

Congregationalism in Oxford
*The growth and development of Congregational Churches
in and around the city of Oxford since 1653*

by

Michael Hopkins

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School of Historical Studies
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ABSTRACT

This thesis contends that the growth and development of Congregationalism in Oxford was different from elsewhere because of the presence of both the University of Oxford and Mansfield College. It explores fully the progress of Congregationalism in Oxford during the three hundred and fifty years from the Puritans in the English Commonwealth until the beginning of the twenty-first century. It considers these developments in the light of the national background and explains how they are distinctive, rather than representative, through the story of the New Road Meeting House, George Street and Summertown Congregational Churches in particular, and the other suburban and village Congregational chapels in contrast to other towns and cities with Congregational colleges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the city of Oxford has long been recognised in English church history, particularly at the times of the English Reformation and the Oxford Movement. The city itself is also of particular interest to historians as industry and university grew and developed in parallel, alongside corresponding civic changes. However, a much less well-known and less told story is that of the distinctive development of Nonconformity, particularly Congregationalism, within the context of both this wider civic, industrial, and commercial growth and development, and the presence of the University gradually opening itself to Nonconformists after the repeal of the Test Act. Oxford was, of course, a university city and a very Anglican city. However its geographical position, where the Thames Valley from London meets the Cotswolds, crossing the routes from the south coast ports to the Midlands, meant that Oxford was always more important than just the University: it was a thriving town in its own right. It is this unusual blend of a strongly Anglican university city, and a country town and staging post, which provided an unusual setting for Nonconformity to develop in distinctive ways.

This thesis examines Congregationalism in Oxford by looking in detail at the Congregational churches in and around Oxford. The thesis is that Congregationalism in Oxford was distinctive, perhaps unique, and certainly in no way representative of ordinary Congregationalism, because of the presence of the University of Oxford and of Mansfield College.¹ Mansfield College, founded in 1886 as a Congregational theological college, soon became a powerhouse of Congregationalism. From the 1890s until the 1960s it provided the major part of the theological backbone of English Congregationalism, as well

¹ The argument is developed fully in the conclusion.

as making a significant contribution to the University's theology faculty. It was clearly of national significance, yet it was also important locally for Mansfield supplied generations of student pastors and pulpit supply for churches that might not otherwise have survived so long, and a supply of the best of English Congregationalism's theologians to preach, help churches through problems, open special events, and so on; indeed the list of names from Mansfield cropping up in church records reads like a *Who's Who* in Congregationalism. Mansfield College was the continuation of Spring Hill College, which had been founded in Birmingham in 1838 to train Congregational ministers. The main benefactors of the College were the Glover and Mansfield families, who were related by marriage. After the removal of the university tests there was a mood amongst Congregationalists to establish a college in Oxford. The idea that Spring Hill college should move to a university town was first mooted in 1875 by the Principal, David Worthington Simon (Powicke, 1912, p. 108), and one of those who promoted this idea was R.W. Dale, the influential minister of Carrs Lane Birmingham. It was agreed that Spring Hill College would move to Oxford, and the new Mansfield College opened in temporary accommodation in 1886, until the buildings were completed in 1889. The detailed history and significance of Mansfield College has been thoroughly documented by Elaine Kaye in her history of the College, which originated as a Ph.D. thesis and was later published as *Mansfield College Oxford: its Origin, History, and Significance* (Kaye, 1996). The scope of this thesis is not to duplicate that work, but to look at the role of Mansfield College in the context of the local churches, whilst remembering that Mansfield was of national, not just local, significance.

The relationship between Mansfield and the local churches divides into four phases: from the arrival and opening of the College until the closure of George Street; from the closure

of George Street until the closure of Cowley Road; from the closure of Cowley Road until imminent arrival of the United Reformed Church in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and from the formation of the United Reformed Church onwards. The College is now beginning the fifth phase of its life, as the training of ministers for the United Reformed Church finished in the summer of 2009.

The opening of Mansfield College's buildings, and its magnificent chapel, in 1889 provided a place for University Congregationalists to worship, and many of them did. From early days, the College organised grand services with many important and attractive preachers, drawing large audiences. The chapel came to function as a *de facto* Congregational church, even being listed in *The Congregational Year Book*, but had no membership, Church Meeting, or anything to make a Congregational church in any real sense. Undoubtedly it drew significant numbers of Congregationalists, and many others, from the University.

Mansfield set up a Sunday morning service, which became a beacon of Congregationalism in the University: worship of the highest quality and preachers of great distinction and ability. This was only to be expected, considering the grand setting that this exceptional and highly unusual chapel offered. Although the chapel was imposing, (Kaye, 1996), more magnificent than any other in Congregationalism, it was not perfect and had some deficiencies in practical use (Micklem, 1957, p.99).

The chapel was large and impressive, exuding the new found confidence of the Congregationalists, demonstrating their claim to be a true and permanent church, part of

the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Outside, the building was graced with statues of Athanasius, Augustine, Origen, and John Bunyan; inside there were statues of John Wyclif, John Calvin, Isaac Watts, George Whitefield, John Wesley, John Knox, and others. Stained glass windows were added over the next few years, including Christ in glory, with figures supporting from the Old and New Testaments, on the north side; and scenes from Christ's ministry on the south.² Along the sides of the chapel, the east and west windows have images from the church down the years, described by Kaye (1996, pp.80-81) as:

“a remarkably ecumenical collection: to the great figures of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament there were now added representatives of the Greek and Latin churches; the medieval church in Britain and on the Continent; the Reformation in Britain and on the Continent; Puritanism and eighteenth century Nonconformity...the American church; and nineteenth century Nonconformity, including some of those who had worked hard to establish the College”.

Mansfield was able to fill the gap in the provision for Congregationalists in the University, because George Street had totally failed to understand the opportunities presented to it by the relaxation of the University tests, just as it had failed to understand the need for a new and more appropriate building in a better location, let alone to grasp these opportunities. Mansfield made its provision for University Congregationalists in a very striking way: with both its superlative building and its inspirational worship. In Cambridge the provision for town and University Congregationalists was made together in Emmanuel Church,³ but in Oxford the provision was divided between Mansfield and George Street.

It would be quite misleading, though, to suggest that there was no connection or relationship between the two. Naturally, the staff of Mansfield were occasional visitors to, and some were on the membership roll of, George Street. There was some interchange and

² The chapel is built at ninety degrees to the “traditional” alignments of churches, thus the north windows are in the wall facing worshippers.

³ See conclusions

overlap, but the situation of being separate providers for Congregationalists in the town and the University was an unspoken assumption. This undesirable but inevitable situation was outlined by R.F. Horton, in a letter to the *Nonconformist and Independent* in 1881, (Kaye 1996, pp.50-51) where he explains what he perceived to be the poor nature of the building and fellowship at George Street. In the context of Horton's views, it is very easy to understand why Mansfield was so easily able to fill the gap left unfilled by George Street. Whilst George Street was basically a town church, there were a few members of the University in membership, and the *Victoria County History* (Crossley, 1979, p.421) names two: Sir James Murray, the Lexicographer, and W.E. Soothill, Professor of Chinese, who were both members at George Street.

This curious relationship between Mansfield and George Street, harmonious and clear, yet so far removed from what might have been, continued amicably enough until George Street closed in 1933. After George Street closed, the relationship between Oxford's Congregational churches changed. Summertown and Cowley Road to some degree both shared the role of the leading Congregational church in Oxford, being about equidistant from the town centre, and of a similar size. Summertown was in a much more affluent area, saw itself as more prosperous than Cowley Road, and was the more significant partner in this shared role. Mansfield, in its turn, continued to provide a Sunday morning service that now excelled in providing the very best worship, music, and preachers. It was held at 11.30 am, after the University Sermon, indeed in some ways it could be seen as a rival to the official University Sermon. Elaine Kaye describes it thus:

“When I was an undergraduate (1948-51) I attended Mansfield chapel every Sunday at 11.30. It was usually 2/3 full,⁴ with undergraduates, ordinands, lecturers

⁴ This would have been 200-250 people.

and their families, widows of former staff, and other academics. The standard of preaching was very high, as was the music...afterwards the conversation outside the chapel usually went on for a long time...for me it was a revelation of what worship could be, and influenced me for life.”⁵

In 1962 Cowley Road closed. The changes now were more subtle, but still significant. Summertown’s place as the main Congregational church was undisputed. Almost all the Mansfield staff were members there. It was stronger, larger, and busier than the other Congregational churches. Mansfield had long ago earned a place in the affections of all the Congregational churches in the area, and this continued. The Sunday morning service continued, and Mansfield functioned both as a Congregational chaplaincy to the University and, to some extent, as a Congregational presence in the centre of the city.

Negotiations to form the United Reformed Church were progressing at a swift pace by the latter part of the 1960s, and in Oxford it was clear that all the Congregational churches intended to join the United Reformed Church, as did St. Columba’s, Oxford’s Presbyterian Church. The groups for the Congregational and Presbyterian Students came together in 1970, two years ahead of their denominations. It was now agreed that there should only be one united Sunday morning service for both Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the University, and that this would be at St. Columba’s (Kaye 1996, p. 278).

Under the United Reformed Church Mansfield continued to be a presence in the University for that tradition, but with the move of the Sunday service to St. Columba’s something of the influence of Mansfield upon the local church scene was diluted. It was still loved and valued, and provided a great resource, but was not the locus at the centre that it had once

⁵ A letter to the author.

been. Numbers of students training for the ministry of the United Reformed Church shrank over the years, and in 2006 it was agreed by the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church that it would send no more students to train at Mansfield, and several other institutions, so as to concentrate upon keeping up numbers at other institutions, notably Westminster College Cambridge, which is owned by the United Reformed Church. It remains to be seen what form any relationship between Mansfield and the United Reformed Church takes once the final ordinands finish their courses.

Mansfield is a very significant feature of the landscape of Oxford Congregationalism. It is crucial in creating the distinctive situation of Oxford Congregationalism. In that distinctiveness this thesis examines patterns that emerge in times of flourishing and floundering. In some respects George Street might have been anywhere, but the network of daughter and granddaughter churches created from the excitement of building rather than maintaining, is different from anywhere else. Other models of a large town church, and daughter churches in suburbs and villages, are different because other places, such as Guildford, did not have to content with the three elements of changing country town, the developing industrial town alongside, and the ancient university gradually recognising Dissenters alongside them. George Street was clearly operating in a nineteenth century paradigm, as they struggled to come to terms with the new challenges of the twentieth century, as were some of the suburban churches. Summertown, though, found a new model that worked rather differently from George Street, and this is responsible for its comparative success in the twentieth century. The village churches again show different models of what it means to be a Congregational church and different responses to the University and to Mansfield.

The provision of ministry is also worthy of note. The money provided by the George Street Trust enabled provision of buildings that would not otherwise have been available, and also provision of ordained ministry to churches which it is questionable could ever have afforded or justified it. This represented a huge gamble of an enormous amount of money, and it is questionable whether that gamble paid off. Although Congregationalism requires active involvement of lay people, it is clear that ministers dominated Oxford. The narrative of this thesis clearly focuses upon the work of ordained ministers. This is because the character and standing of the ordained ministry is so strong, especially in Oxford. Although diaconates made many more day-to-day decisions than Church Meetings, Church Meetings kept better records. Ministers can also dominate records because some lay people write them in this way. This, though, is a valuable opportunity for the historian because it allows an examination of the state of ministry, for instance ministers moving to or from what some would regard as more or less significant churches,⁶ and the calibre of ministers. This is an important tool seeing the landscape of Congregationalism locally within the context of the maturing national picture.

The ecumenical situation of Oxford is also distinctive. Progress in ecumenical work in Oxford was further advanced at an earlier time than it was often thought to be in other places. This is especially notable in Summertown. Significant account also needs to be taken of the Presbyterian and Congregational discussions, leading to the eventual formation of the United Reformed Church. Mansfield's Principal Micklem served on the committee that formulated the 1947 Scheme of Union, and Principal John Marsh and John

⁶ The theory of Congregational ministry is that ministers move where the Holy Spirit leads them, and that there is no career structure or progression. However the primary sources for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries make it very clear that ministers and churches were thinking in a way that did reflect a career structure and progression of pastorates. This thesis does not commend the merits of such a view, it merely reflects what the sources show.

Wilding, minister of Temple Cowley, both served on the joint committee of the late 1960s that eventually produced the 1972 union. Of course Presbyterians were not Congregationalists, but during the twentieth century these two traditions grew closer together, and mutual understanding and influence developed between them, leading to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972. The story of Oxford's Congregationalists before 1972 is not complete without reference to the Presbyterians, and the story after 1972 is the story of the United Reformed Church, and so we must be aware of Oxford's Presbyterians.

After the relaxation of the university tests, the opening of Oxford and Cambridge universities to non-Anglicans brought many such students. Some of these were Presbyterians, both Scots and English, and they soon came to Oxford in rapidly increasing numbers. The first attempt at a modern Presbyterian church in Oxford came in 1871 (Crossley, 1979, p. 423; Moore, 1875, p.31). H.C. Bazeley, a fellow of Brasenose College, was attracted to the Church of Scotland as he thought it was truest to Reformed Christianity. He formed a congregation, which met in the former Quaker Meeting House in Pusey Lane. In 1877 he built a small church, at his own expense, in Nelson Street in the Jericho district of Oxford. Bazeley requested, and was granted, ordination by the Scots Presbytery of London⁷. The church was always reliant upon Bazeley's generosity and influence, and after his death in 1883 the congregation sought a successor from the Church of Scotland, but there was none forthcoming, and the church was dissolved.

⁷ Scottish, English, and London Presbyterianism had passed through rather more stages, and the picture had changed rather more than the pre-1843 Scots Presbytery of London by the 1870s, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to untangle such matters.

With the increasing religious diversity in Oxford after 1871, “chaplaincies” developed, in addition to the college chapels, as bodies relating to the whole University for particular religious groups. The Oxford Movement set up Pusey House, and the Evangelical Anglicans developed their chaplaincy from St. Aldate’s church. The Roman Catholics set up a chaplaincy opposite Christ Church, the Wesleyans had their new Wesley Memorial Church, and the Congregationalists used Mansfield College, where they extended hospitality to Presbyterians. This hospitality was not really enough, and the next, and successful, attempt to establish modern Presbyterian worship in Oxford came in 1908, when the Presbyterian Church of England appointed the Rev’d Donald Matheson to investigate the possibilities of establishing a Presbyterian chaplaincy. This trial was a success, and a Presbyterian chaplaincy began to grow (Lusk, 1921, passim).

In 1914 the chaplaincy was established on a legitimate and permanent basis, as a joint enterprise of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland. The minister would report to all three supreme courts, and the elders would be recognised as elders of all three churches. In June 1914 the foundation stone of the chaplaincy building, in Alfred Street behind the Town Hall and next door to *The Bear*, was laid. The building was opened in May 1915. Soon the chaplaincy attracted Presbyterians from outside the University, and it gradually became clear that it should become a normal congregation, as well as a chaplaincy. Thus, in 1929, it took the name St. Columba’s, and became a fully sanctioned charge of the Presbyterian Church of England in the Presbytery of London North, while continuing to be a chaplaincy to all Presbyterians.

With increasing numbers attending, and concern for a more suitable entrance to the building, the original cloister was replaced with a lobby, larger nave, and gallery above, in 1960. In 1972 St. Columba's joined the United Reformed Church, and quickly took on the role of the central congregation of the United Reformed Church in Oxford, especially after the Mansfield Sunday morning service moved there. Links continued with Mansfield: the chaplain there was invited to lead worship each term at St. Columba's, in recognition of the two chaplaincies from before union, a joint effort that continued into recent years.

This is the wider setting in which Oxford's Congregationalists found themselves. This thesis considers how Congregationalism in Oxford grew in a distinctive pattern within that background. It begins by examining the first Nonconformist presence in Oxford. This is not easily identifiable, but is generally thought to be the worship of parliamentary soldiers stationed in the city from the 1640s onwards, and the earliest congregation is what is now known as New Road Baptist Church, first recorded in 1653. However, during the commonwealth and protectorate, not least during John Owen's vice-chancellorship and occupation of the Deanery of Christ Church, Puritan worship took place in the University.

There was no Congregational church, in the sense that we understand that term today, in the city until 1832, when members from New Road sought dismissal from that congregation to form a new church, meeting in George Street, which was Congregational. However, the Nonconformist situation before 1832 in the city was not straightforward, and the New Road Church was, at that time, not solely a Baptist church, but represented all Nonconformity.

George Street Congregational Church thrived in its early years, but by the late nineteenth century it was clearly continuing to operate on a nineteenth century model and withering as it tried to operate that model in the twentieth century. Summertown, by contrast, was operating a twentieth century model and thus thriving in that age when others were not. Before George Street closed in 1933 it produced several daughter and granddaughter churches. The influence of both Mansfield College and the University upon Congregationalism in the city was profound, leaving a lasting legacy. Congregationalism in Oxford was distinctive, not representative.

CHRONOLOGY

A chronological chart comparing some national and local Congregational and related events

Year	National event	Oxford
1643	Westminster Assembly meets	Royalists occupying city
1647	Parliament abolishes Holy Days	Parliamentarians in Oxford
1650	Deprivation of royalist incumbents begins	John Owen Dean of Christ Church (1651)
1660	Restoration of monarchy and the beginning of the restoration of deprived incumbents.	Public Baptisms by immersion (1659) John Owen & Thomas Goodwin ejected
1662	Act of Uniformity - 961 incumbents deprived	Oxford Dissenters in secret
1672	1 st Declaration of Indulgence	Baptists and Presbyterians licensed in Oxford
1688	Glorious Revolution	Oxford Dissenters briefly appointed to public offices
1689	Toleration Act	Presbyterian Meeting House at the North Gate
1690	Common Presbyterian and Independent Fund to support poor ministers and training.	Presbyterian at St. Ebbe's (1691)
1707	Act of Union with Scotland	Baptist cause almost extinct
1714	Schism Act proposed, but Queen Anne dies	Meeting House riots (1715)
1718	Salter's Hall subscription crisis	Joint Meeting House formed (1721)
1736	Phillip Doddridge awarded DD by Kings and Marischal Colleges, Aberdeen	William Roby dies (1734)
1739	John Wesley begins field preaching	Last Dissenting Minister leaves - thirty eight years before next comes (1741)
1751	Phillip Doddridge dies	Jackson's Oxford Journal begins (1753)
1770	Death of George Whitefield	John Wesley preaches in Oxford (1769)
1776	Essex Ministerial Association (Independent) founded – precursor of County Union	Oxford Methodists reported in Meeting House (1773)
1779	Nonconformist Relief Act	New Road re-founded (1780)
1795	London Missionary Society founded as non-denominational; soon becomes <i>de facto</i> Independent	James Hinton's ministry at its prime Wheatley formed (1794)
1819	Home Missionary Society founded as non-denominational; soon becomes <i>de facto</i> Independent	Death of James Hinton (1823)
1831	'Congregational Library & Denominational Home' and Congregational Union founded	George Street formed (1832)
1833	<i>Declaration of Faith, Church Order & Discipline of the Congregational or Independent Dissenters</i>	George Street calls first minister
1851	Census shows 21% of pop in parish church, 18% in Dissenting Meeting Houses, 59.5% nowhere.	Tyndale begins his ministry at George Street
1854	Oxford University Act ends subscription at matriculation	First Good Friday Service at George Street (1855)
1868	Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Act	Cowley Road began (1869)
1871	Universities Tests Act	George Street opens Day School
1886	Spring Hill College Birmingham moves to Oxford as Mansfield College	Spring Hill College Birmingham moves to Oxford as Mansfield College
1887	<i>Congregational Church Hymnal</i> published (known as 'Barretts')	George Street and Temple Cowley squabble over the latter's status
1896	National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches established	New chapel opened in Summertown (1894)
1910	World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh	Financial worries at Cowley Road

1916	<i>Congregational Hymnary</i> published	Mansfield supplies Student Pastors for Cumnor (1919)
1917	Constance Coltman is the first woman ordained in the Congregational Union	George Street purchases Hymnary and elects women deacons
1919	Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches established Congregational Union forms network of Moderators	Council of Congregational Churches in Oxford formed. Temple Cowley finally given independence.
1922	Congregational Union acquires first full-time Secretary	Old Marston mission closes
1932	1 st Presbyterian and Congregational talks begin (until 1935) 2 nd Methodist reunion	George Street closes. Coltmans leave Cowley Road.
1935	C H Dodd gains Norris-Hulse Chair at Cambridge	Whatley White's ministry at it's peak at Temple Cowley
1940	N(E)FCC (1896) and FC(E)FC (1919) merge into Free Church Federal Council	New building and at new Marston (1939)
1942	British Council of Churches formed	Moxley on founding committee of Oxfam
1943	2 nd Presbyterian and Congregational talks begin	Robert Steel becomes Church Secretary at Summertown (1944)
1946	Archbishop Fisher's invitation to 'take episcopacy into system'	Collinwood Road beginning
1947	Episcopal/Presbyterian/Congregational/Methodist Church of South India formed Presbyterian and Congregational Scheme of Union published	Opening of hall at Collinwood Road (1949)
1951	Presbyterian and Congregational Covenant & Joint Advisory Council follow lukewarm reception of Scheme of Union <i>Congregational Praise</i> published	Owen retires from Frilford, Longworth & Appleton after 18 years (1952)
1961	New English Bible (NT) pub (OT 1970) – Dodd chairman of editorial panel	Blackbird Leys beginning
1963	3 rd Presbyterian and Congregational talks begin	Cowley Road closed. Charles Brock's ministry begins at Wheatley.
1966	Congregational Union becomes 'Congregational Church in England and Wales' by a 'covenant' between churches. An Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches founded.	Geoffrey Beck leaves Summertown for Coventry Cathedral
1967	Congregational Church adopts <i>A Declaration of Faith</i>	First Free Church minister at Blackbird Leys (1965)
1968	London Missionary Society becomes Congregational Council for World Mission	Final building phase of Collinwood Road opened (1969)
1971	Congregational Presbyterian Scheme of Union approved	Oxford Congregational Church meetings voting 'yes'.
1972	United Reformed Church formed	Service in Oxford Cathedral to mark union
1981	United Reformed Church unites with Churches of Christ	Summertown Ecumenical Parish set up (1982)
1982	Failure of ecumenical 'Covenant' proposals	Joint appointment between Marston and Oxford Polytechnic
1991	<i>Rejoice & Sing</i> published	Collinwood Road ceases to be a single pastorate (1992)
2000	Union of United Reformed Church and Congregational Union of Scotland	First United Reformed Church minister at Blackbird Leys (2001)

2. NEW ROAD CHAPEL

This chapter researches and traces the origins of Nonconformity in Oxford, and follows Nonconformity through a very rare situation in the eighteenth century, until the emergence of denominations, and a separate Congregational church, in the early nineteenth century. The situation which pertained during this period in Oxford was quite unlike anywhere else, and demonstrates that at this time Oxford was highly distinctive.

The origins of Nonconformity in the city of Oxford (Chadwick, 2003, pp. 1-34) cannot be traced to a particular person or event, or even a very exact time. There are two strands of early Oxford Nonconformity, both clearly identifiable from the time of the commonwealth and protectorate in the 1650s, and both probably with earlier roots. The first strand stems from the parliamentarian soldiers who camped in the city from the later half of the 1640s, and their Puritan worship and ministry, leading to the Baptist church that became the mother church of Oxford Nonconformity; and the second strand stems from the Independent divines in positions of influence and leadership in the University during the 1650s. These two groups do not appear to have had any significant interaction with one another, and this separation between Nonconformists in the town and the University is a feature that is observed repeatedly as the story develops. The former group can be traced continuously through to the present day, whilst the latter group cannot be traced, as a body, after the restoration of 1660, although they were very influential in their time, and remained important Puritan divines.

The first of these two strands of Oxford Nonconformists were Baptists, although it should be remembered that denominations, in the way we understand them today, did not exist

clearly in the seventeenth century. However, we must follow the trail of the Baptists in the first instance, for it is that which leads on to the Congregationalists and other Nonconformists.

It is not clear precisely when the Baptists first met in Oxford, but Moore (1875, p.11) and Boase (1887, p. 140) both note that a Baptist Society was formed in 1618,⁸ under Vavasour Powell of Jesus College, meeting in rooms in Ship Street⁹. There are no records of the survival of this society, or of any connection with either the parliamentarians or the Independent divines of the University, without which it cannot be regarded as a distinct and definite part of the succession of Oxford Nonconformity as it may well have been a transitory group.

Oxford was, of course, a place of great importance in the English civil wars. Parliamentarians occupied the city on 12 September 1642, but only briefly, for on 29 October that year Royalists, making their way from Edge Hill towards London, occupied the city. They stayed for nearly four years, until Oxford finally surrendered on 24 June 1646, and parliamentarian soldiers again occupied the city, bringing with them their Puritan chaplains. It was at this point that Stevens (Stevens & Bottoms, 1948, p.3) suggests the first Baptist presence in Oxford.¹⁰ Whilst it is certainly true that there were Baptists amongst the parliamentarian army and their chaplains, it would be wrong to infer either that these were the only Nonconformists or that their religion was organised into formal churches at this stage. Stevens (Stevens & Bottoms, 1948, p.3) states that

⁸ As Powell was only born in 1617, this date is clearly wrong, and 1638 is a much more likely date, although the incorrect date is the only one documented.

⁹ Moore is the only recorded source of this information, and it is likely that Boase used this as his source.

¹⁰ Stevens follows most historians in not regarding the Powell society as a significant part of the Nonconformist story in Oxford.

parliament, itself largely Presbyterian in outlook, found the more radical Puritan preaching that predominated in Oxford worrying, and sent Presbyterian ministers to preach in the town.

Despite the significant evidence of widespread Nonconformist preaching during the second half of the 1640s, there is no clear evidence of the formation of a church separate from the Church of England until much later. From late 1652 onwards, meetings were held for local Baptist churches to find ways to help and support one another, leading to the formation of what became the Berkshire Baptist Association. On 17 March 1653 a meeting was held at Tetsworth, and amongst other recorded participants were “messengers” from an Oxford congregation (Stevens & Bottoms, 1948, p.3). This is the first formal record of an organised and distinct Nonconformist congregation in Oxford. It is also clear that the Baptists of Oxford were intrinsically linked to the larger and stronger Baptist church in Abingdon, as they were to be until the late eighteenth century. An early leader of the church was Richard Tidmarsh, in whose house they met for a time.¹¹ The church was definitely known to be baptising in public by 1659, and quite possibly earlier. John Bunyan visited Oxford in 1657 (Moore, 1875, p.11; Alden, 1903, p.7), presumably to support this fledgling cause. Bunyan was accompanied on this visit by Powell, indeed the visit might have been organised by Powell. From 1646 to 1660, it may be reasonably supposed that the church was developing into a clearly organised Baptist church. After the restoration of 1660, and the Act of Uniformity of 1662, there followed a time of persecution for Nonconformists generally, and Oxford appears no different in the lack of documentary evidence of the life of Nonconformity during this period. Names associated

¹¹ This house was in what is now called Tidmarsh Lane, and was licensed in 1672 as a Baptist Meeting House.

with both the Baptists and the Quakers appear in court records from the 1660s, but there are no formal records of the churches before licences were granted to the Baptists and the Presbyterians in 1672. Tidmarsh and other Nonconformists were briefly appointed to public offices in 1688, following James' declaration of indulgence, although this caused some controversy amongst the Baptists, although Moore (1875) does not record why there was controversy.

The *Victoria County History* (Crossley 1979, p. 416) tells us that while the Baptist church was developing its life, so was a Presbyterian congregation. Moore (1875, p.20) suggests that the Presbyterians gathered from 1648, but there is no evidence for a gathered church before the Baptists of 1653. The details and records of this congregation are much more sketchy, but there was a Presbyterian minister was preaching to a congregation gathered in an old dancing school near the North Gate in the winter of 1689 (Summers, 1905, p. 244), and that they then moved to a meeting house in St. Ebbe's in 1691 (Moore, 1875, p.12; Boase, 1887, p.170; Alden, 1903, p.8), which was destroyed in the 1715 riot. Stevens and Bottoms (1948, p.8) state that the Presbyterian Minister was Henry Cornish. However *Calamy Revised* (Matthews, 1934, pp. 137-8) is more circumspect. Henry Cornish held a canonry of Christ Church during the commonwealth and protectorate, but was ejected in 1660. Initially living at Cowley, he resided at Stanton Harcourt after the passing of the Five Mile Act. In 1672 he was licensed at Stanton Harcourt, and he died there in 1699. In 1690 he preached to the Presbyterians, but there is insufficient evidence to suggest he was their Pastor.

Although records are limited, the indications are that this was a strong cause. By the end of the seventeenth century, Tidmarsh had left Oxford, working first in East Anglia, and then in Devon, and the Baptist cause sank to a very low ebb after his departure. In 1707 the congregation was almost extinct, lacking any leadership. On Sundays they were joining with the Baptists of Abingdon, holding only a weekday meeting in Oxford. Thus it was a moribund Baptist church, and a strong Presbyterian church,¹² that represented Oxford Nonconformity in the early eighteenth century.

The second strand of Oxford Nonconformity is most closely associated with the character of John Owen. Owen (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*) began his life as an Anglican and a royalist. He was ordained in 1635 after studying at Queen's College. By 1642 he had become chaplain to John Lord Lovelace, at Hurley, Berkshire. However, he began to sympathise increasingly with the Puritan position, and by 1644 he had become a Presbyterian and had moved to London. His views continued to shift, and by 1648 he regarded himself as an Independent, and held various military chaplaincies. He was appointed Dean of Christ Church in 1651, and Vice Chancellor of the University in 1652. He resigned the vice chancellorship in 1657, at the same time Oliver Cromwell handed over the chancellorship to his son Richard, but continued to hold the Deanery until he was deprived in March 1660. Along with Owen, Thomas Goodwin (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*) was the next most prominent Puritan in leadership in the University. Goodwin became a Puritan in the 1620s, and became president of Magdalen College, a position he held until May 1660. During his tenure, Magdalen became a natural home for many of the Puritans in the University (Moore, 1875, pp. 18-20). It is known that Owen

¹² There were 150 members of the Presbyterian congregation recorded in 1715 by the enquiry into the riots.

and Goodwin preached fortnightly in the University Church, and that a gathered church met, during the 1650s, in Goodwin's home in Magdalen. The gathered church is known to have included a great many prominent Puritans in the University (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*), such as Thankful Owen, fellow of Lincoln College from 1642 and President of St. John's College from 1651, Francis Howell, Fellow of Exeter College from 1652 and Principal of Jesus College from 1657, Samuel Blower, fellow of Magdalen, Theophilus Gale, Principal of University College, Stephen Charnock, fellow of New College, John Howe, chaplain of Magdalen, and Zachary Mayne, fellow of Magdalen. There were, without doubt, many others, but only those names of some repute are recorded. This church included a wide breadth of thinking and opinion within one fellowship: John Howe was a convinced Presbyterian, whereas Zachary Mayne was a Socinian. Even allowing for open-mindedness and the fluidity of 'denominational' boundaries, it is worth noting that they all co-existed within this one gathered church. After the restoration, and the ejections of 1660-1662, these men left the University and went their separate ways. We have no record what happened to their gathered church, although as it existed entirely in the context of Puritans holding power in the University in the 1650s, we can reasonably conclude that as they lost their power and influence and dispersed, the church also dispersed. Thus, of those two strands of Oxford Nonconformity, only the strand that began amongst the parliamentarian soldiers and developed in the Baptist Church of the 1650s remained beyond the restoration to form a foundation for development of Oxford Nonconformity in later years.

The next recorded events are in the year 1715 (Moore, 1875, p. 12), which was a crucial year for the Nonconformists generally, and in Oxford in particular. The first of what

became known as the Meeting House riots occurred on 28 May, when many windows were illuminated in honour of the birthday of King George. They were smashed by a Jacobite mob. The enthusiastic crowd then went on to the Presbyterian Meeting House, where they broke a hole in the wall, took away the pulpit, and destroyed the pews and the windows. The pulpit was taken to Carfax, where it was burned. The following night a mob celebrated the anniversary of Charles II's accession by smashing all the windows that were not illuminated, destroying what was left of the Presbyterian Meeting House, and inflicting similar destruction upon the Baptist Meeting House. The spree ended with the Quaker Meeting House receiving a similar treatment. The riot was of such force that martial law had to be declared. The culmination of the riot was a bonfire of pews outside St. John's College, and the burning of an effigy of William Roby, the Presbyterian minister, at the nearby North Gate. Roby eventually fled to London, in fear of his life, to petition the King. These riots were the first of many around the country, although Oxford was the first, the furthest south, and the only place where others besides Presbyterians were affected. Thomas Hearne, a writer of the time, described the incidents thus (Moore, 1875, pp.12-13; Boase, 1887, pp.182-3):

“Last night a good part of the Presbyterian meeting house in Oxford was pulled down. There was such a concourse of people. In the evening they pulled down a good part of the Quakers' and Anabaptists' chapels. This caused much consternation at Court...The King (George I) being informed of the proceedings was very angry; and, by his order, Townsend, one of the Secretaries of State, hath sent rating letters to Dr. Charlett, Pro-Vice-Chancellor. The destructive riots were begun by the scholars, who cheered the townsmen on in their work of demolition, mobbing those who protested. The heads of colleges met, and drew up a programme of the damage done which the state in a great measure allowed.”

In response the government ordered an enquiry, and subsequently passed the Riot Act. Commissions were set up in nine counties, and that for Oxfordshire assessed the damage to the Oxford Presbyterian Meeting House at the massive sum £108 17s. 11d., reflecting its

total destruction, and the Baptist Meeting House at £17. Several private individuals received compensation, totalling £20 10s. 4d., for damages to their homes and property.

The Baptists were still too fragile to develop their life beyond occasional meetings and visits to the Abingdon congregation, and in no position to build a new Meeting House. The Presbyterians, though, did decide to rebuild their Meeting House: a natural decision for a strong cause (Moore, 1875, p.13). They purchased the site of what is now New Road Baptist Church. Their Meeting House was duly erected, and registered on 31 July 1721. This new Meeting House was not just a Presbyterian Meeting House, but a combined Meeting House practising open communion. Alden (1903, pp.811) describes this period as a “union of Presbyterians and Baptists”. It is known that later in the eighteenth century Baptists certainly worshipped there, and the wording of the trust deed, which named the Presbyterian William Roby as minister, would have included all Nonconformists except the Quakers. The old Presbyterian Meeting House at St. Ebbe’s was restored and used, at a later date, as a Sunday School by the New Road congregation.

William Roby died in 1734. By 1741, the church had had three other ministers, but their last settled minister, Richard Harrison, left in that year. They were not to have another settled minister for thirty-eight years, during which time the church went into a deep decline. In 1769, John Wesley preached in Oxford, and was unsure whether to preach in the Dissenters’ Meeting House or not, but his mind was made up for him when the Meeting House doors were locked, and so he preached in the open air. However, in 1773, Methodists were reputed to be joining worship in the Meeting House.

After the riots, with the inhospitable climate for Dissenters in Oxford, and the Baptist cause being at a very low ebb, it must have seemed, even in the early eighteenth century, reasonable to build a joint Meeting House. The Presbyterians were obviously the very much stronger partner, but the Baptists were faced with a choice of either simply giving their cause up, or transferring their allegiance completely to Abingdon. In any event, the Baptists maintained a relationship with Abingdon. However, the joint Meeting House did not prosper, but rather declined, almost to the point of extinction. It can only be a matter of conjecture whether this was in spite of, or because of, or unrelated to the existence of this almost unique joint Meeting House. The relative inclinations of the congregation towards heterodoxy and orthodoxy are similarly not clear. The reaction of the wider town is not recorded. Although *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (from 1928 the *Oxford Mail*) is available from 1753 onwards, this was a Tory journal and therefore not sympathetic to Nonconformists, recording little of their activities.

In the year 1780, it was decided to re-found the moribund congregation of the joint Meeting House (Whitehorn, *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England* 6 1938 pp.229-232) with a new covenant.¹³ There were but two surviving members, so something dramatic had to be done (Alden, 1903, pp. 11-18). It was a step of faith, but the covenant was signed on 13 November 1780 by thirteen members. This covenant was remarkable for taking forward the basic principles of the 1721 Trust Deed, and formally creating a Nonconformist church that was open to both Infant and Believers' baptism: a united Nonconformist church for the city of Oxford.¹⁴ James (1867, pp. 646-7) suggests

¹³ The text of this covenant is at Appendix One

¹⁴ There were, of course, no denominational structures to complicate matters in the way that there are today.

that this formalised joint Baptist-Presbyterian Meeting House was a unique situation. The covenant is particularly special because of the paragraph:

“And whereas some of us do verily believe that the sprinkling of the infant children of believing parents in the name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT, is true Christian baptism; and others of us do believe that true Christian baptism is that which is administered to adults upon the profession of their repentance, faith, and experience of the grace of God, by Immersion in the Name of the Sacred Three; yet, notwithstanding this difference of sentiment, we promise and agree to receive one another into the same affection and love; and for this, among other many reasons: because we can find no warrant in the Word of God to make such difference of sentiment any bar to Communion at the Lord’s Table in particular, or to church fellowship in general; and because the LORD JESUS receiving and owning them on both sides of the question, we think we ought to do so too.”

This open communion between those of different Baptismal practices, and with both modes of baptism available in the same Meeting House was certainly rare in the eighteenth century.

Following the covenant, the first minister of the newly re-formed church was George Dyer, serving from 1781-1782. Dyer graduated from Emmanuel College Cambridge in 1777/8 (Fiddes in Rosie Chadwick ed., 2003, p.94), and then became a Dissenter. Having served as Assistant minister at St. Andrew’s Street Baptist Church Cambridge, he moved on to Oxford, leaving in 1782 to teach at a school in Northampton. By 1790, he had become a Unitarian. Dyer seems to not have been baptised as a believer, and it is likely that he was baptised as an infant in the Church of England. Dyer was perhaps the ideal candidate to be the first minister of the Oxford open communion Meeting House, because his service at St. Andrew’s Street Cambridge gave him good Baptist credentials, but he was always on the edge of orthodoxy, giving him the openness needed for this new venture in Oxford.

Dyer's successor, Edward Prowitt, left in 1786 having been accused by some in the church of heterodox preaching. His ministry was notable for the formation of a Sunday School in 1785 (Alden, 1903, p. 17), believed to be the first such formed following the example of Robert Raikes. In 1788, the church called James Hinton, student of Bristol Academy, to be its minister. His Ministry was perhaps the most influential in the church's history. Hinton managed to achieve a very high standard of pastoral care and leadership, holding the different theological factions in the congregation together, to the extent that the church thrived, growing substantially in numbers during his thirty-six year ministry.

Hinton is significantly described in his biography (Hinton, 1824, *passim*) by his son John Howard Hinton, as a Congregational minister, and as minister of the Congregational church at Oxford. In the *Dictionary of National Biography* (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 1891) it is strongly implied that James Hinton baptised his son as an infant.

Hinton also fostered considerable interest in Home Mission, preaching in many villages, leading to the formation of Nonconformist causes. Most of these became Baptist, except that at Wheatley, which became Congregational, and whose story is told later. Hinton died in 1823, whilst visiting his son at Reading. A very full account of Hinton's life and ministry is covered in a memoir by his son. Hinton was succeeded as minister of New Road by William Copley in 1825, and it was during Copley's ministry that the events leading to the formation of George Street Congregational Church occurred.

3. GEORGE STREET CHAPEL

This chapter tells the story of the principal Congregational church in the centre of Oxford for the whole of its life. In doing so it demonstrates the building of a fine Victorian chapel, with a Congregational church founded very much in the same Victorian model. What then follows is a worthy obsession with forming new churches, which became a considerable drain on money and leadership, and a total failure to engage with the new mission paradigm of the University opened to Nonconformists. This is again a highly distinctive story because nowhere else managed to make so many choices that, with hindsight, were so wrong, and to miss so many opportunities.

The first Congregational church in Oxford was constituted on 2 December 1832, following the opening of a building on 8 November 1832 (George Street Church Book). The only extant record of the story of the founding of that church was written by the founders themselves (George Street Church Book), containing a great deal of hearsay and anecdotal evidence. As the story involves two congregations, one of whose records are no longer extant for that period, today's historian can only speculate as to the level of bias in the accounts that we have, and how those whose version of events has not survived in writing would have wished their part of the story to be recorded.

It is widely reported, not least in the *Victoria County History* (Crossley, 1979, pp. 421-422), that the reason for members leaving New Road chapel to form the George Street chapel was a divergence of views over infant baptism. This is a reasonable inference from members leaving a Baptist church to form a Congregational church. However, there is little evidence to back up this assertion. The only reason given, by the George Street

founders (George Street Church Book), is a lack of “evangelical truth.” This could indeed be referring to differing views of baptism, but it could also be referring to many other things. In the 1830s denominations were only just beginning to form, and it is distinctly possible that differences of baptismal theology were secondary disagreements. As no items more specific than “evangelical truth” have been recorded by the George Street founders, it can only be a matter of supposition as to whether not there were more important factors at play than Baptismal theology, and what those might be.

The first George Street Church Book begins with an account of the history of the church. Although it is anonymous, the handwriting is unmistakably that of the first Church Secretary, Mr. George Cox, which is identified in countless other places through the Church Book. The history begins with an account of the “rise and progress of the church of Christ assembling for worship in the chapel in George Lane¹⁵ in the city of Oxford” (George Street Church Book). Cox begins by implying that a significant number of people were dissatisfied with the lack of “evangelical truth”, although no idea of the numbers involved is given. It is implied, although not stated explicitly, that this is lacking in the New Road chapel. In order to consider this situation, a meeting was held at the house of a Mr. Cousins, a coach maker, in the High Street on 28 July 1830. In addition to Mr. Cousins, there were present Messrs Archer, Barrett, Blackwell, Chillingworth, Collingwood, Cox, Cousins junior, Davenport, Evans, Evaness, and Underhill: Twelve male members of New Road chapel. Mr. Collingwood was elected to the chair, the object of the meeting was stated,¹⁶ and each man expressed his sentiments.¹⁷ After everyone had spoken, it was resolved (George Street Church Book):

¹⁵ The road became known as George Street at a later date.

¹⁶ But not recorded in the account.

1. That it is desirable for the further promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom, that another place of religious worship be erected in Oxford, as soon as it shall be found practicable.
2. That the persons present agree to form themselves into a committee for the general purposes of the undertaking, and request Messers Cousins, Davenport, Chillingworth, and Underhill to make immediate enquiries after an eligible site for the erection of a chapel.
3. That the meeting desires to express the lively desire that they entertain of the kindness of Thomas Wilson Esq. of Highbury, London, in the very liberal offer that he has made towards the promotion of the object.
4. That Mr. Collingwood be appointed Treasurer, and Mr. George Cox be appointed Secretary.
5. That a copy of the resolutions be sent to Thomas Wilson esq. and a letter (including the resolutions) be sent to the Rev'd. William Copley.

A letter was indeed sent to the Rev'd. William Copley. The letter did not go into theological matters, thus denying us another opportunity of any direct evidence of the nature of the theological differences, instead referring to the strength of feeling and motive, which is "a simple eye to the glory of God and the salvation of immortal souls" (George Street Church Book). Copley's reply is equally opaque, but it is written in gracious terms wishing them well. Thus, the exact nature of the differences of opinion can never be known, but we can say with reasonable certainty that it was at least an amicable difference of opinion.

At the close of that first meeting those present subscribed the sum of £320, which was later increased to £690 (George Street Church Book). Given that these men were largely tradesmen, small shopkeepers, and craftsmen,¹⁸ these were remarkable sums to contribute to such a project. We can only assume that this shows the strength of their belief in their cause. Their commitment was not just financial, but also spiritual. They agreed that on the

¹⁷ Again, these were not recorded.

¹⁸ The building contract for the George Street chapel lists the occupations of those who signed the contract on behalf of the church. These were Barrell (linen draper), Blackwell (Saddler), Chillingworth (Farmer), Cousins (Coachmaker), Cox (schoolmaster), Davenport (Gentleman), Evans (Saddler), Evaness (Coachmaker), Underhill (Grocer).

last Wednesday of each month, they would meet for prayer, to seek divine direction, although this was soon increased to every week. Fundraising continued, augmented by the very generous donation of Thomas Wilson of Highbury,¹⁹ and plans were drawn up by Thomas Greenshields, the appointed architect. Work began on the site on 17 April 1832, soon followed the laying of the foundation stone by Mr. Collingwood on 8 May, and the rapid completion of the building, without accident, on 8 November of that year. In less than two years since that first meeting, a large and grand chapel was built and ready for worship. The total cost of the building was £3400, of which £1400 was for the purchase of the land. £1700 had already been raised, leaving a £1700 debt to be settled. On that opening day, in November 1832, there were three services. In the morning the Rev'd. John Leifchild, of the Craven Chapel London, preached; in the afternoon the Rev'd. Edward Stearne of Camberwell; and in the evening the Rev'd. John Clayton, Junior, of the Poultry Chapel London. On that day the collections exceeded £60.

Now that a chapel had been built and opened, all that remained was for a church to be formed, in order to meet in the chapel. So, sixteen people²⁰ applied to New Road for dismissals in order to form the new church, meeting in George Street (George Street Church Book). These were duly granted, and on 2 December 1832 the new church was formed by those people signing a covenant, in the presence of the Rev'd. Dr. E. Henderson, Tutor in Theology and Professor of Oriental Languages at Highbury College (George Street Church Book). In addition two further persons were also received into membership on that occasion, giving the fledgling church eighteen members at its

¹⁹ Wilson's connection with the men and their cause is not explicit, but he donated to many such causes around the country. In Oxford he gave a large sum, much more than in other places.

²⁰ The names are those recorded on the covenant in appendix two.

inception. After the formation of the church, new members began to join quite rapidly, and numbers increased significantly.

A comparison of the 1832 covenant and the 1780 covenant shows little similarity. Over the passage of fifty-two years one would not expect an identical document, but it is worth observing that the open and generous spirit of the 1780 covenant is no longer present. Of the thirteen signatories to the 1780 covenant, five of them are women, and of the twenty two signatories to the 1832 covenant, eleven of them are women. It is not a matter of great surprise that there are no signatories of the 1780 New Road Covenant who are also signatories of the 1832 George Street covenant. Fifty-two years are a long time, and this alone is sufficient to account for the fact. However, it is known that there were a several generations of the same families in New Road, but none of the same surnames appear on both covenants, so the families that constituted the remarkably open New Road Church in 1780, were different families to those who formed George Street in 1832. One possibility to account for this is that there had been a change in the ethos of New Road, as discussed above regarding “evangelical truth”, that led some people who had joined New Road because of its open nature to become unhappy with the direction in which the church had gone after James Hinton’s death. This would support the argument that there was a more general change in ethos, rather than just a dispute over baptismal theology. The open congregation of James Hinton’s day had become narrower in ethos under William Copley’s Ministry, coinciding with the emergence of denominations in their more contemporary understanding. The brave, early, ecumenical experiment of the eighteenth century had failed, spawning two churches: one Congregational and the other Baptist. ‘Ecumenical’ was not a term or concept that was used or even understood in the eighteenth

century, not least because of the lower level of denominational identity in those days, but its use here is deliberate and implies that although ecumenism is thought to be a modern idea, the reality is that it has always been there, often arising from situations of weakness. The Congregational Union of England and Wales was formed in 1831, although unsuccessful attempts had been made before then to form a union. The *Declaration of the Faith, Church Order, and Discipline* (Peel, 1931, pp.69-74) adopted at the annual meeting of the Congregational Union in May 1833, although considerably longer, covers the same ground that the George Street Covenant edges towards and attempts to express.

Having been formed on 2 December 1832, the fledgling George Street Church began to order and organise its life. On 26 December 1832 (George Street Church Book), they began the process of electing four deacons. As they had no pastor of their own, and no deacons, the members agreed to send their recommendations to the Rev'd. Dr. Pye Smith of London, who was filling the pulpit for the forthcoming two Sundays. This they duly did, and Dr. Pye Smith intimated that Messrs Samuel Collingwood, Michael Underhill, William Cousins senior, and George Cox had been elected as deacons.

These deacons began in earnest the business of arranging the work of the church. However in June 1833 (George Street Church Book) complaints arose that the election of the deacons had been conducted irregularly, on the grounds that proper notice had not been given. A Church Meeting was called, with scrupulous attention to the giving of the correct notice, at which the deacons previously elected were unanimously re-elected.

On 30 June 1833 (George Street Church Book) the Church Meeting invited the Rev'd. James Hill, who had lately been serving as a missionary in Calcutta, to supply the pulpit for six weeks with a view to becoming the "settled pastor". Hill was delighted to accede to this request, and on 22 October (George Street Church Book) the Church Meeting issued a unanimous call to Hill. A deputation of deacons met Hill on 25 October to offer him the pastorate. The nature of the discussion is not recorded, save that Hill preferred any call to be in writing. The speed with which a written call was issued suggests that all was happily agreed, which we can glean from Hill's immediate acceptance of that call. Hill's recognition service was agreed to be held on Christmas Day 1833.²¹

In little over two years, George Street Congregational Church had gone from an idea discussed at a meeting to a fully fledged Congregational church with a diaconate, a Church Meeting, its own minister, and an imposing building in the centre of Oxford.

In the first ten years of George Street's life, it continued to grow in strength and in numbers, following its strong start. During those years a further nineteen members transferred from New Road,²² a large proportion of whom did so in March 1837 (George Street Church Book). We can never know for sure,²³ but perhaps there was some incident there which caused a large exodus at this time. A small number of members also transferred from the Baptist church at St. Clements, run by John Howard Hinton, son the late Rev'd. James Hinton of New Road (George Street Church Book). Also, a small proportion of new members transferred from other parts of the country, presumably being

²¹ This seems an unusual choice of day at first, but at that time it would have been one day when many working people were not at work.

²² In January 1841 the transfers are recorded as from the 'Baptist Church at New Road', rather than from the 'New Road chapel', emphasising the growing separation of the two congregations.

²³ The New Road records are not complete at this time, and do not mention this departure

people recently moved to Oxford. However, by far the largest proportion of new members were received by profession of faith.

The church recorded baptisms from 1831 onwards, and marriages from 1837 (George Street Church Book).²⁴ The names in these registers are, unsurprisingly, of the same families that made up the church membership. Names that stand out from the long list of new members include the Blackwells,²⁵ the Collingwoods, the Chillingworths, the Underhills, and even some Aldens²⁶ – all good New Road families, the latter prominent at New Road until the late twentieth century. On the 2 November 1834 (George Street Church Book) James Thornton and George Castell both joined the church, eventually setting up their respective businesses (bookseller and tailor) almost next door to one another in Broad Street.²⁷ Nearly without exception, the members are largely tradesmen and craftsmen of almost every kind, as demonstrated by the wide range of occupations given: mason, cabinet maker, tailor, milliner, saddler, dressmaker, baker, plumber, porter, cook, bookseller, printer, merchant, carpenter, servant, bailiff, butcher, tea dealer, painter, coachman, solicitor's clerk, hatter, artist, carrier, upholsterer, laundryman, laundress, and bookmaker. Thus, the members of the church had no connection with the University, except the supply of services: very definitely town rather than gown, and the working class part of town, not the rich people's half.

²⁴ Following the passing of the Marriage Act of that year.

²⁵ We know that Michael Blackwell was a saddler. Did his family go on to become publishers, or was that another family of the same name?

²⁶ Anne Davies, one of the early members, was the daughter of Isaac Alden of New Road.

²⁷ When James Thornton was publishing James Spence's books in the 1850s his address was in the High Street.

Following James Hill's call at the end of 1833, the church continued to organise their life at some speed. It was very soon agreed that the deacons would meet on a regular basis, including a meeting directly before each Church Meeting (George Street Church Book). From January 1835 onwards (George Street Church Book), the church agreed to the issuing of Communion tickets, which would be distributed by the deacons. In addition, they approved a regular system of visiting, and the celebration of Holy Communion at a special service at 3 pm on a Sunday afternoon.

The length of Hill's pastorate, the appointment of his successor, and the length of the vacancy are, alas, unrecorded, as the minute book was not written up²⁸ for a number of years. The Rev'd. E. Jones, the pastor following James Hill, concluded his pastorate around September 1844, and therefore followed 44 weeks of supply preachers, until the Ordination of the Rev'd. James Spence on 3 July 1845 (George Street Church Book). Spence was a Scot, born at Huntley in Aberdeenshire, and had studied at Aberdeen University, where he took both the M.A. and D.D. degrees (Congregational Year Book, 1846). At first glance, therefore, Spence appeared an odd choice for a provincial English Congregational church. However, for the year before his call to Oxford, he had been studying at the Highbury Academy. As opportunities for Congregationalists were comparatively limited in Scotland, it is reasonable to suppose that Spence, being an intelligent man with a D.D., decided to forge his career in England.

²⁸ The Church Book is one of a composite volume designed by the Congregational Union of England and Wales to contain the church's history, minutes, membership rolls, and records of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials. These volumes were widely used, although generally for a later 'write up' of original records, which were subsequently often destroyed.

In the mid 1840s Oxford's university and ecclesiastical circles were, of course, in the grip of the exciting events of the Oxford Movement, which had their own impact upon the Nonconformists. When on 5 February 1845 James Spence wrote from Highbury to accept the call, he said (George Street Church Book) that:

“...I am not ignorant of the difficulties which are to be met with in Oxford in maintaining and promoting the interests of a Congregational Church in Oxford – difficulties which are perhaps peculiar to that place; - nor am I ignorant that in the esteem of many in such a city a certain degree of reproach is attached to all forms of Dissent from the established church. But ‘truth is great and it will prevail’.”

Clearly Spence intended to respond to the challenge of the Oxford Movement and refute some of the ideas with Protestant theology. Spence's enduring response to the Oxford Movement is in the form of a series of lectures delivered at George Street, and published in 1847 as *The Tractarian Heresy: a Voice from Oxford*. What is special about this book is not the content, which is a fairly run-of-the-mill Nonconformist response, but the fact that it was written in Oxford, and therefore the product of direct experience of the Oxford Movement at first hand. This was, however, Spence's second foray in writing, as his first book *Christ, the Christian's God and Saviour*, was published in 1843, whilst he was still studying at Aberdeen University. Spence was a prolific author; as he went on to produce another nine books in his years after Oxford. All of these were published in London, except *Tradition: No Part of the Christian Rule of faith*, which was also published by the Oxford Congregationalist and bookseller John Thornton in 1857.

On 4 December 1845 (George Street Church Book), the Church Meeting at George Street sent a memorial to Lord Palmerston following an attack on the French on the island of Tahiti. They had chosen to write to Lord Palmerston, a Whig and in opposition, despite his being out of office at that time, rather than to a member of the Tory Government. Given

Lord Palmerston's reputation in foreign affairs, and the traditional Nonconformist Liberal allegiance, it is perhaps not surprising. The George Street concern with international affairs clearly reflected the spirit of the times nationally, for in 1846 the May meetings of the Congregational Union of England and Wales discussed both Overseas Missions and Congregationalism around the world (Congregational Year Book, 1847). Spence's attendance at the May Meetings is not recorded in 1846, but is in 1847 (Congregational Yearbook 1846 and 1847).

On 31 December 1845 (George Street Church Book) a letter from a Mr. J.J. Hemmings, addressed to pastor, was read to the Church Meeting, in which Hemmings requested the pastor to allow "liberty of prophesying". We can assume this to mean freedom for members to offer testimonies during the service. The Church Meeting supported the pastor, and declined the request. From this we can infer that the George Street congregation were concerned to remain in the mainstream, and not to be led in any extreme directions.

In 1847 the Congregational Yearbook records that the Treasurer of the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Association of Congregational Churches was one Michael Underhill of Oxford, one of the George Street deacons, and a part of one the great New Road/George Street dynasties. Clearly, George Street was well established and settled as a Congregational church if they were supplying Association officers.

A major event occurred in the life of both the church and the pastor on 20 March 1846 (George Street Church Book), when James Spence, the pastor, married Charlotte

Underhill. As Spence married into the Underhill family, all staunch supporters of the church, perhaps he intended to stay in Oxford for some years? However, it was barely more than a year later, on 16 April 1848 (George Street Church Book), that Spence announced that he had accepted a call to Cannon Street Congregational Church in Preston. Spence cited as his reasons the low damp situation of Oxford, which was unfavourable to his health. Spence's doctor, who suggested that clear bracing air would offer him a much better chance of health, corroborated this opinion. As was then customary, Spence put his resignation into the hands of the church, and left it for them to consider. On 4 May (George Street Church Book) the church decided it was most beneficial for "the cause of God at large and to himself" for Spence to accept the call. Preston seems a curious choice as a pastorate to succeed Oxford, as Spence would have been expected to move up and this was at best sideways. Spence eventually went on to fame when, in stronger health, he became the minister of the famous Poultry Chapel, London, and also as editor of the *Evangelical Magazine*.

Following an eight month pastoral vacancy, John Tyndale began the pastorate at New Road in February 1849 (George Street Church Book). Comparatively little is known about Tyndale, and his pastorate was remarkably uneventful. Tyndale was born in Middlesex in 1817, and graduated from the Homerton academy in 1838 (Congregational year Book, 1850). Unlike Spence, Tyndale did not get very involved in the wider church, and never attended the May meetings. His significant work seems to have been only within the local church. On 1 August 1850 (George Street Church Book) the Church Meeting admitted a thirteen year old girl to membership because they were so impressed with her "remarkable amount of Christian knowledge and experience". Admitting someone of this age was quite

unusual at that time, and is remarked upon as such in the Church Book. In April 1851 (George Street Church Book) Tyndale begins to describe himself as president, rather than pastor, in the Church Book. This was a change from what was pretty much universal usage in the mid-nineteenth century, and these two unusual acts perhaps hint at a gently subversive personality in Tyndale.

One significant event did occur during Tyndale's pastorate. On 25 January 1851 (George Street Church Book) the final link with New Road was severed. A united weekday prayer meeting was wound up. This was effected by the actions of New Road, against the wishes of George Street, because of insufficient attendance. At the time this was not noticed as particularly significant, which shows that the congregation no longer saw any special relationship with New Road, but it was the last formal tie between the two congregations.

On 4 April 1853 (George Street Church Book) Tyndale resigned the pastorate, in order to accept a call to Sherborne. His ministry, however unrecorded for future generations, must have been appreciated by the church, for on 28 April (George Street Church Book) he was presented with a leaving gift of a purse containing eighty sovereigns - a very considerable sum for a working people's church in 1853.

The vacancy this time was even shorter, for on October 17 1853 (George Street Church Book) a letter was received from James Collier, a Wesleyan Methodist minister in Leeds, accepting the pastorate. Clearly there was no fear of Arminianism at George Street, or Collier had changed his theological views. Whilst Collier's letter of acceptance is written in the usual kind of language, expressing the usual sentiments, he does use the letter to

make clear his holiday entitlement of the five Sabbaths per year that “obtains, I understand, in most Congregational Churches”. Collier had come from another denomination, and perhaps sensing a different climate, was keen to make clear what the ground rules would be. His Recognition Service took place in February 1854 (George Street Church Book), some months after his arrival, as was then customary. Collier, like Tyndale before him, did not get involved in the wider church, and never attended the May Meetings.

On November 16 1853 (George Street Church Book), about the time that Collier arrived in Oxford, a wedding took place at George Street between one Robert Spence, Independent minister, and Matilda Underhill. The service was conducted by the former minister of the church, James Spence. Robert Spence is most likely to be the brother of James Spence, though we cannot be sure how Matilda and Charlotte Underhill were related, but it is more than likely that two brothers married two sisters.

Collier’s pastorate, like Tyndale’s, was not very remarkable, the only notable event being that on 29 March 1855 (George Street Church Book) the church agreed to meet on Good Friday, but in the schoolroom not in the church. On 6 August 1857 (George Street Church Book) Collier announced his resignation in order to take up a pastorate at Huddersfield. The remainder of Collier’s ministry was in the north of England, from whence he had come to Oxford for his short pastorate, and perhaps it was there that he was happiest.

During the pastoral vacancy one matter of note occurred. On 29 October 1857 (George Street Church Book) a Miss Ramsey dismissed to the Baptist church at New Road. This was the first time that New Road had been described with a denominational tag, although it

is not clear whether this was following New Road's self-designation, or whether George Street were choosing to see New Road as a distinctively Baptist church.

After this succession of brief ministries, the congregation embarked upon its arguably most successful period when it called David Martin, who commenced his pastorate on 1 August 1858 (George Street Church Book). Martin was born in 1814, and had studied at the Newport Pagnell Dissenting Academy from 1836-1840. He came from London to Oxford in 1858 and was to stay for over twenty years, overseeing two major church planting initiatives and significant growth in the George Street congregation itself. Martin was clearly a very energetic pastor, throwing himself into the whole work of the church with great zeal, and a very Congregational man, in contrast to his immediate predecessors, exemplified by, for instance, his regular attendance at and participation in the May Meetings (Congregational Year Book, 1859-1880) of the Congregational Union. Early in 1879 (George Street Church Book) it was decided that the service should be held at 11.00 am, not at 10.45 am, and that the building would be described as a "Congregational Church" on the notice board.

Within the life of the George Street congregation, Martin's ministry was a constantly busy one, with events of great significance happening on a regular basis. Early in his Ministry, on 21 March 1859 (George Street Church Book), the church appointed new trustees. However, it was later discovered that this election had been technically illegal,²⁹ and a further election was held on 7 May 1866 (George Street Church Book). On 7 June 1860 (George Street Church Book), they set up a committee to consider the then new

²⁹ It is not recorded if this was illegal according to their rules, or to the wider law governing trusteeship.

Congregational hymnbook. This committee reported on 28 January 1861 (George Street Church Book), and their recommendation to change the hymnbook and that the replacement would be the new Congregational hymnbook was accepted. It is testament to Martin's already obvious pastoral character that such a potentially contentious issue was the subject of a debate that was, "carried on in the most Christian spirit and perfect good temper".

Early in 1867 (George Street Church Book) significant alterations were made to the buildings in the areas of lighting, heating, cleaning, ventilation, re-pewing the chapel, and adapting the schoolroom to the needs of a day school. This coincided with the purchase of an adjacent property in Gloucester Green, which was opened as a day school, known as the Central Elementary school for boys, in 1871. The vision behind this work is described in the Church Book:

"Commencement of the Day school in Gloucester Green.
The opportunity of purchasing a valuable freehold adjoining the chapel led to the determination of having a Day school in connection with George Street. The property was purchased, the school buildings erected, the money subscribed & collected by this congregation. This being done it was resolved at the beginning of this year to begin the undertaking. Having determined on being an un-denominational school assistance was sought from some liberal members of the university, who gladly offered their services."

In 1872 Martin fell ill (George Street Church Book). Perhaps this is not surprising given the volume of work that he was undertaking. His illness became a more significant problem in later years, and we can only speculate upon whether this was a temporary illness, or an ominous indicator of future events.

The two most significant events, however, were the planting of two new Congregational churches. The first was on the Cowley Road, in a rapidly growing residential area, and the second a few years after in the Temple Cowley area, further to the east. Events are recorded on 28 September 1869 (George Street Church Book), when the new Congregational Room on Cowley Road was opened. It was to be used for public worship and teaching on a temporary basis, until a larger and more prominent building was erected. The circumstances leading to this event are described by Martin in the George Street Church Book,

“The rapid increase of this neighbourhood – the distance from George Street – the want of a means of grace – led to the desire to begin another cause. The cause of delay was our having so much on hand in improvements and building schoolrooms. But one of our members Mr. Radbone living on the spot offered the use of a warehouse for twelve months rent-free...having applied to the county union for help they granted us £50 a year if we would raise £30 to make the stipend of a minister £80. We were encouraged to begin – accordingly the room was fitted up and on 18 March 1868 I opened it – preaching from the words ‘we preach Christ Crucified’. Here for some months public worship was carried on. Mr. Scammell was appointed minister till Mr. Underhill granted them the use of Caroline St. chapel...where they publicly worshipped till this day September 28. The ground on which the New Room is built has been purchased for £500. This infant cause being the fruit of George Street I thought it right to make this brief record – the particulars are however more fully related in the minutes of the Village Mission Committee – which has conducted this movement all through.”³⁰

Seven months later, on 22 April 1870 (George Street Church Book), the new Congregational church on Cowley Road was formally constituted. Martin presided over the whole proceedings. A motion to form a church was passed and then all those who were present and willing to join the new church signed their names in the Church Book, but no covenant was signed. The church being duly formed, they then proceeded to elect the Rev’d. Isaac Scammell, who had already served for some time, as their pastor. Scammell did not stay at Cowley Road for very long, and on 23 February 1874 (George Street

³⁰ The Village Mission Committee records are not preserved.

Church Book) his successor, the Rev'd Keith Walden, was recognised as the pastor at Cowley Road. Walden was clearly a determined man, and work continued towards the new building. This was finished less than four years later, for on 3 January 1879 (George Street Church Book) George Street sent a letter to the Cowley Road pastor and deacons congratulating them upon their new sanctuary.

The second new church formed in Martin's ministry was that in the suburb of Temple Cowley, further east along the Cowley Road. Records do not make clear how much of this operation was due to the work of George Street, and how much to Cowley Road. Mrs. Martin, wife of the George Street pastor, laid the foundation stone of this new Temple Cowley Congregational Church at an afternoon ceremony on 19 September 1878 (George Street Church Book), in the presence of some of the neighbouring ministers, and friends from neighbouring churches. The new chapel was very rapidly completed, and the opening ceremony was on Monday 6 December 1878 (George Street Church Book), when a dedicatory service was held, at which both David Martin and Keith Walden gave addresses.

The social status of the George Street church was gradually rising, as might be expected with the growing prosperity of the artisan classes in the Victorian Britain. There were not just local workmen and shopkeepers, but also leaders of local businesses within George Street Church, but there were no nationally famous industrialists amongst the Congregational churches of Oxford (Jeremy, 1990, *passim*). Perhaps this is not surprising, as Oxford did not have a large proportion of national industry headquarters based there. Temple Cowley Congregational Church, in the mid-twentieth century, was reputed to have

a large proportion of Welsh car workers amongst the membership, and is remembered as “Morris Motors at prayer.”³¹

Martin fell ill again early in 1879, with what would nowadays be described as a nervous breakdown, which was notified to the church at a special Church Meeting, to which Martin had offered his resignation. This was not accepted, and the church hoped for a recovery. After a prolonged period of rest, in October 1879 (George Street Church Book) the congregation reluctantly accepted that the only way forward for them was to accept Martin’s resignation, and to seek a new minister. The congregation saw this as an opportunity to engage more seriously with the University and the possibilities that this represented, thus they seized upon the opportunity to raise a fund that would provide a suitably attractive stipend for the calibre of minister that they envisaged.

Following the acceptance of Martin’s resignation there was considerable communication with both the University Towns Committee and the officers of the Congregational Union. On 4 June 1880 (George Street Church Book) there were discussions with Alex Hannay, then Secretary of the Congregational Union. Soon after, the church invited the Rev’d Thomas Jones, formerly of Swansea, with a stipend of £800 (George Street Church Book). Jones was a prominent minister of the calibre that they envisaged. £400 of this massive stipend been offered from the Church Aid Society, and £800 was more than twice the sum received by Martin, indicating the seriousness with which both the church regarded themselves and the esteem in which the wider Congregational Union held them. Jones declined the pastorate, despite the persistence of the church in urging him to reconsider on

³¹ Conversation with the Rev’d. A.D. Tucker

several occasions. It is somewhat doubtful that the church would have ultimately been able to raise their side of the stipend package.

The next strong candidate emerged in 1881: Robert Forman Horton (George Street Church Book). Horton was notable for being the first Nonconformist fellow at Oxford, of New College (Horton, 1917, *passim*). He had recently combined his fellowship with the ministry of Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church in Hampstead. Although thoroughly an Oxford man, he thought himself unable to leave Lyndhurst Road so early in his Ministry there. Horton was eventually ordained, and transferred his efforts to Lyndhurst Road on full-time basis.

It was noted in the Church Meeting on 2 September 1881 (George Street Church Book) that there was no enthusiasm for any of the recent supplies in the pulpit. In October 1881 (George Street Church Book) it was decided not to invite the Rev'd. F.W. Adeney of Acton, although the reason is not recorded. In December 1881 (George Street Church Book) it was decided to invite the Rev'd. W.G. Horder, but at a stipend of only £500, but this suggestion was not acceptable to the University Towns Committee. In January 1882 (George Street Church Book) the church invited the Rev'd. John Brown of Bedford, but he declined the invitation. With each invitation, the church was steadily lowering its expectations. Later in 1882 (George Street Church Book) they settled upon the thirty year old George James Burch – a far cry indeed from Thomas Jones and R.F. Horton. Burch had studied at Cheshunt College Cambridge (Congregational Year Book, 1883) and was a scientist of some note before entering the Ministry. Early on in Burch's ministry at George Street, in February and March 1883 (George Street Church Book), there was a

disagreement with Temple Cowley about financial and organisation arrangements between the two churches.

Problems with Burch's ministry were already serious by early 1884 (George Street Church Book), as there was not enough money to pay even the meagre stipend of £300 per annum. On 10 April 1884 (George Street Church Book) the Church Meeting openly discussed whether or not they were happy with Burch's ministry, but in June (George Street Church Book) Burch notified them that he had decided to stay on as pastor. This was, however, not to be for very long, for in May 1885 (George Street Church Book) difficulties had reached such a stage that Burch had no option but to resign. He did not seek another pastorate, and instead became Professor of Physics at the then University College Reading and a University External Staff Lecturer at Oxford. He continued in his scientific career, not returning to pastoral charge, until his death in 1914 (Congregational Year Book 1915).

After a pastoral vacancy of less than a year, the George Street congregation called Robert Harley from Huddersfield to be their new pastor (George Street Church Book). Clearly Nonconformists in general and George Street in particular were now beginning to receive public recognition in Oxford in a way that had not been the case previously, for on 6 March 1886 an account of Harley's social welcome was reported in the *Oxford Chronicle*.

Harley's arrival also coincided with the foundation of Mansfield College. A Dissenting college known as Spring Hill College had been established some years earlier at Moseley in Birmingham. Led by the famous R.W. Dale, minister of Carr's Lane Birmingham for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, the College moved to Oxford as soon as

the university rules changed to allow Dissenters into the University. W.R. Ward observes that from 1860 to 1889, there were a great many Dissenters at Cambridge, attracted by the mathematical background, holding such offices as the law then allowed. By contrast, there were very few Dissenters at Oxford. Ward proposes that this was because Dissenting education did not supply the required classical knowledge to study at Oxford, but it should in fact be noted that Dissenters could attend, but not graduate, at Cambridge, whereas at Oxford Dissenters could not matriculate at all. There was just as a strong a pressure for the repeal of the Test Act at Oxford as there was at Cambridge. Ward (1965, pp. 220-221) suggests that in Cambridge the pressure came from Dissenters, but in Oxford the same pressure was coming from liberal Anglicans.

Formed in 1886 (Kaye, 1996, *passim*), Mansfield College initially met in rented rooms in the High Street, until its grand and imposing buildings were opened in 1889. The College clearly had a very early impact, for in February 1886 the George Street Church Meeting decided that when Mansfield was established they would use students in order to save the expense of a settled pastor at Wheatley. In May 1886 the new Principal of Mansfield arrived, Andrew Martin Fairbairn, previously Principal of the Airedale College at Bradford, and he and his wife joined the George Street Church.

After this initial flurry of interest, Mansfield College did not greatly impinge on George Street for some time. The latter part of Harley's four year ministry was occupied by difficulties with the branch churches. In February 1887 (George Street Church Book) there was a considerable struggle over a desire on the part of Temple Cowley to change their status from that of a branch church into being a fully independent church. This is

unfortunately combined with some confusion and argument about both money and the division of parental responsibilities between Cowley Road and George Street. This was followed in 1888 (George Street Church Book) by long debates about Wheatley and the nature of their relationship with George Street. Around the late 1880s the steady flow of new members in the church began to dry up to a mere trickle (George Street Church Book). The written records that survive do not comment upon this change, and so it is impossible to know whether this was noticed by the members, and ignored, or simply not noticed. Any assessment of the reasons for the fall in members can only be speculative, but a church caught up in internal wrangling over money and control of branch churches was unlikely either to be attractive to new members or to be putting enough effort into evangelism. Harley's pastorate ended after less than four years, when he resigned in January 1890 (George Street Church Book).

Arthur Robert Ezard, from Brecon, was the minister next called to the George Street pastorate, after a vacancy of nearly two years, in November 1892 (George Street Church Book). He was a Wesleyan minister who had served three pastorates in South Wales, although he was not a Welshman, having been born in, Staffordshire (Congregational Yearbook, 1893). Once Ezard's ministry began, the numbers of new members began to increase once more, but not at the previous rate, and it seems that, at least in part, the church was renewing itself after Robert Harley's ministry.

Ezard was clearly concerned with worship. At the Church Meeting on 6 February 1895 (George Street Church Book) it was agreed that psalms would be introduced into the service, and the Amen would be sung after the benediction. Such innovations were

nothing unusual. Changes like this were exactly what was happening in Congregational churches across England at this time. For instance (Munson, 1991, p.129), the decision in 1895 of Aylesbury Congregational Church to repeat the Lord's Prayer together in worship, and in 1898 to place a vase of flowers in the chapel, were typical this.

The matter of the status of Temple Cowley had clearly not been resolved satisfactorily in 1887, for it was addressed again in January 1896 (George Street Church Book), this time it was agreed that Temple Cowley was to be treated as a branch church on the same basis as Cumnor. This was obviously more acceptable, as the matter was not raised again until independence was granted after the First World War.

Ezard's pastorate was short, and he resigned in the autumn of 1896 (George Street Church Book). Given the desire to call a well known and prestigious minister for George Street in 1880, and the initial support of the national Congregational Union in doing so, it was a serious disappointment that no such minister was available, and the church ended up calling Gordon Burch. It must have been more disappointing that after the disastrous ministry of Gordon Burch, they had two further short ministries by little known ministers. However this changed with the appointment of Ezard's successor.

Shortly before the new minister arrived, the congregation was shaken by the death, on 29 November (George Street Church Book), of Professor Legge, the Professor of Chinese in the University, who had been a deacon and Member for many years at George Street. Robert Harley was invited back to conduct his funeral, and a memorial service was also held at Mansfield College. Legge was a former Congregational missionary from China, as

was William Soothill, another Professor of Chinese. Returning Nonconformist missionaries were providing the main bulk of Chinese teaching in the University, and this point deserves greater prominence than has previously been noted.

In October 1897 (George Street Church Book), George Street called James Robertson, from Scarborough. Robertson was a thirty-eight year old Scot, a graduate of St. Andrew's, and a former student of the Airedale College under Fairbairn (Congregational Year Book, 1899). In no way could Robertson be thought of a famous and prominent pulpit giant, but he was none-the-less a league above the recent ministers and beginning a rising career. Church life continued apace under Robertson's ministry. On 2 February 1898 (George Street Church Book) Robertson formed a Communicants Class, and the Church Meeting agreed to his suggestion of a scheme of visitation: a programme for members of the church to be visited by the deacons. As the deacons were at the time all men, this deficiency was made good by the inclusion of two "lady visitors". The following month (George Street Church Book) it was agreed to appoint new trustees. These included the usual mix of tradesmen, being a builder, draper, bookseller, and dairyman. However one notable exception was the inclusion of the editor of the *New English Dictionary*, Professor James Murray, who was a member of the church. This seems to be typical of George Street: largely prominent and respected local tradesmen, with the occasional high profile dignitary or academic thrown in as an exception to the norm.

J.V. Bartlet, the Professor of Church History at Mansfield College, joined the church in 1898 (George Street Church Book). In the summer of 1899 the Mayor of the Oxford, Mr. Kingerlee, paid an official visit to George Street. This was recorded in the *Oxford*

Chronicle, which made particular reference to the children's talk, the choir, and the anthem. The visit of Kinglerlee to George Street was nothing unusual, because he was a member and deacon of that church, and so he was to be found there on most Sundays. However, the official visit of the Mayor to a Nonconformist service was rather more noteworthy. The acceptance of Nonconformists in public life was clearly demonstrated by the election of a Nonconformist Mayor, and his official visit was recorded in the press just as was that of an Anglican Mayor who had visited St. Mary Magdalen. A few years later the church sent a letter of congratulations to Dr. Murray on progress with the *Oxford English Dictionary* (George Street Church Book). Following the death of Professor Legge, Murray was the most prominent member of the University involved in George Street.

Property matters continued to feature in the life of the church. On 3 October 1900 (George Street Church Book) it was announced that the mortgage had been finally cleared on the property adjacent to the church. This had held the church back for some time, and they were only now free of this. Just a few weeks later on 31 October (George Street Church Book) Kinglerlee, who was also a local builder, announced that he had found a site suitable for a new church in St. Giles, and had secured it for £7500. Despite various schemes and plans this was to come to nothing, and in November 1908 (George Street Church Book) the St. Giles site was sold to ease the financial constraints on the church, and the money thus generated was used to restore the George Street chapel.

The changes in worship, begun under Ezard's ministry, continued. In April 1902 (George Street Church Book) it was agreed alter the line vesper hymn "may angels guard us while we sleep..." to "O Saviour, guard us while we sleep...". One member had raised a

theological objection to the original, and the Church Meeting agreed, and made the necessary change. In October 1912 (George Street Church Book) it was agreed that the Holy Communion elements would be taken together, when all had been served, not when they were received. It was also agreed that individual communion cups would be used for the first time on 6 October (George Street Church Book) of that year. In March 1914 (George Street Church Book) the church began using the term “sidesmen” - a clear demonstration of the influence of the Church of England upon Nonconformity.

Relationships with Mansfield College had been barely mentioned since 1887, but had clearly been growing the background. Towards the end of Robertson’s Ministry they began to receive more prominence. The *Oxford Chronicle* of 5 April 1912 reported that the Counties Association³² met at Oxford, and lunched at Mansfield College. On 2 July 1913 (George Street Church Book), at the invitation of Principal and Mrs. Selbie, George Street held a Garden Party at Mansfield.

Generous support for the branch churches was a significant feature of George Street’s church life during Robertson’s ministry. In March 1898 (George Street Church Book) the church was busily occupied raising money for Wheatley, while the following March it was making a serious effort to raise £300 to pay off the deficits of both Temple Cowley and Cumnor churches, whose relationship as mission stations was confirmed in September of that year. On 21 April 1901 a new building was proudly opened at Temple Cowley, and in June 1904 George Street was able to offer a stipend for five years for an assistant to work at both Temple Cowley and Cumnor. This support for the branch churches was generous,

³² The counties being Berkshire, south Oxfordshire, and south Buckinghamshire. North Oxfordshire and north Buckinghamshire were in a separate county union.

indeed sacrificial, given the relatively weak position of George Street. It was invaluable in establishing the branches with a strong foundation to enable them to have a strong foundation for the future, but was damaging to George Street, in that considerable effort and finance was directed to other churches at the expense of the work in George Street itself.

Robertson retired, to Scotland, after what can only be described as a successful ministry by any measure, and more so in George Street's recent history of short ministries. He died not long into his retirement on 11 September 1917. After a short vacancy, on 20 May 1914 (George Street Church Book), the church called John George Stevenson. Stevenson was a Shropshire man, born in 1873 and trained at Hackney College, who had previously served at Union Brighton and Beckenham (Congregational Year Book, 1915). Stevenson was very well thought of, and George Street were clearly more successful in attracting a minister of high calibre and standing than they were in their previous endeavours in this area. Clearly George Street was eventually, perhaps too late, being recognised with the esteem that they expected for Oxford. Stevenson's reputation was well deserved, and the signs were promising. Early on a questionnaire was circulated amongst members about the order of service. However, this hopeful ministry was cut short early, and the great potential never realised. In November 1915 (George Street Church Book) Stevenson was taken ill, and it was reported to the Church Meeting that the Rev'd C.J. Cadoux, of Mansfield College, would give oversight during the period of the pastor's illness, assisted by Dr. Selbie and Dr. Dodd, also of Mansfield College. Any recovery was short-lived, for in March 1916 (George Street Church Book) Stevenson was again ill. He did not recover, and died in post on 8 July 1916 (Congregational Year Book, 1917).

So, once again George Street found itself seeking a new minister. On 6 December 1916 (George Street Church Book), they agreed to invite John Harrison Milnes to fill the vacancy. Milnes was clearly one of the new breed of establishment Congregationalists. Born at Frome, Somerset, in 1876, he went to Mill Hill School. From there he went up to St. John's College Cambridge, and then on to Mansfield (Congregational Year Book, 1918). He was to stay for seven years at George Street, definitely on the longer side for their ministries. Despite these academic and establishment credentials, and his relatively long ministry, Milnes' ministry seems to have been one of quiet progress.

On 2 May 1917 (George Street Church Book), the church agreed to purchase the new *Congregational Hymnary*, published only that year, and later made minor adjustments to the order of service. On 31 October 1917 (George Street Church Book) George Street took what was, for them, a major step forward with the agreement that women could serve as deacons. However, as women had begun to serve as deacons in other Congregational churches over the past thirty-five years, it was hardly a radical idea.

Co-operation between the various Congregational churches in Oxford was suggested following the end of the First World War, and on 7 May 1919 (George Street Church Book) George Street agreed to the idea of a "Council of Congregational Churches" in Oxford, which had been suggested by the Temple Cowley congregation. The Council would not involve any form of sharing of ministerial or financial resources, and seems to have been entirely to do with mutual support and encouragement. Probably linked to this was the decision on 28 May 1919 (George Street Church Book) to finally grant the Temple Cowley chapel its independence as Temple Cowley Congregational Church.

Milnes resigned from the pastorate on 2 July 1924 (George Street Church Book), taking the rather unusual step of becoming the bursar at Mansfield College, where he stayed for another twenty-two years. Milnes was blessed with a natural aptitude for the Ministry, as Kaye (1996, p. 196) describes him in his post at Mansfield as being, “a warm and encouraging presence and a steady support to the Principal”. Even more unusually, Milnes remained an active member of George Street until he left Oxford in 1946 for a final pastorate at Petersfield (Congregational Year Book, 1948).

Following Milnes’ leaving office, George Street eventually issued a call to the Rev’d John Phillips, on 3 February 1926 (George Street Church Book), from St. Ives, Huntingdonshire. Phillips was a Welshman, with degrees from the universities of Wales and Oxford, having studied at St. Catherine’s College before his ministerial course at New College London (Congregational Year Book, 1927). Following the call to Phillips, the church purchased a manse at 334 Banbury Road (George Street Church Book). Phillips’ ministry began well, but almost all of his time was overshadowed by the events leading to the eventual closure of the church in 1933.

The story of the closure of George Street Congregational Church is a classic example of an ineffective church with good intentions, but poor leadership, being totally overtaken by events around them. The church found itself in a situation beyond their control, from which they were not able to extract themselves. On 28 May 1930 (George Street Church Book) the church received an offer made by Oxford City Council to purchase whole of the property belonging to the church in George Street, Gloucester Street, and Gloucester Green, a substantial area of property in the centre of Oxford. At this stage it appeared that

the offer was simply an offer, with no compulsion about the matter on the part of the City Council. The church decided to examine the offer by setting up a subcommittee of trustees to examine in detail and report back to the Church Meeting. This they duly did on 25 June 1930 (George Street Church Book), and they recommended that the church should accept the offer for property, as it was required by City Council, in what would today be described as a compulsory purchase. Assuming that the property would be sold, there was some discussion of what the church should do. One of the deacons gave an historical overview, and suggested that the church was “entitled to go back on equal terms” to New Road. The evidence for this point of view was somewhat limited. Others in the meeting suggested that a move to suburbs, where they would build a new church, was the right way forward. There was significant opposition to selling the site, but in the end there was sufficient support and the motion was carried. Thus the church had made the crucial decision to sell its site very early on, with no clear of what to do next.

By the time of the November 1930 Church Meeting (George Street Church Book) it was reported, unsurprisingly, that the Baptists had said no to any form of union church, and so the door was closed to a return to New Road. In April 1931 (George Street Church Book) the Church Meeting agreed the details of the sale: final price of £25 000, the church to keep the organ, oak woodwork, and seats, and to vacate by June 1932. However, there was still no firm, or even vague, plan for what the church was to do when it became homeless in 15 months time. By December 1931 (George Street Church Book) there was a plan to build a new church, presumably in a suburban part of Oxford, but there was no firm proposal for any particular site. With the clock ticking, and matters progressing no further, it eventually became necessary for the church actually to do something. Accordingly, at

the Church Meeting in May 1932 (George Street Church Book), the only options before the church were to acquire the lease on a redundant chapel in St. Michael's Street, or to close and disband. It was a matter of regret to many that no firm plan had ever emerged for building a new church. In the end, thirty three members voted in favour of the plan to lease premises in St. Michael's Street, twenty six voted against, and there was one spoilt ballot paper. The church rules required a majority of two thirds, and as this was not achieved the motion was not carried. Therefore, the church had no option but to disband. It was, however, not until 29 March 1933 (George Street Church Book) that this came into effect. Had the church known, in May 1932 of this further delay in their vacating the premises, perhaps other ideas could have emerged. However, this was not to be.

The minister was given occupancy of the manse for a considerable period of time, and a year's stipend (George Street Church Book). The £25,000 from the sale of the site was invested in a trust and used over the next thirty years for the benefit of the other Congregational churches in Oxford. The 1933 *Congregational Year Book* shows that George Street recorded 143 members, while Summertown recorded 159, Cowley Road 170, and Temple Cowley 140.

4. SUMMERTOWN CHAPEL

This chapter relates a rather different story. Summertown began as a village, in many respects similar to Cumnor. However it developed in a very different way, and showed a different model of being a Congregational church in the way that it engaged with the University, with the dons moving into the area, and with Mansfield. Because Oxford's other Congregational churches had not worked in this way Summertown was even more successful.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, Summertown was a disparate village: a few cottages and house scattered around a mile or two from Oxford on the roads to Banbury and Woodstock. The village, such as it was, lacked any kind of centre or focus until the Church of England built the church of St. John the Baptist in what is now Middle Way³³ in 1832, although this building was always too small, and was itself replaced by the much larger church of St. Michael and All Angels in Lonsdale Road, east of the Banbury Road, in 1909.

The precise dates of the beginnings of Nonconformity in Summertown cannot be definitively stated, but the general situation is clear. Some sources say that Nonconformists began to gather in houses for worship in or after 1824, others give a later date,³⁴ and grew into the habit of walking, or the wealthier going by pony and trap, to George Street Oxford for the morning service, whilst holding their own evening worship. Although there is no conclusive evidence, it would appear that the Dissenters gathered in

³³ The road was, in the early 19 century, called George Street, later becoming Middle Way. I shall, however, refer to it was Middle Way throughout to avoid confusion with George Street Oxford (which itself was known earlier as George Lane).

³⁴ See the following paragraph for further details.

Summertown, and began attending George Street, rather than George Street worshippers from Summertown also gathering there, although the evidence does not permit a definite judgement. Members sought dismissal from New Road in 1843, and their own building was soon opened in Middle Way, near to the Anglican church of St. John the Baptist in 1844 (Summertown Church Book), and the Rev'd. D.M. Evans was the first pastor of the newly constituted Summertown Congregational Church.

Summers (1905, p. 256), states that it was in 1838 that Congregationalists first began to worship in Summertown, and a house was registered for worship in 1840. However, Mead (1994, p.1) states that it was in 1824 that worship first began, in a building already existing in Middle Way. Mead does not use the same material as Summers, and relies upon an unpublished, and now untraceable, volume entitled *History of Our Church*, written by Judith Lindsey, the mother of one of the then church Members, at the age of twelve. At a guess this would have been written around 1900. It is not possible to make a definitive judgement upon the validity of the respective sources. However, the precise date is not very relevant. We know the sequence of events, as described, and the approximate chronology, which led to the building of a Meeting House in Middle Way in 1844 for the newly formed Summertown Congregational Church.

Evans soon left, for in 1845 the pastor was the Rev'd G.W.E. Brown (Summertown Church Book), although he only stayed two years until 1847 (Summertown Church Book). There followed a pastoral vacancy of four years until 1851, when the Rev'd. Henry Baker served for three years until 1854 (Summertown Church Book). This time the vacancy was short, for the Rev'd. Edward Ellis began his ministry a few months later, serving six years

until 1860 (Summertown Church Book). After a year's vacancy the Rev'd. William Gandy served two years from 1861-1863 (Summertown Church Book). There followed a very long pastoral vacancy of eleven years until 1874, although there had been some pulpit supply and pastoral assistance from Wesleyan ministers between 1867 and 1873 (Summertown Church Book). Thus in the first thirty years of the church's life there had been five ministers, serving a total of only fifteen years and an average of just three years. A significant factor behind this rapid turnover of ministers was the lack of a manse. Nevertheless, the membership of the church grew in number steadily throughout this period (Summertown Church Book).

By the 1870s Summertown had changed from being a disparate collection of houses and cottages, to a thriving suburb of Oxford. Large villas had been built on the Woodstock and Banbury roads, and the wide tree lined roads between them, for university dons and well-to-do businessmen. The industrial growth of Oxford was concentrated in the east, especially around Cowley, and so Summertown became a largely residential area and was able to maintain, indeed increase, its growing social status in Oxford. In 1874 the Summertown Congregationalists called the Rev'd. Charles Higgens to be their pastor (Summertown Church Book). Higgens's ministry was a time of growth and development for the fellowship. Gas was installed in the Meeting House, at a cost of £1 per year for the following fifteen years (Summertown Church Book). The church wrote a "Code of Rules" for their government (Summertown Church Book). Weeknight services began to be held in 1875 (Summertown Church Book). A Sunday School had been started, and flourished under Higgens's guidance and leadership as Superintendent (Summertown Church Book). Numbers attending Sunday School were sufficiently high as to be a cause for concern both

in Sunday worship and in the Sunday School itself (Summertown Church Book). Higgs stayed for twelve years: a remarkable pastorate given Summertown's track record. In his resignation, in February 1886, he notes in the Church Book that the latter part of his ministry has not been entirely satisfactory, "the last four, seasons of great anxiety, worry, and discouragement".

The church coped well with pastoral vacancies, with capable deacons undertaking many roles in the life of the church. Mr. John Lindsey and Mr. Thomas Horn feature prominently in Summertown's records at this time (Summertown Church Book). Higgs's resignation coincided with, although was unconnected to, the arrival of Mansfield College in Oxford in 1886. Mr. Lindsey visited Dr. Fairbairn, the new Principal of the new Mansfield College, in order to secure the services of students for pulpit supply (Summertown Church Book). It would seem that Lindsey and Fairbairn struck up a good relationship, and this was the start of a long relationship between the Summertown church and Mansfield College. The appointment of a new minister was not a priority, for in 1887 the evangelistic and missionary activities of the church were occupying too much time for them to spare any time for dealing with the ministers applying for what had become an attractive pastorate (Summertown Church Book). No doubt the ready supply of students from Mansfield College helped the church to avoid seeking a new minister with any urgency. One such student was Thomas William Hodge, who moved with Spring Hill College from Birmingham to Oxford. He is first mentioned in the Church Meeting Minutes on 29 March 1888, and acted as *de facto* pastor until he left the area to take up his first pastoral charge in 1891. He was an energetic man, who clearly revitalised the church:

visiting, preaching, conducting missions, and generally increasing the speed and energy of church life and activities.

Around this time it was realised that the last appointment of Trustees had been in 1852, and only one of them was still alive (Summertown Church Book). The majority of trustees on the 1852 list are from Oxford, not Summertown, and include the familiar names of Charles Underhill, Richard Chilton, and Samuel Collingwood, all men from good New Road and George Street families. The trustees on the 1888 list, naturally, were all Summertown men, reflecting the increased confidence and independence of the church, and the deacons and leading lights of the church John Lindsey, Thomas Horn, and George Howard. They were a Butcher, Solicitor's Clerk, and Carrier, all upper working class professions (Summertown Church Book). This increased confidence and energy in the church was no doubt a factor in their desire for new and more prominent premises. The parlous state of the building, upon which the deacons were reluctant to spend any money, was another factor (Summertown Church Book). In January 1891 a special Church Meeting was held to launch a building fund. The church had made enquires about a plot of land on the Banbury Road, and were keen to proceed with a suitable new building on a more prominent site (Summertown Church Book). Soon after this Hodge departed to Fife for his ordination and first official pastorate, the church called the Rev'd. J.B. French, but his pastorate was short as he died in February 1892 (Summertown Church Book).

Plans for the new building continued apace without a pastor, and the church was guided by the Rev'd. Norman Smith, who was the first Bursar of Mansfield College (Summertown Church Book). No doubt Smith's bursarial skills were very helpful to a project of this

nature. The new chapel, designed by Mr. Kingerlee, the builder and deacon of George Street, was built on a commanding corner site on the Banbury Road. The foundation stone of this new building was laid on Tuesday 13 June 1893 (*Oxford Times*, 17 June 1893), by William Crosfield, Congregational layman and MP for Lincoln. Crosfield's speech referred to the mutual help and support given between the Summertown chapel and Mansfield College. John Massie, a layman and the Professor of New Testament at Mansfield College, also spoke of the close links between the Summertown chapel and Mansfield College. Fairbairn, the Principal of Mansfield, was also present and spoke more theologically about freedom, power, and obligations in the Free Churches. This was all reported in the *Oxford Times* of 17 June 1893, including very favourable comments on the design and the assistance of Kingerlee, "greater attention having been paid to solidity of construction than to elaborate ornamentation. It should be mentioned that Mr. Kingerlee has generously furnished the drawings and details, which have given great satisfaction, and relieved the church of considerable anxiety and expense".

The new building was ready for opening on 25 January 1894 (Summertown Church Book). Hodge returned for the celebrations, and the Preacher was R.F. Horton, by then minister of Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, Hampstead, and a former fellow of New College. The service was unusual in that it included the ordination of the new pastor, Mr. Eason, who had come from northern Ireland to study at Mansfield College, before being ordained as pastor at Summertown. The costs of the new building were met as all the bills were settled by the end of January 1894, but it would be some years before loans were repaid, including a significant amount due to the English Congregational Chapel Building Society.

The new chapel was gradually furnished and equipped during the year, although the old chapel was still used for some weekday meetings. Existing meetings and activities flourished, and some new ventures were begun, including the national Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement (Summertown Church Book). However, spiritual matters began to take a higher profile than the many social activities in the following year. In the latter part of 1895 and in 1896 special mission services were held, a boys club, and Congregational Band of Hope and Total Abstinence Society branches were begun (Summertown Church Book). Ecumenical matters, to feature so much in later years, were already coming to the fore even in 1897. There was concern about a possible Baptist church being built in the area, and there were remarkably cordial exchanges with the departing Anglican Vicar, Alfred Smith (Summertown Church Book).

In the last couple of years of the nineteenth century an organ was installed, new Communion vessels were donated, and £100 raised towards paying off the mortgage. However, just as the new century really got under way, Eason resigned the pastorate towards the end of 1901 in order to return to northern Ireland, following a call from a church in Londonderry.

After a very short pastoral vacancy, Arthur Welch, from Shanklin, Isle of Wight, accepted the pastorate in May 1902 (Summertown Church Book). Welch stayed only two and a half years, as ill health necessitated his removal from Oxford in October 1904 (Summertown Church Book). During this short ministry, the family of the wider church featured in discussions, including the reconstitution of the Congregational Union, and the local church continued to develop as they discussed plans for extending their new buildings to provide

halls and rooms for the Sunday School and their other activities (Summertown Church Book).

In sharp contrast to the vacancy of the late 1880s, where the church was too busy to find a new minister, Church Meetings were occupied by little else but the search for a new minister. This search bore fruit in May 1905, when Evan Rees accepted a call to the pastorate (Summertown Church Book).

Rees quickly showed his concern for work amongst children and young people, as, in addition to the existing organisations, he quickly started a class for young people (Summertown Church Book). Church life flourished in all areas. During the following winter there was a series of lectures to raise funds for the building fund (Summertown Church Book). In 1906 it was mooted that women might become deacons, still a novel idea in Congregational churches, but it was not until 1918 that this became a reality (Summertown Church Book). Women were, however, permitted to participate in other aspects of church life, and in 1907 Miss Ada Lindsay retired after many years service of organist (Summertown Church Book). Concern was expressed that same year about Sunday playing at the North Oxford Golf Club, and it is possible that the Sunday players were connected with the church, for the minister agreed to speak to “those involved” (Summertown Church Book).

Rees resigned the pastorate in November 1907, and was quickly replaced by John Stay (Summertown Church Book). The new rooms at the rear of the premises had still not been built, and in January 1908 the congregation raised, at the expense of fundraising for the

London Missionary Society, £150 to allow the start of building (Summertown Church Book). Construction was rapid, for the new rooms were opened in February, with a service conducted by Principal Selbie of Mansfield College (Summertown Church Book).

The Summertown Anglicans received mention again on two counts. After the opening of the new rooms on the Banbury road site, they were leased the old chapel in Middle Way, although the parlous state of the building was such that the Anglicans has a clause in the lease allowing them to terminate it should the building collapse (Summertown Church Book). The Anglicans laid the foundation stone of their new, and much more prominent, church in Lonsdale Road in 1909, at a grand ceremony involving civic and ecclesiastical processions and the band of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (*Oxford Times*, 13 February 1909). Both new buildings were left incomplete to this day: the Congregationalists never built the transepts and chancel originally planned, and the Anglican's temporary west wall still awaits conversion into a "cathedral" for the Oxford Movement.

The years leading up to World War One were marked by continual financial problems. Money was always in short supply, and funds had to be raised for a myriad of different causes. The start of World War One passed without note by the church. However its effects were soon felt. No mention was made of the departure of the organist, Mr. Moreton Bailey, but he was replaced by Mr. E.R. White, who had already given long service to the church (Summertown Church Book). In June 1915 a committee of ladies sent gifts to men from the church serving in the war (Summertown Church Book). Stay was released from the pastorate for three months chaplaincy service in France in the autumn of 1916, and in

May 1918 he resigned the pastorate, having accepted a call from Thatcham (Summertown Church Book).

In February 1918 the long standing suggestion that women become deacons was finally accepted (Summertown Church Book), and three were appointed to this body which had to oversee the process of finding a new pastor. T.W. Hodge, old friend of Summertown, was invited to preach with a view, but he could not accept the voting of twenty-four for and thirteen against (Summertown Church Book). After one or two false starts, the new minister chosen was Melville Harris, who began his pastorate in July 1920 (Summertown Church Book).

Harris' pastorate was a time of consolidation after the devastating effects of the war. No doubt in an age with a shortage of young men, efforts were made to bring them into the life of the church with a new Scout group, a new Bible class, new gym and woodwork classes, and a cycle club (Summertown Church Book). Most organisations and activities in the church consolidated their work, except for the choir, now welcoming boys, in which there was considerable upset. Fortunately Harris's diplomacy and strength avoided summoning the newly appointed Moderator (Summertown Church Book). A manse at 6 Beechcroft Road was purchased in 1922, for £809 (Summertown Church Book), but Harris resigned a year later (Summertown Church Book).

It was two years before his successor, William Foreman, arrived in 1925 (Summertown Church Book), and a new manse was purchased at 226 Banbury Road (Summertown Church Book). Foreman continued and expanded the activities of the church under Harris.

More organisations for children and young people were founded, and the worship was gradually made more dignified, and the church more beautiful (Summertown Church Book).

1932 saw the building of the Cutteslowe estate by Oxford City Council, north of the church. Private housing was also built between the estate and the Banbury Road. It was a cause of great concern to many in the community, as well as the church, that between the estate and the private housing the council erected a tall brick wall topped with revolving spikes (Summertown Church Book). Summertown members saw the need to reach out to the new estate, and also to seek harmony in their local community, by asking for the removal of the wall (Summertown Church Book). Despite these desires on the part of the congregation, a Free Church place of worship was never built on the Cutteslowe estate, and the wall was not removed until 1959.

However, the main event during Foreman's ministry was the closure of George Street Congregational Church in 1933. The repercussions, though, were subtle but significant. Only two George Street members transferred to Summertown (Summertown Church Book), and there had been no sharing of ministerial resources. The real significance was that with the closure of George Street, another Congregational church needed to be the centre of Oxford Congregationalism. Aside from Mansfield College chapel, which attracted large congregations but was not a church, Summertown and Cowley Road were both about the same distance from the City centre, with similar sized memberships, but Summertown was in a more prosperous area, with a congregation of an altogether higher social standing. Although Summertown clearly saw themselves as assuming this role, the

reality was that, at least to some degree, that role was shared between Summertown and Cowley Road. The trustees of the George Street funds clearly shared the view of Summertown that they were the prime Congregational church. The trustees had in excess of £10, 000 at their disposal, and in the following years schemes were drawn up both for a new and much grander building in Summertown (Summertown Church Book), and for considerably more imposing and majestic improvements to the existing building (Summertown Church Book). Neither scheme found favour, and so Summertown's buildings were not developed.

Foreman resigned the pastorate in 1936, moving to Ash Congregational Church, east Kent (Summertown Church Book). He was quickly replaced by Henry Roberts Moxley, who lived in his own house at 301 Woodstock Road, receiving a stipend of £325 and any rental income received from the manse (Summertown Church Book). Moxley's ministry in the latter part of the 1930s was a time of growth and development for the church, with fundraising and activities for those outside the church as well as the members. Moxley brought many gifts to the church, including that of hymn writing. Two of his hymns were included in the new hymnbook *Congregational Praise* in 1951.

The coming of war in 1939 was treated very differently than 1914, when it was scarcely mentioned. Before the Church Meeting on 30 August 1939 there were prayers for peace (Summertown Church Book). The effect of the war upon church life was rapid: evening services were held in the hall, because the church could not be blacked out; the railings and gates were removed for munitions; an air raid shelter was built behind the church; the school rooms were requisitioned for civil defence; the old Meeting House in Middle Way

was taken over by the ARP; but through all this church life continued (Summertown Church Book). In 1942 Moxley served on the founding committee of Oxfam (Summertown Church Book).

It should be noted that the new Church Secretary in 1944 was not a local man, but a university man. Mr. Robert Steel was a fellow of Jesus College and a lecturer in Geography at what was then known as St. Peter's Hall (Summertown Church Book). When he relinquished the post in 1956, leaving Oxford to take up a Professorship at Liverpool University he was replaced by Dr. Dimbleby, another university man, who was a botanist (Summertown Church Book). Dimbleby's skills were put to practical use in planning and replanting the church gardens. In 1949 Moxley retired, aged 68, because he felt the pastorate needed younger hands at the helm (Summertown Church Book). Because his daughter was permanently in hospital, he continued to live in Oxford until his death in 1963.

In 1950, Moxley's replacement, Geoffrey Beck, arrived from Eccleston Congregational Church, St. Helens, and moved into yet another new manse at 42 Lonsdale Road, which had been purchased for £3600 (Summertown Church Book). Beck was given a stipend of £450 per year, reflecting the increase in prices since before the war (Summertown Church Book). In some respects Summertown still had the feel of a village, but Beck was a Mansfield man, and familiar with the situation. Although the area still retained something of a village atmosphere, Summertown was clearly seeing itself as the leading Congregational church in Oxford.

Strong work with children and young people was a feature of these times, as it had been in many previous Summertown ministries. The Sunday School, like so many others, still met on Sunday afternoon. The children attending were largely from the Cutteslowe estate, rather than from the well-to-do church families. During Beck's ministry these children were gradually drawn more into the life of the church. One aspect of this was moving baptisms to an early place in the main service, rather than a private service at a later time (Summertown Church Book). A company of Pilots, the national non-uniformed Congregational childrens organisation, was started (Summertown Church Book). In the late 1950s the Sunday School was re-thought, and became the Junior Church.

The church had always taken an interest in world affairs, but after the war this increased. In 1945 a Free Church representative was appointed to the Oxford Education Committee for the first time (Summertown Church Book). The local United Nations Association met in the Summertown schoolroom (Summertown Church Book). In November 1945 there was a tea for prisoners-of-war (Summertown Church Book). The Women's World Day of Prayer, a movement of growing significance around the UK, was marked in Summertown. Conferences and discussions were held on the role of the family in the modern world, family planning, responsibilities in the neighbourhood, and race relations (Summertown Church Book). Dr. John Marsh returned from Nottingham University, where he had set up a new Theology department, to take up the Principalship of Mansfield College in 1953, and resumed his membership at Summertown (Summertown Church Book). The outward-looking emphasis of the church broadened further under Marsh's influence, as Marsh was the Congregational representative on the World Council of Churches, as well as serving on their Faith and Order Committee, and later as their President.

Changes were made to the Communion service in 1953. Women deacons were finally permitted to serve Communion, and in October a common plate and a chalice were again placed on the Communion Table, although non-alcoholic wine and individual glasses continued to be used (Summertown Church Book).

Ecumenical matters, which had long been a significant feature of Summertown church life, featured again when the Summertown Council of Churches was formed towards the end of 1954 (Summertown Church Book). It consisted of the Baptist and Congregational churches, St. Michael's and St. Andrew's Anglican churches, the latter being south of Summertown towards the city centre, and Methodist representatives, although there was no Methodist church in Summertown. In 1956 the church was invited to the installation of a new Vicar at St. Michael's (Summertown Church Book). In 1959 John Thornton, the minister of St. Columba's, conducted the anniversary service at Summertown (Summertown Church Book).

Many changes were afoot in the 1960s in the wider world, and also with Summertown Congregational Church. In 1962, when the Tyndale Congregational Church in Cowley Road closed Dr. Nathaniel Micklem and Dr. Erik Routley, both of Mansfield College, transferred their membership to Summertown thus strengthening Summertown's links with Mansfield College and now finally giving Summertown of the undisputed role of the foremost Congregational church in Oxford (Summertown Church Book). Morning service attendances grew considerably, and much higher proportions of the congregation stayed for communion, while evening service attendance plummeted. Summertown village changed

in character as it slowly became more clearly a suburb of Oxford. Shops were built on the east side of Banbury Road. In 1962 the Church Secretary appealed for help in finding “the right level of exposition which will help us most” (Summertown Church Book). It was clearly a challenge to preachers to find the right level of sermon for a congregation including C.H. Dodd and the staff of Mansfield College, along with many less educated families and tradespeople, some from the Cutteslowe estate.

The question of national union between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians began to impinge upon life in Summertown. Summertown members attended St. Columba’s for their evening service in March 1962 (Summertown Church Book), and quarterly joint services were planned. At an early stage it was noted that there would be financial implications in any union, not least that Presbyterian stipends were higher than Congregational ones (Summertown Church Book). Work towards a Free Church presence on the new Blackbird Leys estate was also shared with the Presbyterians.

Early in 1966 Beck’s ecumenical skills and talents, nurtured in ecumenically-minded north Oxford, were recognised in his appointment as Warden of the Chapel of Unity in the new Coventry Cathedral, necessitating his departure from Oxford (Summertown Church Book). Beck was replaced that year by Anthony Tucker, another Mansfield man, who came to Summertown after two successful pastorates at Abingdon and at Northwood Hills, and moved into yet another new manse at 62 Lonsdale Road (Summertown Church Book).

Ecumenism featured as strongly as in the past. Ministers of four denominations participated in Tucker’s induction (Summertown Church Book). There were ecumenical

services as part of the “People Next Door” programme of mission and evangelism. Elders from St. Columba’s visited in order to explain something of Presbyterianism and its practices to the church (Summertown Church Book). With some nervousness over what to expect, the congregation agreed to take part in St. Michael’s Patronal Festival (Summertown Church Book).

Education and learning continued to take place through discussions and conferences. Topics became considerably bolder than previous years, as the church considered divorce and remarriage, euthanasia, and a Ghanaian minister speaking about the inappropriateness of western imperialist and intellectual approaches to overseas mission (Summertown Church Book).

1969 was an important year in Summertown. Mrs Joy Moore became the first woman Church Secretary (Summertown Church Book). Tucker, who was already a Director of the Oxford Samaritans, became the Welfare and Counselling Officer at the Oxford College of Technology (Summertown Church Book).³⁵ He and his family also moved out of the manse into their own home, and the manse was sold (Summertown Church Book). On May 1 of that year there was a serious fire, caused by arson (Summertown Church Book). There was much thought and debate about the role of the church in the community, and whether it was necessary to rebuild, and if so, how. The conclusion was that there was still a role for a Congregational church in that part of Oxford, and it was restored in much the same manner as before the fire (Summertown Church Book).

³⁵ Later Oxford Polytechnic, now Oxford Brookes University

With the long experience of ecumenism in Summertown, and the long history of links with Oxford's Presbyterians, it was no surprise that in October 1971 the church voted very strongly in favour of uniting with the Presbyterians (Summertown Church Book). On the Sunday following union, in October 1972, Summertown joined with the other congregations of the new United Reformed Church for a joint communion service in Oxford Cathedral, planned by Tucker and John Thornton, the ex-Presbyterian minister (Summertown Church Book).

Tucker tendered his resignation in January 1974, in order to work fulltime at Oxford Polytechnic (Summertown Church Book). The new United Reformed Church provided an Interim Moderator to guide the church through the vacancy: Dr. Norman Goodall (Summertown Church Book). The vacancy was very short, and Donald Norwood was called in the summer of 1974, and inducted in September (Summertown Church Book). Yet another new manse was purchased, at 100 Victoria Road (Summertown Church Book).

Ecumenism immediately came to the fore once again, as Norwood's Induction included a commitment both on his part, and that of the congregation, to working in partnership with St. Michael's (Summertown Church Book). In the spring of 1975 St. Michael's initiated a scheme to demolish both churches and replace them with one new church (Summertown Church Book). For many this was a wonderful opportunity, but a majority were not able to share the vision and the scheme failed. In the wake of this, though, the congregations slowly began to work more closely with each other in numerous small, but significant, ways thus increasing and deepening the knowledge and working together.

In September 1982, after eighteen months work, the Anglican parishes of St. Michael's Summertown and St. Peter's Wolvercote, now working as a team, and Summertown United Reformed Church formalised their long commitment to shared outreach and church life (Summertown Church Book). Ecumenical working also affected worship: a common cup was re-introduced for communion, and alleluias were sung in services (Summertown Church Book).

Norwood left Summertown in 1995, moving to Richmond Hill Bournemouth (Summertown Church Book). He was succeeded by Ruth Whitehead³⁶ in 1997, Summertown's first female minister, yet another Mansfield trained minister, and yet another minister of Summertown to move into a new manse (Summertown Church Book). During her pastorate there was considerable growth in work with children and young people, and in outreach activities, especially to the Cutteslowe estate, which had long been in the hearts of Summertown members.

³⁶ The call was issued to Ruth Ball, but she later reverted to her maiden name of Whitehead.

5. SUBURBAN CHAPELS

The chapels in the suburbs of Oxford represented quite different models of being Congregational churches, although they had several factors in common. All of them were east of the river. All of them were firmly centred in their local communities, and all of them were set in industrial working class areas, not in university areas. Some made a success, surviving today, and others did not. This chapter will examine them, and demonstrate again the uniqueness of the Congregational story in Oxford.

Continual struggle: Cowley Road 1869-1962

Cowley Road was a poor church. It began with a building too large and expensive to pay for. By the time the building was paid for, it was already deteriorating through maintenance problems, which would cause its eventual closure. It was a poor church, not surprising for the working class area in which it was set, that always struggled to pay for ministry. It only attracted the ministry it received because it was in Oxford. Had it been elsewhere it would not have received the same level of ministry, including support from Mansfield, which kept it going for so long.

When more industry arrived and grew in Oxford, it did so to the east of Magdalen Bridge. Naturally, then, this was the area in which new Congregational churches needed to be founded. In September 1869, a new “Congregational Room” on Cowley Road was opened (George Street Church Book), which was to be used for public worship and teaching on a temporary basis, until a larger and more appropriate building was erected. The circumstances of which, were recorded by David Martin in the George Street Church Book.

The temporary building having opened, it was on Friday 22 April 1870 that a meeting was held in order to formally constitute a Congregational church (Cowley Road Church Book). The Rev'd David Martin, minister of George Street, was in chair. The covenant was signed by 32 members, and those members then immediately proceeded to issue a unanimous call to Isaac Scammell to be pastor of their new church. The meeting then concluded by expressing goodwill and appreciation towards David Martin for his work in establishing this new cause. It is notable that this appreciation was to David Martin personally, not to the George Street Church.

Church life began to proceed, and it was soon agreed, in August of that year, that the right hand of fellowship, given to new members, would be offered not at the Church Meeting, but instead at a service of Holy Communion (Cowley Road Church Book). In September it was agreed that the temporary church would be mortgaged for £700, presumably to provide funds towards a more permanent building (Cowley Road Church Book). In January 1871 the church decided to form a Tract Society, to prepare and distribute evangelistic material, and to create a visitation programme amongst the members (Cowley Road Church Book). Work was going well, so the county association withdrew its support in May, and it was necessary for members to increase their subscriptions. It was on 16 March 1871 (Cowley Road Church Book) that the first moves towards a permanent and more appropriate building were made, when it was agreed that the church would build a chapel in association with the English Congregational Chapel Building Society.³⁷

³⁷ The English Congregational chapel Building Society had been formed in 1853, and continued until 1932, when it changed its name to the church Building Committee until it wound up in 1964. Its purpose was to build new Congregational Churches, and it used standard designs to enable it to build more chapels with its resources.

Isaac Scammell vacated the pastorate in 1873, and on 18 September 1873 the church called the Rev'd Keith Walden to be their new pastor (Cowley Road Church Book). Church life proceeded very uneventfully over the following years. More importantly, on 6 November 1876, the church decided to found a "Mutual Improvement Society" (Cowley Road Church Book). This was to consist of music and singing, and objects of art, antiquity, and scientific interest were to be on view. Addresses were given to the new society by the Rev'd. Dr. G. Legge, Professor of Chinese to the University and a member of George Street, and by the Rev'd W. Yates, of the Methodist Free Church, which was situated almost opposite.

Finally, over eight years since a decision had been taken to proceed with a permanent and imposing building, on 16 June 1879 work finally started on building a chapel (Cowley Road Church Book). Progress was slow, for it was not until 27 May 1880, nearly a year later, that the foundation stone of this new building was laid (Cowley Road Church Book). Keith Walden did not see the building finished, for on December 4 1880 he offered his resignation in order to accept a call to the Stannary Congregational Church, in Halifax, a very significant step up from Cowley Road Oxford (Cowley Road Church Book).

The new chapel was finally completed after two years of building, and was opened 23 June 1881 (Cowley Road Church Book). It was, however, to be some time before a new pastor was found to lead the fellowship in their new building. In February 1882 the Church Meeting voted 34:12 to issue a call to a Rev'd J. Bradbury, but he did not accept (Cowley Road Church Book). On 7 June 1882 a call was issued to a Rev'd H. Webb Smith, but on 2 August it was noted that he had declined to accept the call (Cowley Road Church Book).

On 4 December 1882 a letter was received by the Church Meeting from the Rev'd J.S. Williams accepting the call that they had offered (Cowley Road Church Book). His service of recognition was reported in the *Oxford Times* of 26 May 1883. By now it was nearly two years since the new building had opened.

The problem of finding ministers willing to accept the call of the Cowley Road Church Meeting resurfaced in June 1890 when J.S. Williams left the pastorate (Cowley Road Church Book). In December of that year it was agreed that T.W. Hodge, the student at Mansfield College who had also worked well at Summertown, would give oversight ministry for four months (Cowley Road Church Book). In June 1891 a call was offered to Mr Thomas Grantham, a student at Hackney College, but he declined, instead accepting a call from Farnham (Cowley Road Church Book). In September 1891 the church finally issued a call that was accepted, to Frank William Collyer of Daventry (Cowley Road Church Book).

Relationships with other churches began to feature around this time. In September 1892 mentioned was made of the Marston Road church's trust deed (Cowley Road Church Book). In July 1895 help was sought as a Superintendent was needed for the New Marston Mission Hall, and a lack of interest in mission at Old Marston was noted (Cowley Road Church Book). In August a Mr. Chapman was to become Superintendent of New Marston (Cowley Road Church Book). In April 1896 it was again mentioned that help was needed at both New and Old Marston (Cowley Road Church Book).

Collyer's ministry saw a greater involvement of lay people. In November 1893 it was agreed that the young people would conduct the Wednesday evening service once a month and that members of the congregation would take part on other weeks (Cowley Road Church Book). In July 1894 the pastor's family circumstances necessitated a rise in stipend (Cowley Road Church Book), and in August Collyer resigned, accepting a call to Sutton Coldfield (Cowley Road Church Book). This was again a significant step up for the outgoing minister of Cowley Road.

Another long pastoral vacancy followed, and on 24 March 1897 the Church Meeting invited the Rev'd E.J. Hammond of Guildford, by a vote of 43:16, which he accepted (Cowley Road Church Book). In April women were first appointed to the Church Council (Cowley Road Church Book). Hammond's ministry was marked by financial and building concerns, and by the supervisory work of the branch churches at New and Old Marston. In April 1900 the Church Meeting received the resignation of Mr Paddon as superintendent of Old Marston, and noted that a fire at the New Marston Mission Hall had caused damage of £5 (Cowley Road Church Book). In March 1904 there was considerable concern about the debt that still remained on the building, some twenty-three years after its construction, although the church was pleased to note good work at Marston Road (Cowley Road Church Book). In April 1905 new members at Marston Road were received by the Cowley Road Church Meeting (Cowley Road Church Book). Throughout all these discussions, the overwhelming theme of the lack of money predominates. In February 1905 the Salvation Army were permitted to collect outside the church, and an organ was installed, a further drain on the parlous finances (Cowley Road Church Book). In June 1905 a visiting committee of ladies was formed (Cowley Road Church Book). In February 1907 some of

the choir voiced their unhappiness with the use of hymns in the evangelistic meeting (Cowley Road Church Book). On 8 March 1909 Hammond resigned the pastorate, his reason being that the church could not afford ministry (Cowley Road Church Book).

The lack of funds did not deter the church, and, with uncharacteristic haste, they issued a call on 23 August 1909 to the Rev'd W.J. Hailsham of Bognor, which was accepted (Cowley Road Church Book). His ministry began on 10 October of that year (Cowley Road Church Book), but was to be a short and troubled one. Throughout 1911 there was considerable concern about the financial deficit and the ongoing debt upon the buildings. On 23 May 1911 there was a special Church Meeting because four of the deacons had resigned (Cowley Road Church Book). Principal Selbie came from Mansfield College to chair the meeting, which resulted in a unanimous vote of confidence in the pastor. However, this was to be short lived, as on 11 March 1912 Hailsham resigned the pastorate because of the strain of the financial problems (Cowley Road Church Book).

On 30 September 1912 the church invited the Rev'd Allan Gaunt, who had been a student at Mansfield College, to be its temporary pastor, although this "temporary" arrangement lasted longer than the previous "permanent" ministry (Cowley Road Church Book). The financial crisis was tackled in November, when both the church building and the land were re-mortgaged in order to obtain more money. In July 1914 it was noted that Gaunt would finish his temporary pastorate at the end of September (Cowley Road Church Book).

During the ensuing pastoral vacancy the chair at Church Meetings was filled by the Rev'd Dr. C.J. Cadoux, of Mansfield College (Cowley Road Church Book). However, this

pastoral vacancy was to be much shorter than Cowley Road were accustomed to, for on 31 May 1915 they called Noel Whitfield, a student of Mansfield College, to be their next pastor (Cowley Road Church Book).

Whitfield's Ministry was another relatively uneventful one for Cowley Road. The First World War did not appear to have much impact on church life. In December 1916 the church agreed to continue the practice, previously adopted, of floral decoration of the Communion Table (Cowley Road Church Book). Money problems reared their head yet again, and in April 1919 various money raising schemes were suggested (Cowley Road Church Book). It may have been owing to these financial problems, or there may have been some other cause, but in October 1919 Whitfield accepted call to St. Austell Congregational Church (Cowley Road Church Book).

Cadoux had moved to the Yorkshire United Independent College,³⁸ and so during this pastoral vacancy the Church Meetings were chaired by the Rev'd Dr. C.H. Dodd or the Rev'd Dr. Nathaniel Micklem, both of Mansfield College (Cowley Road Church Book). It was again a very short vacancy, for on 27 July 1920 the church called Leonard Hibbs as its next pastor (Cowley Road Church Book). However, there were still significant worries about finances, and whether the church could afford ministry.

In July 1921 the title of "pastor" ceased to be used, and Hibbs opted for the title "minister" (Cowley Road Church Book). At this time a War Memorial was erected in the church.

³⁸ Formed in 1888 by a merger of the Airedale and Rotherham Independent Colleges, themselves descended from Dissenting academies. It merged with the Lancashire Independent College in 1958, on the Manchester site, to be known as the Northern Congregational College, now part of the United Reformed Church as Northern College.

Work in other churches continued to feature, and in July 1922 there was a special Church Meeting to agree alterations at New Marston (Cowley Road Church Book). In accord with the new patterns of ministerial terms sweeping the country, it was decided to purchase a manse, and in September 1922 trustees were elected for this manse, which was near the church at 161 Divinity Road, and there was an appeal to the congregation for special funds to purchase the manse (Cowley Road Church Book). Church life followed the usual pattern of bazaars, sales of work, jumble sales, concerts etc. In March 1924 Hibbs announced that he had accepted a call to Handsworth Congregational Church, Birmingham (Cowley Road Church Book).

Again with great haste, the church called its next minister with very little time passing. On 24 June 1924 a joint call was issued to a husband and wife: Claude and Constance Coltman to serve as co-pastors (Cowley Road Church Book). Constance Todd had trained for the ministry at Mansfield College, and had been the first woman Christian minister, when she was ordained in 1917 at the Kings Weigh House Congregational Church in Mayfair.³⁹ The following day she married Claude Coltman, a fellow student of Mansfield, and their ministries had always been shared. After their ministry at the King's Weigh House's Derby Street Mission, they ministered jointly at Greville Place Congregational Church in Kilburn, until their call to as joint ministers of Cowley Road. They were given a stipend of £250, the same as Hibbs was given in 1920, although £30 per year was deducted as rent for the manse (Cowley Road Church Book). The same stipend four years later clearly shows the finances of the church were still somewhat stretched, as £250 was meagre even in

³⁹ Selbie, as Principal of Mansfield, had been expected to conduct the ordination, but he discovered there had been a technical breach of the rules of the London Congregational Union, and he declined to conduct it. Selbie was clearly not an innovative risk taker.

1920. The deduction for rent on the manse was not as harsh as it appears, because ministers had been renting accommodation before manses were provided.

The Church Meetings were always chaired by Claude Coltman. There were a few references to “Rev. Constance M. Coltman in support” in early meetings, but these soon disappeared, and there was very little indication of what a joint ministry really meant. There were numerous References to “Rev Coltman” and “Rev CM Coltman”, but these are rather ambiguous as they could refer to either Claude or Constance.

In February 1926 the church finally extinguished the debt on their premises (Cowley Road Church Book). The building had been opened in 1881, and it had taken the church forty-five years to pay for its grand and imposing building. In another forty-five years the church would be closed because this building it had taken so long to pay for could not be maintained.

There was a controversy in the local council elections of February 1927. The church members were clearly in some difficulties because they were naturally drawn to support the Liberal candidate, however the Liberal candidate managed a public house, which ran contrary to the temperance view of the members. At the Church Meeting a proposal was put to the vote that the church would not let its hall to any political party with candidates supporting the licensed drink trade. When pushed to a vote the members loyalty to the Liberals overcame their loyalty to temperance, and this motion was defeated. An alternative motion was put regretting the appointment of a licensed victualler as a

candidate by the East Oxford Liberal Association, which was passed (Cowley Road Church Book).

Work amongst the other churches continued. However, in June 1930 it was agreed by the Church Meeting “That having explored all possibilities re-opening Old Marston, the general opinion is that time is not yet ripe, and that available services be used at New Marston” (Cowley Road Church Book). In January of the following year a letter was received from the New Marston Church thanking Cowley Road for their donation towards a restoration fund for the New Marston buildings (Cowley Road Church Book).

The Coltmans resigned the pastorate in April 1932, after eight years (Cowley Road Church Book). It would seem to have been a happy time for them, for the reasons given for their move were that they needed a larger manse, and were anxious to give their children the benefit of a country life. They had arrived childless in Oxford, but in those eight years produced three children, so their acceptance of a call to Wolverton Congregational Church, Buckinghamshire, in these circumstances, was understandable.

In October 1932 Cowley Road called Sidney Crawford to their pastorate (Cowley Road Church Book). Crawford had trained for the ministry at Paton College, Nottingham, and had served for a year as minister of the village church at Keyworth, south of Nottingham. Under his ministry, matters progressed without incident. In April 1933 the opinions of the Church Meeting were sought on candidates for the chairmanship of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (Cowley Road Church Book). Changes were made to the

order of service, when it was agreed that the deacons would meet in the vestry before the Holy Communion service, and would sit with the minister for the whole service.

After George Street closed in March 1933, there were a few transfers of membership (Cowley Road Church Book), but only a small proportion of the 143 members of George Street ever transferred membership to another church. In December 1933 the Church Meeting discussed a proposal to make the office of Secretary of the County Union a full-time post. They decided to oppose this because they felt that any available funds should be used to help poor churches, no doubt putting themselves into that category (Cowley Road Church Book).

The everyday work of the church was also recorded (Cowley Road Church Book). In January 1934 the Church Meeting noted the,

“Presentation of a tea urn. A very interesting ceremony took place when Mrs Pyer presented to the church a new tea urn. A very much needed and useful article.”

In February 1935 it was noted that,

“Mrs Pargeter, Mrs King and Miss Jennings undertook to try and secure signatures petitioning for pensions at 60.”

The status of other churches also continued to be on the agenda. On 26 February 1936 the Cowley Road Church Meeting agreed to grant independence to New Marston, making it a separate church (Cowley Road Church Book). Crawford’s ministry ended in September 1936, when he accepted a call from Alvaston Congregational Church, Derby (Cowley Road Church Book).

The ensuing pastoral vacancy was rather longer than the previous ones, and it was not until 23 February 1938 that the church called a new minister (Cowley Road Church Book). The new minister was a Lay Pastor, H J Haggett, who was offered a stipend of £200, 20% less than the already meagre stipend offered in 1920, eighteen years previously (Cowley Road Church Book).

The Second World War impinged much more directly on the life of the church than the First World War. In December 1938 the church discussed, without result, how they could help Czech refugees (Cowley Road Church Book). In February 1940 the minister told the church of his efforts to keep in touch with those serving in forces, and in September of that year there was concern about lights in the church during blackouts (Cowley Road Church Book). Throughout the war the Church Meeting was notable for its especially low attendance, only four to thirteen members attending. In November 1942 the Church Secretary sent his apologies to the Church Meeting as he was otherwise occupied fire watching (Cowley Road Church Book). July 1943 saw the Church Meeting protest at the opening of cinemas on Sundays (Cowley Road Church Book). Towards the end of the war, in April 1945, the church set up a Pilots company for children, which began with ten boys and girls (Cowley Road Church Book). In January 1946 Haggett announced his resignation, having accepted a call to Marlow Congregational Church (Cowley Road Church Book).

Cowley Road returned to their former experience of a short vacancy, and on 8 May 1946, one year after the end of World War Two, they issued a call to Henry Starkey, a final year

student from Cheshunt College, Cambridge (Cowley Road Church Book). Starkey's ministry marked an upturn in church life and morale.

In July 1946 the first mention was made in the Church Meeting of Oxford's newest Congregational Church, on a new housing estate beyond Headington on the eastern edge of Oxford (Cowley Road Church Book). It was described as the new "Far Headington church", and had been constituted on 11 November 1945 with 20 members (Cowley Road Church Book). Cowley Road actively supported this venture after September 1948, when it agreed that Starkey would be available to preach once a month there (Cowley Road Church Book). In November 1952 it was learned that the Congregationalists had been offered site on the new Wood Farm estate, then being built between Cowley and Headington, although nothing came of this proposal (Cowley Road Church Book).

Wider church concerns were also discussed when the Church Meeting heard that a proposal for a scheme of union between the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and the Presbyterian Church of England, had been discussed at the 1947 Congregational May meetings (Cowley Road Church Book). In January 1948 the Church Meeting approved the principal of union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, but asked for more information on the details (Cowley Road Church Book). In October 1954 the church sent greetings to St. Columba's on the occasion of their silver jubilee, and accepted a gift of a font from them (Cowley Road Church Book). Although the 1947 national scheme of union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians had not been defeated nationally, the two traditions entered into a national covenant from 1951.

Worship and children were also characteristic features of Starkey's ministry at Cowley Road. In February 1947, like many other churches around the country, concern was expressed at the very small attendance at the morning service, compared to the evening (Cowley Road Church Book). At the same meeting, it was noted with pleasure that the minister was continuing to come down from pulpit to talk to the children. The Holy Communion service was changed, so that the bread was served on a large plate, rather than tiny individual plates upon each glass. In October 1952 it was agreed to set up a children's corner in the church (Cowley Road Church Book).

Concern for the wider world was also noticeable. In September 1946 the Church Meeting passed a resolution regarding allocation of grain used for brewing, and sent their views to the Prime minister, the local M.P., and the Minister of Food (Cowley Road Church Book). There was a concern for evangelism in the neighbourhood around the church, and in December 1950 the Forward Movement, a national renewal programme of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, was first used at Cowley Road (Cowley Road Church Book).

Unfortunately financial and practical matters still lingered. There were discussions during 1951 about the low level of the stipend paid to the minister, but Starkey refused to accept any increase until the debts of the church had been cleared (Cowley Road Church Book). The church felt that they should offer more to the minister, but there was simply not enough money to do so. In May 1954 the name of the church was changed from Cowley Road Congregational Church to Tyndale Congregational Church, to avoid what had been an increasing confusion with Temple Cowley Congregational Church (Cowley Road

Church Book). In 1954 the Church Meeting, no doubt remembering the Coltman's departure over the manse, expressed its desire for a new manse. Two years later, in 1956, a possible new manse at 64 Hill Top Road was discussed (Cowley Road Church Book).

After 11 years, Starkey resigned the pastorate in July 1957, as he had accepted the prestigious post of chaplain to Mill Hill School, a Congregational public school in north London (Cowley Road Church Book). During the ensuing pastoral vacancy, the Church Meetings were chaired by either the Rev'd Dr. Erik Routley and or the Rev'd David Goodall, both of Mansfield College (Cowley Road Church Book). The vacancy was to last for a little under a year, for in May 1958 the church called the Rev'd Lloyd Jenkins, who had trained at Western College and served for four years at Castle Green Congregational Church, Bristol (Cowley Road Church Book). The manse was still the unsatisfactory house at 161 Divinity Road.

Almost immediately, following Lloyd Jenkins's appointment, serious problems with the buildings began to appear. Less than a year after the Induction, in April 1959 the deacons were discussing whether to sell some of the deteriorating church premises in order to raise funds to restore the remainder of the premises (Cowley Road Church Book). By January 1960 things were getting worse, and the roof was in a very poor condition (Cowley Road Church Book). It soon became apparent that the buildings problems were ever more serious, for in February the Church Meeting considered whether to sell part of the site and rebuild a smaller church on the part they retained, or to seek to join with the nearby Cowley Road Methodist Church (Cowley Road Church Book). By July they had decided to try and seek redevelopment of the site, and this decision was concurred with in Jan 1961

(Cowley Road Church Book). Back in 1947, there had been a concern, shared in many Congregational churches around the country, at the small attendance at the morning service. Now, in 1961, Cowley Road was also, like many Congregational churches, worried over the small size of the evening congregation (Cowley Road Church Book).

Although voted upon twice by the Church Meeting, in July 1960 and January 1961 (Cowley Road Church Book), it was clear that the church had still not come to a mind about to resolve the problems of their decaying building and the lack of funds needed to repair it, for in July 1961 the Church Meeting decided that they needed a wider consideration of what to do for future. One idea suggested was a merger with their daughter church at Marston, but this did command majority support (Cowley Road Church Book). In November 1961, reversing its earlier decisions, the Church Meeting made a firm decision not to redevelop the site (Cowley Road Church Book). This left the way forward for the future still unclear. In January 1962 the deacons recommended that the church building and site should be sold, and the members should disperse to other churches, which was agreed (Cowley Road Church Book). Later that month it was agreed to dispose of various items of property to several different churches (Cowley Road Church Book). The final Church Meeting was held on 28 February 1962, when it was agreed that the wish of the Church Meeting was that the monies raised from the sale of the site and buildings should be used for the costs of the new church on the new Blackbird Leys housing estate, beyond the ring road to the east of Cowley (Cowley Road Church Book).

Rise and fall: Temple Cowley 1878 -

Temple Cowley is another unique Oxford story, but a rather different one. The church was very well placed to be the church for the many people who came to the industry in this part of Oxford. It worked well on that basis until some time after World War Two. As the local community changed and developed, Temple Cowley eventually managed the same, and retained a relatively strong presence in the area until very recent times.

The cause at Temple Cowley began as evangelistic work of George Street and Cowley Road, in 1878, with an early and quickly erected building in September that year.⁴⁰ Temple Cowley ran semi-autonomously, with a parental relationship with George Street. This lasted for some years, for in 1896, George Street agreed that Temple Cowley must still be treated as a branch church.

The *Congregational Year Book* records that one J Robertson was their minister in 1899, and that he stayed until 1913. During this ministry, the membership fluctuated between around thirty and fifty members. Robertson's successor was Percy Rose (*Congregational Year Book*), arriving in the spring of that year. Rose was an Oxford man, born in Oxford in 1881. He trained for the ministry at Paton College,⁴¹ so probably came from an ordinary background, presumably the working half of Oxford not the University half. From 1915-1919 he served as a forces chaplain, then returning to resume his ministry at Temple

⁴⁰ The records and archives of the Temple Cowley church were damaged by fire before consultation, and so this section relies upon such snippets as could be gleaned from such records as were available pending their restoration and deposit in the County Record Office, and other secondary sources. Hence this section was restricted in source material.

⁴¹ A Congregational College in Nottingham with the specific remit of training non-graduates, and specialising in older and married candidates.

Cowley. He left, in 1922, for Wolverhampton. During Rose's ministry the membership rose a little to around sixty-five.

Rose's successor was a much older man, William Fry (*Congregational Year Book*), who was also a Paton man. He stayed for four years at Temple Cowley until his retirement in 1926, after which he remained in Oxford and give oversight ministry to Wheatley for some years. During Fry's ministry the church began to grow, membership reaching eighty.

The heyday of the church, though, was to come at an unlikely time from an unlikely source. The unlikely time was 1926, after Fry's retirement. The unlikely source was the next minister, Whatley White, a partially sighted, indeed almost blind, minister (*Congregational Year Book*). 1926 was the year of the General Strike, and the great depression was soon to take hold. Temple Cowley was very much set in the heart of the car manufacturing territory, and many were coming to work in the Morris Motors factories. White was another Oxford man, again his church of origin is not recorded. Because of his eyesight difficulties, he was unable to gain a place at a theological college, so he began as a Lay Pastor, and worked through non-collegiate exams, and finally passed the List A exams⁴² in 1927. During White's Ministry the membership at Temple Cowley rose to over two hundred and twenty. After thirteen years, White left in 1939.

Stanley Rees-Tyrer, a Welshman, arrived to succeed White in 1939 (*Congregational Year Book*). During his time the church continued to grow, with membership reaching over two hundred and fifty. During his ministry at Temple Cowley, Rees-Tyrer served on Oxford

⁴² The primary list of the Congregational Union of those ministers fully trained and ordained

City Council, although he declined nomination as Lord Mayor. His party is not recorded, but given the national and local Nonconformist political scenes, he was most likely Labour. He left in 1947 for Ipswich. Cyril Steley, another Paton College man, came to Temple Cowley in 1948, for six years (*Congregational Year Book*). During Steley's ministry the membership began to decline, falling back to two hundred. Like his predecessor, Rees-Tyrer, Steley was very involved in the wider community, as he was in all his pastorates. Again, like Rees-Tyrer before him, Steley also left Temple Cowley for Lea Road Congregational Church Wolverhampton.

Brian William Rowlands, known as Bill, accepted the call from Temple Cowley in 1956, and stayed eight years until 1964 (*Congregational Year Book*). During this ministry membership began to fall dramatically, being only one hundred and fifty when he left. John Wilding came to Temple Cowley in 1965 (*Congregational Year Book*). It was during his ministry that the church voted to join the United Reformed Church. This is not surprising, as Wilding served on the joint committee between Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Tom Dyer served for three years from 1975 - 1978 (*United Reformed Church Year Book*). During that short time membership declined by 25% to only 90. Given the decline in industry in those years, especially the British car industry, a decline in membership was only to be expected here. John Robinson came, via the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, to Temple Cowley in 1979, staying seven years until 1986 (*United Reformed Church Year Book*). Membership, finally, held reasonably static, and Robinson's ministry stabilised the decline of the previous thirty years. However the church now found itself in a poor neighbourhood, and a very multi-cultural area, with

many people of different races and religions living. To prosper the church would need to respond to these issues.

Their response came after a two year vacancy, when Elizabeth Gray-King accepted a call, this being her first pastorate, straight from Mansfield College (*United Reformed Church Year Book*). There were sixty six members when she arrived in 1988, and ninety when she left in 1999. Given how many deaths and removals the church suffered during her ministry, there was a remarkable response to the situation in which the church found itself, and a significant increase in membership. However, this was to not last long, for after Gray-King left there was another two year vacancy. Because of a shortage of ministers, and a need for a greater number of members per minister, Temple Cowley was unable to remain as a full-time post, being given only a half-time post. In 2001, they called Dick Wolff, whose other half time post was as Mission Enabler for the Wessex Synod. In 2005 Wolff exchanged his post with Wessex for another half-time ministry at Collinwood Road (*United Reformed Church Year Book*). Unfortunately, the response to the area that led to an increase in membership during Gray-King's ministry was not sustained. The ninety members when she left in 1999, were reduced to only twenty-seven in 2008, leaving the inescapable conclusion that Wolff's ministry has not been a success in numerical terms.

Short-lived failure: Old Marston 1884-1922

This section demonstrates something that didn't happen elsewhere in Oxford Congregationalism: a failure that was quickly seen and dealt with. In other situations events continued and lingered on until they could go on no more, but this situation finished quickly and cleanly: so much so that it has been almost erased from records and memories.

In the 1880s the members of Cowley Road Congregational Church began outreach work in the Marston area of Oxford, then a village to the north east of Oxford (Cowley Road Church Book). They began two different missions around the same time, and some care is needed to establish clearly which was which at the time, and also later, as the name of the former closed mission eventually came to be adopted by the surviving one, whose members today were in some ignorance of the existence of the other former mission. Because this was only a mission, and not a formally constituted church, records are non-existent, and the only sources of information were surviving records from Cowley Road and external material.

In 1884 Cowley Road established a mission in the village of Marston, and this mission was variously referred to as "Marston", "Old Marston", and "Marston village". The *Victoria County History* (Crossley, 1979., p. 220) agrees with the Cowley Road records that the mission was formed in 1884 by members of Cowley Road, and further notes, which Cowley Road records do not, that the members forming the mission were not from Marston village. The mission did not have permanent purpose-built premises, and met in a building that was known as the "Workman's Hall".

Although Cowley Road set up a village missions committee, and delegated powers from their Church Meeting to that committee, it is quite clear that the missions were under the firm control and direction of Cowley Road, to the extent of having their preachers booked for them (Village Missions Committee Minute Book). It is worth noting that in 1896 of the preachers booked for the autumn, the names of two Underhills, old New Road and George Street families, appear in the list. In 1897 the committee discussed the principles and the details of the employment of a Caretaker and the appointment of a Superintendent for the mission. Despite the lack of delegation to folk in the missions, the meetings were irregular and not as effective as they might have been.

However, this changed in 1898, when quarterly meetings were set up, and the pastor took the chair. Immediately, the meetings became more business-like, and there was also a more professional approach to the business. The committee worked on both the general oversight of the work, such as the principles of running the Sunday Schools,⁴³ the appointment of Superintendents etc. The day to day running was increasingly left for decision locally, and thus became without record.

There are no records from around the time when this mission closed, but it ceases to be listed in Congregational Yearbook in 1922. Cowley Road's Church Meeting in 1930 decided that there was no current prospect of re-opening, and a Charity Commission scheme was executed for the lease of building, presumably no longer the "Workman's Hall", in 1932. The *Victoria County History* notes that the building was used by the Royal British Legion in 1954.

⁴³ For instance, on 18 June 1903 it was agreed to change the time of the Sunday School time to 3-4 pm because this was in the long term best interests, despite not meeting the short term problems.

Small and struggling: Marston Road 1885 -

This section demonstrates a situation that was very different because it was in Oxford. Marston would not have had a new building had it not been in Oxford and benefitted from the George Street Trust. Likewise, it would not have received the level of ministry that it did, or the succession of student pastors from Mansfield to keep things going. The reality of the situation is that anywhere else it would have become a very small number struggling on, the current situation, many years ago.

What became Marston Congregational Church, now United Reformed Church, began in 1885. There are no records of the formation of the church within the church itself. However, the formation of the Mission Hall is noted by Cowley Road (above) and the Deeds for the conveyance of the land, dated 1 June 1885, at a cost of £320 14 shillings, are extant. The purchase of the site and the cost of erecting the Mission Hall were paid for by Cowley Road. In those early days, there was no minister for either of the Marston missions, and both were to be served largely by Lay Preachers until after World War One.

The earliest record extant is a Minute Book, beginning in 1896, of the Marston Mission Halls Committee of Cowley Road, for both the Marston missions. As the Old Marston mission closed so long ago, contemporary records tend to have forgotten its existence, and whilst Old Marston was originally referred to as “Marston”, with the other being “New Marston” or “Marston Road”, the surviving mission has now taken on the name of “Marston”.

As noted under Old Marston, both missions were firmly controlled by Cowley Road, although there was a gradual transfer of power once the twentieth century was under way. Following the closure of the (Old) Marston Mission Hall, work was concentrated at New Marston (aka Marston Road), now referred to simply as Marston. The first Student Pastor, from Mansfield College, was appointed in 1919, Mr. R. Tooth. Each year, until 1935, another student was appointed. These included many Mansfield men who later went on to noble and distinguished service, such as Eric Shave in 1926, John Marsh in 1929, and Gordon Robinson (actually a Baptist) in 1930. The first woman was Miss. J. Robbins in 1931. These Student Pastors were each *de facto* minister of Marston for their year of office, and the close proximity of the College and acquaintance of the students would have led to some degree of continuity for Marston.

What is not at all clear from the Marston records when the fellowship moved from being a mission of Cowley Road to an independent Congregational church, we know from Cowley Road that it was February 1936. In 1940 a Membership Book, with a covenant printed in the front cover, was begun, but the first members signatures and the inscription indicate that the membership roll had already been in existence sometime before that book was begun.

Although records are somewhat spasmodic before the 1950s, until the 1930s it was always clear, although unsaid, that Marston was a minor player in Oxford Congregational terms, in the sense that it had a small building, limited amounts of people and money, and no hope of ever having a full-time fully qualified ordained minister of its own for the foreseeable future. However, the geography and demography of the area was rapidly changing in the

1930s. By 1935 new housing was springing up which linked together Old and New Marston, and created several new housing estates in the Marston area, turning the area from two villages into one large suburb of Oxford.

In 1938 the George Street trustees, having a great deal of money and not a great deal to spend it on, and aware of the growth and building in the Marston area, approached the members at Marston offering to build a new church, if the members there would respond to the challenge of mission and outreach offered by the opportunities of the new housing developments. After some trepidation, the church accepted both the challenge and the new building that went with it (Marston Church Book). A site on Marston Road, very close to the Mission Hall, was purchased, and the foundation stone was laid in February 1939 (Marston Church Book). Work proceeded quickly, and the building was completed by the end of the summer, and a service of dedication and opening was held on 9 September 1939, just after the outbreak of World War Two (Marston Church Book). Having paid for the building, the George Street trustees' generosity also ran to paying a stipend of £135 per year for Miss Irene Smith, a deaconess who was to lead the church, but, curiously, not to conduct services (Marston Church Book).

World War Two had a significant effect upon Marston, as it did in so many other places. Here the area was one to which evacuees were sent, and the premises, except for the church itself, were requisitioned for use as a school (Marston Church Book). However, a good consequence of the presence of so many children in the locality was a huge increase in Sunday School numbers, so much so that extra teachers had to be found to come with the increased numbers (Marston Church Book). Deaconess Smith left in 1943, and the

church called its first minister of Word and Sacraments, the Rev'd. Jim Hardyman, who served for two years on a part-time basis (Marston Church Book). The opportunity for a new minister, to succeed Hardyman, did not arise until 1948, when the Rev'd. Dr. Ralph Johnson, an American Presbyterian studying at Mansfield, took on part-time pastoral duties (Marston Church Book). Under his leadership the church grew, and a manse was purchased (Marston Church Book). Johnson stayed a year, and was followed by another American studying at Mansfield, Dr. Lowell Atkinson. The exceptional quality and brevity of Atkinson's sermons was noted (Marston Church Book). Other short ministries followed, including from the Rev'd. Elwyn Edwards, who served from 1950-51 (Marston Church Book). In contrast to Atkinson, he was noted for his extremely long sermons. Another short, part-time, ministry was given by the Rev'd. Leonard Wolcott from 1951-52. This ministry was not a success. Wolcott's temperament and style were not well suited to the congregation and work at Marston, and they soon parted (Marston Church Book).

The first full-time minister, for a pastorate of significant length, was the Rev'd. Mansel Davies, who arrived early in 1953 (Marston Church Book). During his ministry, the manse developed structural problems, and was sold. A replacement manse, funded by the common practice of interest free loans from church members, was purchased 100 yards from the church at 378 Marston Road (Marston Church Book). After Mansel Davies left in 1957, the church reverted to its former practice of having Student Pastors from Mansfield, and called Jack McKelvey, who had also studied at Paton College, Nottingham, as part-time minister in exchange for the occupancy of the manse (Marston Church Book). This arrangement seems to have suited everyone well. McKelvey threw himself into the work with great zeal, and provided an inspirational leadership to the church. He was ably

supported by his wife Myrtle, who shared this enthusiastic leadership in her work in the church, especially the Sunday School. After Marston and Mansfield, McKelvey ministered and offered theological teaching in South Africa, before becoming Principal of the United Reformed Church's Northern College in 1979 and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1994-5.

McKelvey was followed by another full-time minister, the Rev'd. Charles Attridge, who arrived in 1958, and was to stay for nine years, until his wife died and he moved on to Fordingbridge Congregational Church (Marston Church Book). Attridge was a quietly enthusiastic minister, who quickly endeared himself to everyone. During his ministry at Marston, he also offered oversight to Benson Free Church, a chapel in a riverside village near Wallingford (Marston Church Book). One arrival at Marston during Attridge's ministry was Brian Wren, then a student at Mansfield, and now a distinguished and internationally renowned hymn writer. Wren is remembered at Marston not for his hymn writing, but for his enthusiastic work with the young people (Marston Church Book).

Attridge was followed in 1968 by the Rev'd. George Cornell, who ministered until 1973 (Marston Church Book). During Cornell's ministry the Junior Church work flourished, and a monthly service was set up at Marston Court, a nearby residential home for the elderly, which still goes on today. It was during Cornell's ministry that the United Reformed Church came into being in October 1972, by a union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, and the Presbyterian Church of England. Church Meetings discussed and voted upon this issue in October 1971 and in January 1972 (Marston Church Book). On both occasions, although there were some questions and reservations, the

minister strongly supported the scheme, and Marston's Church Meeting voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining the United Reformed Church. However, the required resolutions had not been put to the Church Meeting in the precise legally required form of words, and another vote had to be held in November 1972, which was again successful and the church formally joined the United Reformed Church in May 1973, at its first General Assembly (Marston Church Book). Cornell left in 1973, and in September of that year, after a remarkably short vacancy, a call was issued to the Rev'd. Constance Payne (Marston Church Book). She was another dedicated, hard-working, and enthusiastic minister, whose zeal rubbed off on the church, where her hard work built up the church. She stayed until 1981, when she accepted a call to the nearby pastorate of Grange Church, in Reading (Marston Church Book). From the years between the wars until now, the church had been sustained by dedicated and hard-working laypeople, who worked extremely hard to keep the mission of the church alive and well. Names such as Vallis, Wiggins, Dandridge, and Teal litter the minutes over the years. Without them the work in Marston could not have been sustained.

After Constance Payne left, the membership had shrunk to about fifty people, and it was no longer possible to sustain a full-time minister at Marston. Payne was succeeded by Ron Ewart, who came directly from his training at Mansfield to be full-time Chaplain of Oxford Polytechnic, and also to serve Marston in a part-time capacity in addition to his duties at the Polytechnic (Marston Church Book). Ewart left in 1985, and was followed in 1988 by Chris Ball, again an ordinand from Mansfield, in a similar role until 1992 (Marston Church Book). From 1995 until 2000, Marston shared the services of the Rev'd John Wilkinson and the Rev'd Dick Wolff in a group with Cumnor and Collinwood Road churches.

Wilkinson served full-time, and Wolff served half-time in the group and half-time as Mission Enabler for the Wessex Synod of the United Reformed Church (Marston Church Book). From 2000 until 2003, when he retired, Wilkinson served Marston and Collinwood Road alone (Marston Church Book). Since 2004, Marston have been served by a non-stipendiary minister, the Rev'd. Diana Townsend (Marston Church Book).

6. VILLAGE CHAPELS

The village chapels around Oxford were typical *Larkrise to Candleford* territory. Any one of the villages could have been where Flora Thompson set her autobiography. What, though, that marks them out as different is that each was influenced by Oxford and the University.

Country chapel re-invented: Wheatley 1794 -

This section demonstrates three important points. One is that Wheatley began originally as a Baptist cause, linked with New Road, but became Congregational and linked with George Street: a second important marker of continuity between old Dissent and the nineteenth century. Another is that Wheatley was a very difficult situation throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and the remarkable point is that it survived at all given the upheaval. A third very important point is that since World War Two a good proportion of its ministry has been provided by Americans also working at Mansfield. This extraordinary situation, quite unlike anywhere else, has meant that the chapel was able to reach out to a different section of the population in a way that many villages are just unable to. Had this been anywhere but Oxford then this would not have happened.

The first trace of Nonconformity in Wheatley was not seen until the last years of the eighteenth century. In those heady days of the 1790s, with anti-French revolutionary fervour filling the air, James Hinton, the well loved pastor of the New Road chapel in Oxford, began to preach in villages around Oxford; firstly at Woodstock, where they were attacked by soldiers and residents, and then at Wheatley, where there was more success. The story of what eventually became Wheatley United Reformed Church was written in

1997 by John Fox (Fox, 1997), a Roman Catholic historian who had the advantages of knowing the local area and of not being a member of the church, thus having a measure of objectivity that is sometimes lacking in histories written by those too closely associated with the events.

In 1793 Wheatley was a poor village: fifty people were receiving weekly payments from the Parish Overseers, and workhouse bills of £20 were also falling to the overseers (Fox, p.14). Wheatley was still part of the ecclesiastical parish of Cuddesdon, but was waiting for a long overdue church of its own. So it was to this largely poor and heathen village that James Hinton came to preach the gospel. A request was made for a Meeting House licence in 1794, and a second in 1796, which was granted without delay. It is not clear whether the 1794 application was refused, or whether the 1796 application was for a second Meeting House. As the 1796 application was granted quickly and willingly, the most plausible scenario is that the 1794 application was granted, but either not put into effect or the cause did not survive for very long (Fox, pp.14-15).

The next formal records of the cause are not found until the Church Book of 1845, which provides a sketchy and not wholly reliable account of the years from Hinton's first days until 1845. As Fox says (p. 16), "it poses more questions than it answers". In 1836 a Mr. Smith started a Dissenting night school⁴⁴ in Wheatley, although there was already a National school in the village. This provoked some disquiet in the village, and in the established church, for the head of the National school, in a forward looking move for the times, was willing to accept Dissenter's children, whilst the curate of the time, William

⁴⁴ It is assumed that a specifically Dissenting school would not have been a British school as these, although run by Nonconformists, were non-denominational.

Langley, was not. In the ensuing court case, of 1841, it was clear that the Dissenters had been running an organised church for some considerable time (Fox p.17).

In the years leading to the re-formation of the Dissenting church around 1841 it was clear that Wheatley, like many agricultural villages at that time, was a relatively poor village, thus good territory for Nonconformity. In August 1842, assisted by the ministers of George Street, Oxford, and Wallingford, a barn used for tanning and hide-dealing was purchased in the middle of the village (Wheatley Church Book). It was rapidly converted into a small chapel, which opened in October of that year. The sittings were all taken quickly, and a church was formed in March 1843 (Wheatley Church Book). Although the building was filled, only nine people became members (Wheatley Church Book), although such a difference between the size of the congregation and the membership was not uncommon at that time. By 1850 forty five members had been recruited (Wheatley Church Book).

Between 1850 and 1875 only sparse records survive, and such minutes as do exist largely record practical everyday decisions, rather than anything of significant interest to the historian. The pastor, Charles Davis, left for Kirkham, Lancashire, in 1854 (Wheatley Church Book). Thomas Knight followed him, staying for nine years (Wheatley Church Book). Knight was succeeded by Charles Murray in 1862 (Wheatley Church Book). There was an influx of workers that year, building a branch of the Great Western Railway from Wycombe to Oxford. The railway workers influence on the religious life of the village was not recorded, save that records of Baptisms suggest a considerable flexibility in the use of church and chapel (Wheatley Church Book). Murray returned to Scotland in

1869, and after that a number of ministers came and went after very short periods of time (Wheatley Church Book). The chapel was very much in the doldrums, and the village was a social, cultural and religious hotchpotch. Finally a new, settled, minister arrived and a new and renewed era began in the life of the chapel in December 1875, when Edwin Bird became the minister (Wheatley Church Book). Attendance, membership, and morale all increased rapidly under Bird's ministry, which was to last until 1887. Bird was clearly enthusiastic, energetic, and charismatic. He breathed new life into a moribund cause at a crucial time. Nevertheless, like many charismatic leaders, his ministry was always controversial. Although there were many successes, these were also tempered with associated failures.

An early experiment was with pew rents, but this was not successful, despite running for many years, and the end result was a decrease in both income and attendance (Wheatley Church Book). Temperance was another significant feature of chapel life during Bird's ministry. A Band of Hope had been formed in the village in 1874, and under Bird's encouragement it met in the chapel and gradually became more associated with the chapel (Wheatley Church Book). The records suggest that a considerably wider temperance influence came to bear in chapel life than merely the Band of Hope, for instance evening classes and social activities took root and grew in the wider chapel community (Wheatley Church Book), originating with the Band of Hope.

Like many ministers, Bird was concerned with the Sunday School work. His arrival was well timed, for the infant school numbers had peaked in 1874, and so there were many children around. Fox (pp. 38-39) notes that attendance at the school was always very low

on the day of the chapel Sunday School tea party, such that in 1883 a half holiday was given that day, and in 1884 the two relevant days of chapel Sunday School events became permanent half-holidays.

The village was neither an easy nor a happy place to live in the 1880s, the heyday of Bird's ministry, because of the general economic depression of those years causing unemployment and increasing poverty, combined with several hard winters. Church finances, naturally, suffered in consequence. Income fell, activities were financially curtailed, and eventually Bird's stipend was reduced (Wheatley Church Book). Yet, Bird's ministry was such that the size of the congregation grew considerably. Activities increased; worship and spiritual affairs grew and developed. However all was not well beneath the surface. The reasons were not recorded, and they cannot easily be deduced from such records as were made, but Bird resigned the pastorate in March 1887 (Wheatley Church Book). Clearly something had gone seriously wrong that caused Bird to resign, but there was a significant body of members who were not content with his resignation, and who actively worked for his re-instatement. Despite some procedural difficulties, and some backwards and forwards debates, a properly constituted Church Meeting never issued a call for Bird to return (Wheatley Church Book). Bird himself initially retained the Church Book, and held services in his home for those who sought his ministry, but when the County Union took this up, Bird desisted, although he was still resident in the village in 1891 and conducting funerals (Wheatley Church Book).

A new chapter finally opened in the life of the fellowship when Alexander Pay was called as minister in June 1889 (Wheatley Church Book), and following his arrival chapel life

picked up again: attendances again increased, some redecoration and refurbishment of the chapel took place (Wheatley Church Book). The building was licensed for marriages, and a young people's guild begun (Wheatley Church Book). The improvement, though, was slow. It took ten years for chapel life to return to what things had been like in the heyday of Bird's ministry. In 1898 plans for a whole new chapel were not agreed, but a Sunday School room was built, in order to accommodate the growing ministry amongst children and young people (Wheatley Church Book). Kingerlee, the builder, Oxford Councillor, and deacon of George Street was, unsurprisingly, one of the leading lights in the project to build the school room, and he performed the opening ceremony in December 1898 (Wheatley Church Book). Final breaches from the end of Bird's ministry were healed in 1902, and the Nonconformists of Wheatley again all worshipped together in the chapel (Wheatley Church Book). Thus on the eve of the Great War in 1914, Wheatley chapel life was stronger than it had been for many years.

The difficulties, in shortages of people and supplies, brought about by the First World War had the same effects upon Wheatley chapel as they did in so many other places. Chapel life was curtailed by the absence of young men, many of whom never returned, and the scarcity of supplies caused problems for social events (Wheatley Church Book). After the war things did not get back to normal quickly or easily. The records are slim, and not illuminating to the historian, but it is possible to see a picture of hard lives struggling to make ends meet. The 1920s and 30s pass by without much note, until the outbreak of World War Two. Church life was affected by that war in much the same ways as by World War One: young men were away fighting, goods and services were in short supply. They were also affected by the need for blackouts, which shortened evening activities

(Wheatley Church Book). However, the outbreak of peace in May 1945 prompted a united service for everyone in the parish church (Wheatley Church Book). Like the years after World War One, the late 1940s were hard years. Rationing was stricter than before, materials were in short supply, and the winter of 1947 was a very hard one. However, spirits kept up, and in 1950 a new American minister, William Mackintosh, was called (Wheatley Church Book), who caused some initial consternation, but whose ministry was deeply appreciated in the few years that he stayed. It was the time when the ecumenical movement began in Wheatley in earnest, and Mackintosh was the first Congregational minister to receive the thanks and admiration of the parish church as well as the chapel upon his departure (Wheatley Church Book). Church life was buoyant, activities and organisations were booming, the spiritual life was thriving, but outreach was difficult. Many new housing estates were being built, but the response of the new residents was limited and depressing (Wheatley Church Book). Although the chapel life was flourishing and in good spirits, it was the old village families, rather than the new residents, who were sustaining things.

In 1963 the chapel called Charles Brock to be their minister (Wheatley Church Book). Brock was another American minister, who was also studying at Mansfield College, where he became chaplain in 1964. It was intended to be a temporary arrangement, but became the longest serving ministry in one place in the United Reformed Church at the time of Brock's retirement in 1998. The arrangement was successful because the two halves of the work were both sustained: at Mansfield Brock's responsibilities increased. He finally took full responsibility for the ordination training course from the Principal in 1977. At Wheatley Brock devolved responsibility upon members, so that church life was sustained

and increased without every aspect being driven directly by the minister. During that ministry, Wheatley's membership rose steadily, and aspects of church life grew and flourished.

Throughout its history, Wheatley was always connected with Oxford: under paternal guidance from George Street, sharing ministry with Cowley Road, sharing fellowship and work with other Congregationalists. However, Oxford and Wheatley did not influence each other to the same extent or degree of significance as did the churches in Oxford itself.

Country cousins: Frilford, Longworth, and Appleton 1830 -

In some way this section illustrates the exception that proves all the other rules. These villages remained small places, and avoided any of the developments that would have increased their size and therefore their population and potential chapel-goers. They did not receive significant support from Mansfield in the way that Marston or Cumnor did, and they did not survive. However, the story is not that simple, for the villages were founded by evangelism from Oxford, George Street maintained a paternal link with them, and Mansfield supplied some preachers and pastors. Had the villages been anywhere else then they would not have benefitted from the added extra of Mansfield, and their existence would have been shorter and even less secure.

The villages of Frilford, Longworth, and Appleton lie on heath land to the southwest of Oxford city. They were, until 1974, in the county of Berkshire, although they lie very close to Oxford, and have always looked to Oxford. The villages themselves, and the history of their churches and supply of ministry, are so intertwined that it is impossible to consider them apart. The *Congregational Year Book* says that Appleton was begun in 1830, Frilford in 1841, and Longworth in 1848. No further details are recorded anywhere about the founding of the Appleton cause, but the early history of Frilford and Longworth is recorded in their Church Book. It is clear that the dates of 1841 and 1848 relate to the building of their chapels, and that the causes themselves were begun in 1837. This early history is written in the start of the Church Book of what was then known as the Frilford and Longworth Home Mission thus:

“About the year 1837 the late Henry Leake Esq., who resided near Oxford, began to interest himself in the villages round that city, holding religious services in cottages, in Barns, and in the open air. This induced others to take an interest in his work.

The late Thomas Floyd of Frilford, Thomas Dewe of Longworth, and William Talbot Wallis of New Shefford, Oxford, Esqs, joined in a deed of trust of the date June 5 1854 designated the Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Settlement and Deed of Trust, whereby property is held and provision made for the maintenance of religious work.

A chapel was opened at Frilford Sept. 28 1841 and at Longworth Sept. 13 1848, which with other out-stations were comprised in the deed. Sabbath and Day schools were also built at Longworth and endowed by the late Mr. Dewe, Mr. Floyd making a provision for religious services at Frilford.

Previous to Oct 9 1841 Missionaries had been engaged in the evangelisation of the villages. The accounts show that at that date Mr. Henry Smith and Mr. Stevens were thus employed. Mr. Smith continued so engaged until July 1 1889, with assistance at various periods from Mr. Sumner, Mr. Hayward, and Mr. Scott.

At the beginning of the year 1889, difficulties presenting themselves to the trustees, they communicated with the Berks., South Oxon. and South Bucks Association of Independent churches. This ended in a formal application from the trustees - supported by the unanimous approval of the church at a Church Meeting held March 21 1889 - being forwarded to the Secretary of the Association, Rev. G.P. Jarvis of High Wycombe. At the meeting of the Association held at Henley-on-Thames April 3 1889 the application was considered and acceded to, and an annual grant of £30 was made.

On the invitation of the church, with the approval of the District Committee, the Rev. S.B. Blean MA undertook the pastorate, commencing work July 1 1889. A Recognition Service was held at Longworth on Oct. 9 following. The Rev. R. Harley MA FRS, minister of George Street chapel Oxford, and Secretary of the District Committee; Dr. James Murray, of Oxford, engaged in connection with the university in the production of the New English Dictionary; Rev. S. Lephine, minister of the Independent chapel Abingdon, and their friends, took part in the service, Mr. Harley delivering an exposition of Free Church principles. The new phase of the existence and work of the mission was thus inaugurated."

This account was provided by an unknown historian, who recounted the story of the foundation of these village causes in December 1889 at the start of their new Church Book.

Records continue after that, but the Church Meetings are sporadic and their records sparse.

In July 1891 Blean left the pastorate (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). He was replaced on 27 October 1892 by the Rev'd D.B. Gregory, who stayed for about six years (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). On 1 January 1898 Alfred Couldrey became the pastor, who was himself replaced by William Bert

Osborne in April 1906 (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). Almost exactly four years later, in April 1910, B.H. Eddy became the pastor (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). Evan Edwin Newell, a Lay Pastor, succeeded him in August 1917 (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book).

On 6 January 1918 a joint service was held in Longworth parish church at invitation of Rector (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). It was very rare to find such co-operation between Anglicans and Nonconformists as early as 1918, especially given that Newell was a Lay Pastor, not an ordained minister. Newell's ministry was long, lasting until September 1934 (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). He was very quickly succeeded by William Owen as minister, who was called in October of that year (Frilford and Longworth Home Mission Church Book). The Church Book stops at this point, but *Congregational Year Books* fill in a little information. Owen stayed until he retired in 1952 and his obituary in the 1966-67 *Congregational Year Book* says that,

“his ministries were marked by a genuine concern for people, and his practical and artistic abilities were always at the service of his churches. His musical talent stimulated the work of choirs and choral societies and helped his work among young people, as did his expertness as a tennis player.”

Such a temperament would account for his long ministry and Longworth and Frilford, and his apparent success in these rural causes. At this point Cumnor joined the group, and the general history and work of the ministers is with Cumnor, where the bulk of the work was. Appleton closed in 1973, Frilford in 1994, and Longworth in 1996, when their last remaining members died.

The relationship of Frilford and Longworth to George Street, from their formation until George Street's closure, is not totally clear. Henry Leake was not a member of George Street, although he may have been a worshipper. Frilford and Longworth are not mentioned in 1899 rules about the relationship with village churches (appendix three), but the lack of a ministerial or financial relationship does not mean the lack of a spiritual or ancestral relationship. The George Street minister, and a George Street deacon, both took part in the pastor's recognition service in 1889. Preachers regularly went from both George Street and Mansfield to Frilford and Longworth. During the debates in the George Street Church Meeting surrounding the closure of the church, it was stated by one of the deacons that George Street had produced "six daughter churches and one granddaughter church". It is difficult to reach this total without including Frilford and Longworth.

Oxford supported: Cumnor 1845 -

The story of Cumnor chapel clearly demonstrates another highly distinctive situation that was very different because of Oxford. Cumnor received support from Mansfield students in the pulpit and as student pastors without which it could not have survived. It also received support from the thriving Summertown church, and more recently from St. Columba's. Because of this Cumnor not only survived, but also developed a broader outlook and ethos than might otherwise have been the case in a village church.

It is widely stated that the origins of the Congregational chapel in Cumnor were in 1845 (Summers, p.259), and were the result of evangelistic activity from the Frilford and Longworth Mission. Any meetings as early as 1845 would probably have been in the open air. However, on 12 March 1850 a barn, situated at what is now 43 Leys Road, was registered for Nonconformist worship. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (23 March 1850) tells how only the next day the worshippers were interrupted. Joseph Lambourne, James Lambourne, Edward Adams, Charles Stone, Robert Cudd, and William Puffet "maliciously and contemptuously disturbed a congregation". They "began fiddling, dancing and shouting and by so doing made so great a noise as to entirely stop the service". They were brought before Abingdon Magistrates, but the minister, Henry Smith would not press charges, so they were released with only a warning.

Frilford and Longworth Mission continued to exercise a parental interest in Cumnor. In 1874 surplus furniture was moved from Hannay to Cumnor, and in 1875 they were concerned over the thatch of Cumnor chapel, expressing their hope that the landlord would repair it.

The parental interest in Cumnor moved, sometime after that, for reasons not disclosed, to George Street, and in 1893 George Street were raising funds for a new building in Cumnor (George Street Church Book). The secretary of the County Association, George Jarvis, wrote an appeal letter, dated November 17 1893, which describes the nature of the village chapel community very well:

“The Agricultural Labourers and others constituting the Cumnor congregation have long been known to us as a devoted band of men. Strangers visiting the place have testified to the earnest and refreshing nature of their meetings for worship. Their enthusiasm in the work of securing a new chapel is beyond praise, and the practical sympathy of the Oxford churches has our best thanks. The congregation out of their poverty have already contributed £16 by weekly payments of one penny. The executive of the Berks, South Oxon and South Bucks Congregational Association commend their efforts as deserving the sympathy and help of all Christian people”.

Plans were proceeding because three days after Jarvis’ letter, an indenture dated 20 November 1893 conveyed from the Earl of Abingdon and eleven others to J. H. Thornton and T. H. Kinglerlee (trustees of George Street) “a piece of land situate in the parish of Cumnor containing one rood statute measure or thereabouts” for the sum of £100. Having secured the land, George Street accepted an estimate of £459 in May 1895 for erecting a new chapel at Cumnor (George Street Church Book). They then began a further appeal for funds.

The Trust Deed was dated 15 April 1897 set out that the chapel was,
“to be used, occupied and enjoyed as a place for the Public Worship of God...according to the principles and usages of Protestant Dissenters of the Congregational Denomination being Paedobaptists...under the direction of the Congregational Church situate in George Street”.

The opening of the new chapel is not recorded, but the Church Meeting at George Street admitted Cumnor as a Branch church on 10 October 1895 (George Street Church Book). Cumnor held its first Church Meeting on 19 December, under the chairmanship of the

George Street minister. The first superintendent of the work at Cumnor, for one year, was Thomas Blackwell.

Matters progressed from there in the normal manner of chapels of the time. Communion plate was acquired. A week night service arranged. Unlike most Congregational churches, Cumnor did not establish a diaconate and neither were they represented on the George Street diaconate. Through the early years, though, there are frequent references to “the committee” (Cumnor Church Book), which was the *de facto* organising body of the church.

The membership numbered thirty-three in 1898 (Cumnor Church Book), although, like many chapels, the numbers at each service were likely to be much greater. There are a few surnames which arise repeatedly, and we can infer that the chapel was largely made up of several families. One of these was the Blackwells (Cumnor Church Book), undoubtedly related to the George Street Blackwells. It may be that this family connection explains the move of oversight from Longworth to George Street.

In 1901 an important and significant link began, when the students of Mansfield College were invited to conduct one service each month (Cumnor Church Book). Although this was limited to pulpit supply in the early days, Mansfield students began to act as student pastors from 1919. These appointments were usually for a year, and entailed becoming the *de facto* minister. Like Marston, Cumnor was blessed by some student pastors who later became famous ministers. However, Cumnor were quick to learn from those already well

known. C. H. Dodd, later translator of the New English Bible, and theologian J.S. Whale, amongst others, came to speak in the 1920s and 30s (Tomlinson, 1995).

Early in the life of the new chapel building, plans were formulated to provide a Sunday School, and classes began in 1896 (Cumnor Church Book). However, the accommodation was cramped and unsatisfactory. By 1934 matters reached a head, and the leaders observed that there were fifty-three scholars already, with the likelihood of more coming from the Cradle Roll. It was decided to ask the George Street Trust for help, and thus in May 1936 the Trustees agreed to build a school room, costing £600 (Cumnor Church Book). The exact date of opening was not recorded, but reference was made to it in January 1938 (Cumnor Church Book). Other changes to the building came with the replacement of the oil lamps with electric lights. The heating, though, remained oil-fired (Cumnor Church Book).

By the time of World War Two, Cumnor received evacuees, as did other areas around Oxford. The Berkshire Education Committee rented the schoolroom, now known as the hall, to provide a day school for forty evacuee children, for £28 per annum (Cumnor Church Book). The school stayed only until September 1942, but they had set a precedent for use of the hall by other groups. Ecumenical work also first arose during the war, when in 1942 the Vicar invited the chapel congregation to join St Michael's Church in a service for the National Day of Prayer (Cumnor Church Book).

After the war, church life resumed again, with a new Old Folks Club, and a new student pastor coming from Mansfield once more (Cumnor Church Book). In 1951 it was

proposed that Cumnor should join the other four churches of the Longworth Group under one minister. Cumnor, though, decided that they would neither benefit from nor contribute to group of that nature (Cumnor Church Book). They were, though, aware of the benefits of sharing a minister with another church. Looking to Oxford, they established a link with Summertown, which was to last for six years. The minister, Geoffrey Beck, frequently chaired meetings and occasionally conducted services, while members and Sunday School teachers met jointly from time to time (Cumnor Church Book). In 1953 the Congregational Union published their new hymnbook *Congregational Praise*, and Cumnor eventually agreed to purchase some copies (Cumnor Church Book).

Maurice Husselbee was the last in a long line of student pastors, finishing in 1956 (Cumnor Church Book). This coincided with a vacancy in the pastorate of the Longworth Group. Hanney had left the Group, and Cumnor was asked to consider joining, with the prospect of a full time minister for the now four churches. Matters were finally decided in April 1957, and on 28 March 1958 a call was offered to the Rev'd Gertrude Oyston (Cumnor Church Book). She accepted, and was inducted to the pastorate of the Longworth Group on 21 June at a service at Longworth (Cumnor Church Book). Cumnor had its first full time ordained minister, albeit shared. Within six months of her Induction, Oyston had started several new activities: an Autumn Rally Service for the four churches; a Group news letter, "Meeting Point"; a Prayer Circle; a week night Club for Girls; and a Group Men's Fellowship (Cumnor Church Book).

At this time, there were many children and young people involved in the life of the chapel, and lack of space again became a serious problem. In July 1958 a large wooden hut, to

accommodate the growing work with children and young people, was offered for erection alongside the Hall, although it was to be some time before it was complete (Cumnor Church Book). In the early 1960s there were around sixty children on the books, and at Christmas 1962 and 63 a tableaux and then a nativity play were presented in the church (Cumnor Church Book).

The Congregationalists of Cumnor were not isolationists, and they showed their interest in the wider church by marking a Medical Missions Sunday, annual contributions to the LMS, a film on the “John Williams” ship, and discussion of the Congregational Union's “Short Confession of Faith”, with which they were not impressed, although they did not record why they were not impressed (Cumnor Church Book). The co-operation with the parish church begun in the 1940s continued into the 50s and 60s. Occasionally the chapel committee met with the Parochial Church Council, there were services in the Week of Prayer for Unity, a joint Brains Trust, and a combined Harvest Supper (Cumnor Church Book).

After a successful four year ministry, Oyston left in the middle of 1962, to take up a call from the church at Trimley, Felixstowe (Cumnor Church Book). The vacancy was short, for in March 1963 Stanley Parker, a Lay Pastor, who had ministered at Abingdon and Faringdon, accepted a call to the group (Cumnor Church Book). Parker owned a house in Hatford, thus the manse at Longworth remained empty. Parker was clearly an enthusiastic minister, injecting his energy into all he touched. However the journey home was too much for him on a regular basis, and he left the pastorate on medical advice in August 1965 (Cumnor Church Book).

Twelve months after Parker's departure, Noel Davies came as another student pastor to the group (Cumnor Church Book). The congregations at evening services had declined significantly, and in 1965 it was agreed to suspend them (Cumnor Church Book). Improvements continued to be made to the building: new toilets in 1962, electric heating in the hall in 1965 and church in 1968, and a refurbished kitchen in 1971 (Cumnor Church Book). Finally, in 1974, the roof was re-tiled (Cumnor Church Book). By mid-1968 the wooden building offered so long ago had finally been moved and erected (Cumnor Church Book).

Davies stayed for three years, and after his departure the next minister was to come from an unusual source. George Shelley was a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, who was working locally as a teacher. He accepted a call to come as part-time minister in exchange for occupancy of the manse, continuing to earn his living as a teacher (Cumnor Church Book). Shelley and his family moved in to a newly renovated manse in September 1968. He was to preach in Cumnor on the first and third Sundays of the month. The already good co-operation with the parish church increased under Shelley's ministry, resulting in joint services and House Groups (Cumnor Church Book). In 1971 Cumnor resolved to join the United Reformed Church. Perhaps a minister with Presbyterian roots influenced them?

The Sunday School was still thriving, and in December 1968 they were very busy. On the first Sunday of that month a university student from Papua came to talk about his country as part of their missionary studies. On the second Sunday they sang carols in the Osney Court Old People's Home; on the third, being Gift Sunday, they took the gifts to the

National Children's Home in Chipping Norton; and on the fifth Sunday a Surprise Service began with the children passing round refreshments and then giving a presentation of the Christmas story in readings, drama and carols (Cumnor Church Book). Sadly, numbers dropped soon after that, and a joint Sunday School with the parish church was begun (Cumnor Church Book). Shelley's pastorate ended in 1975, when he accepted a call from Sedlescombe, East Sussex (Cumnor Church Book).

The next minister was also to serve in a part-time capacity. Will Webb had retired to nearby Abingdon, after a thirty-five year ministry. He did not enjoy preaching in different churches on pulpit supply, so agreed to take oversight of the group from 1976 (Cumnor Church Book). Although he was already in his seventies, he took the service at Cumnor most Sundays and a later service once a month at Longworth and Frilford. He was appreciated for his practical down-to-earth Christianity in preaching and pastoral work. He had planned to retire at the end of 1980, but he died suddenly in December of that year (United Reformed Church Year Book, 1982).

The search for a new minister was not straightforward, as the group could clearly no longer support a full-time post, and there was no part-time person obviously available, as there had been before. However, in 1982, Justine Wyatt was co-minister at Trinity, the joint Methodist-United Reformed Church congregation in Abingdon. She agreed to take on oversight of the Group, and was inducted in November 1982 (Cumnor Church Book). She took the service at Cumnor on two Sundays in the month. After two years she exchanged the Abingdon part of her joint post for the Associate Chaplaincy at Mansfield College, keeping quarter-time ministry in the group (Cumnor Church Book). In 1991 Wyatt moved

on, to work for Christian Aid, having been the longest serving minister of Cumnor and of the Longworth Group (Cumnor Church Book).

In 1986, Tom Stiff, minister of Collinwood Road church, retired, and he and his wife became members at Cumnor. He had regularly preached at Cumnor forty-five years previously as Sergeant Tom Stiff RAMC. In 1989 the situation of twenty years earlier was reversed, and Maureen Smith started a crèche, which grew into a new Junior Church.

The United Reformed Church District Council was unable to make suitable arrangements for the provision of ministry at Cumnor, as Appleton, Longworth, and Frilford had all closed or were about to close. Eventually it was agreed to group Cumnor with Collinwood Road and Marston churches in Oxford, such group to be served by one and a half stipendiary ministers (Cumnor Church Book). John Wilkinson was inducted to this new group pastorate in February 1994 (Cumnor Church Book), and was joined by half-time colleague Dick Wolff in 1995 (Cumnor Church Book). Wolff was also serving as the Mission Enabler for the Wessex Synod. In 2000 this new group was dissolved. Wolff exchanged his half-time ministry in the group for a half-time ministry at Temple Cowley, continuing as Mission Enabler. Wilkinson remained at Collinwood Road and Marston. In 2001 Cumnor established a link with St. Columba's to share their minister, Susan Durber, along the lines of the Summertown link of the 1950s (Cumnor Church Book).

The absence of deacons was not a serious anomaly in the early days, but at the time of union with the Presbyterians in 1972, most Congregational deacons became United Reformed Church elders. Because there were no deacons, there were no elders. This

situation was not easily resolved, and several debates in the Church Meeting revealed unease about what was perceived as two classes of members in a small church (Cumnor Church Book). Eventually, elders were ordained and inducted at Cumnor, although not until more than thirty years had passed since the 1972 union, and a new century had been entered (Cumnor Church Book).

7. POST-WAR EXPANSIONS

Post-war zeal: Collinwood Road 1945 -

This section tells the story of a new church built on a new housing estate just after World War Two. At first glance it might have been anywhere, but a closer analysis demonstrates once again the uniqueness of Oxford. Had Collinwood Road been anywhere else it would not have been able to attract a minister of the calibre of Tom Stiff, who initially was attracted by Mansfield's proximity, who was so instrumental in building the strong foundations of the fellowship. Likewise, it would not have received the support and fellowship of so many churches around, and in more recent times the support of students from Mansfield.

At both New Road and George Street a covenant was an essential part of the formation of the church. In later churches, this was not always so. However, Oxford's newest Congregational church marks its beginning from the signing of a covenant, on 11 November 1945, by the first twenty members:

“We the undersigned, being known to one another as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, and seeking to be his disciples, hereby agree to unite together in forming ourselves into a Christian church which would henceforth worship, and hold its meetings as the Collinwood Road Congregational Church, Headington, Oxford.”

Services had been held in houses on the new estates of Barton, Sandhills, and Risinghurst, to the east of Headington. The first meetings had begun in late 1943, and two years later this covenant was signed. Sites had been reserved on the developments for an Anglican church, and a Free Church, and the Oxford Free Church Federal Council had agreed that this development would be given to the Congregationalists (Munday, 1984, p.1).

Support for the new church, and the buildings it would need once the war was over, came from the ever generous George Street Trust. A minister, Norman Williams, was called straight from training at Western College, and ordained for this new work. He was ordained at Temple Cowley on 1 June 1944. Initially services were held in houses, but from 23 July 1944 services were held in a property known as Bush House, Sandhills, which had been acquired by the church (Munday, p.1).

Negotiations for a building began, but the church lost its minister when Norman Williams accepted a call to a more conventional pastorate in Sheffield. Although the church had been constituted by its covenant, Church Meetings were not held after August 1946, as the membership could not sustain them. Services ceased soon after that, and did not resume until 1948 when new accommodation was found at Forest Hill Council School (Munday, pp. 2-3).

However, the cause was not lost because a “Management Committee” took over the strategic running of the scheme for a permanent building. It consisted of ministers and deacons of other Congregational churches in Oxford, who were to manage things until the fledgling church was able to run its own affairs. Clearly this body was where the real work was done. They raised funds for the new building, negotiated with the George Street Trustees, liaised with the architect and builders, and dealt with the legal matters. Their hard work paid off in 1949 with the opening of the first hall on 24 September 1949 (Munday, pp.3-4).

On the day following the opening of the hall, services were held for the first time. The church began to organise its life, appointing officers, starting organisations, arranging services (Collinwood Road Church Book). Naturally there were strong links with Temple Cowley, and with the George Street trustees, but it was a time for the new church to find its own feet.

The church were, of course, keen to appoint a minister. That opportunity finally came in the spring of 1951, when the church issued a call to Tom Stiff, then a student at Western College, Bristol (Collinwood Road Church Book). However there was a problem - the new church had built a hall but had no manse. Houses were scarce for rent or purchase, and there was no money with which to buy a house anyway. The eventual solution was a caravan as a temporary manse, with a wooden shed, known as Uncle Tom's Cabin, to serve as the minister's study (Collinwood Road Church Book). Building a manse, though, was a priority, and this was completed in 1953 (Collinwood Road Church Book).

Despite these difficult conditions, Stiff threw himself into the work wholeheartedly. Groups of every kind were started for men, women, and children of every age. In these early days Collinwood Road was certainly an active and forward looking church. Despite having a hall, a manse, a minister, and a thriving fellowship, the church did not turn to rest. Instead, aware of the growing congregation and the difficulty of a multi-use hall, they set on to build a sanctuary.

By 1956 the debts on the building of the manse were finally cleared, and fundraising was all now directed to the building of the new sanctuary, and the George Street trustees were

again approached (Collinwood Road Church Book). A year later a mutually acceptable plan was eventually devised. The George Street trustees were paying a significant part of the costs of the building, but the church agreed to raise £5000 for furnishings and fittings (Collinwood Road Church Book). Two people heavily involved in the life of the church at the time were Conrad Husk and Richard Wiggins, who both went on to enter the ordained ministry. At this time a subway opened, under the A40, for pedestrians to walk from the Sandhills estate to Risinghurst, and this opportunity to extend their mission was seized upon by Collinwood Road, with a new initiative of house-to-house visiting (Collinwood Road Church Book).

Fundraising now began in earnest for the new church once the plans had at last been agreed. The appeal was amongst the wider community, not just the church. By the end of November 1957 247 households had promised to give regularly to the appeal (Collinwood Road Church Book). Tom Stiff personally stood in Headington High Street, in full robes, with a model of the church, for many days persuading members of the public to buy a brick for a shilling each, with the slogan: “be a brick, buy a brick, bob a brick” (photograph). £200 was raised this way, representing about 4000 people’s giving.

Building work commenced in December 1958, and by the middle of 1959 the building was taking shape (Collinwood Road Church Book). At this time the Congregational Union of England and Wales began a new programme - *Every Person Canvass* - an early exercise in gingering up congregations to plan and organise their life looking towards mission and outreach. By the end of the year the new church was indeed complete. The final service in the Old Hall was held on 6 December 1959. Then on Saturday 12 December 1959 the new

church was finally opened (Collinwood Road Church Book). The preacher at the service of Dedication was the General Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, the Rev'd Howard Stanley. The total cost of the church, with all furnishings and organ, eventually came to £20 000.

Soon after the completion of the church the landscape changed forever with the completion of the new A40 dual carriageway. As the church had consolidated in the early 1950s, after opening the original hall, so the early 1960s were a time for consolidation after the opening of the new church. The first wedding in the new church was that of Richard Wiggins and Jean Masters (Collinwood Road Church Book). Richard and Jean later represented the church at Conrad Husk's ordination in Bourne, Lincolnshire (Collinwood Road Church Book). Organisations and events continued with the usual fast pace. Tom Stiff became president of the Oxford Free Church Federal Council in October 1963 (Collinwood Road Church Book).

However the consolidation would not continue forever. The ancillary accommodation at the church was not sufficient to meet the needs. The original hall was far too small for that was going on, and the manse was used for some of the Junior Church groups, to the extent that one group met in a bedroom. A hall was designed, and fundraising began again (Collinwood Road Church Book). The hall was completed in April 1969 and the final cost was £13 000, considerably lower than that of the church (Collinwood Road Church Book).

Oxford had ten or more Congregational churches in the vicinity, but only one Presbyterian Church. As conversations between the Congregational Church in England and Wales and

the Presbyterian Church of England increased in strength in the 1960s, Collinwood Road invited some elders from St Columba's, to their Church Meeting (Collinwood Road Church Book). Congregationalists were concerned about eldership, and Presbyterians about Church Meeting.

With the building work complete, the challenge to build on this work and to move forward as a growing church was the task of the 1970s. In October 1971 Collinwood Road decided by 68:3 in favour of becoming part of the new United Reformed Church (Collinwood Road Church Book). Following the formal national union in October 1972, a special service was held in Christ Church Cathedral to commemorate the union locally. More building work took place as the manse was extended and the old hall's roof was renewed (Collinwood Road Church Book).

During this time there were many aspects of the fellowship that grew and developed. One particular event was the 25th Anniversary Dinner of the Men's Group. The group had one hundred and twenty members, and sixty-four of them sat down to a dinner provided by the ladies. On the following Sunday both services were conducted by the men (Collinwood Road Church Book). Another important milestone came when Richard and Jean Wiggins finally left Collinwood Road in 1981, as Richard had completed his ministerial training and was inducted to the ministry of South Somerset Group of United Reformed Churches in June of that year (Collinwood Road Church Book). In 1984, the church celebrated a fortieth anniversary (Collinwood Road Church Book). However, the most momentous event in the life of the church was drawing near, for at the end of April 1986 Tom Stiff retired from the pastorate after thirty-five years ministry at Collinwood Road (Collinwood

Road Church Book). This was truly the end of an era, for when he came in 1951 there was just one hall, and now there was a fine suite of buildings, and all the members had only known one minister.

Given the remarkable circumstances, it was after a very short vacancy indeed that the next minister began his pastorate. On 4 October 1986 Martin Whiffen, a student from Northern College, was ordained and inducted at Collinwood Road, also his first pastorate (Collinwood Road Church Book). During Whiffen's ministry the same emphasis on the provision of social and community groups as a means of both fellowship and outreach continued: women's meetings, uniformed groups, men's meetings, fetes, bazaars and such like. In 1987 a lunch club was begun (Collinwood Road Church Book). In 1988 a Pilot company was formed (Collinwood Road Church Book). In 1990 there was a major Flower Festival (Collinwood Road Church Book). The geographical proximity to Mansfield College had provided the occasional big name to attend important events, but had not impinged much upon the life of the church. This changed in 1991-2, when Simon Walking, an ordinand from Mansfield, spent his internship year at Collinwood Road (Collinwood Road Church Book). Towards the end of 1992 Martin Whiffen accepted a call from the Faringdon United Church, and concluded his six year ministry at Collinwood Road (Collinwood Road Church Book).

There was no immediate replacement for Whiffen, as there had been when Tom Stiff retired, because the number of ministers available had decreased, and it was not going to be possible for Collinwood Road to a full-time minister. In April 1993 another era ended, when Jimmy Smith retired after twenty one years as Church Secretary (Collinwood Road

Church Book). It was finally agreed in June 1993 that a team ministry would be set up with Collinwood Road, Cumnor, and Marston churches sharing the services of one and a half ministers (Collinwood Road Church Book). That team began to take real shape in February 1994 when John Wilkinson was inducted, and took up residence in the Collinwood Road manse. The team was completed in September of the following year when Dick Wolff was inducted to the half-time post. Wolff shared this work with being Mission Enabler for the Wessex Synod.

Collinwood Road, and the other two churches, made some efforts to do things together for the three churches, and the results were good for the fellowship, friendship, and support, but it did mean that other activities did not have the same frequency, commitment, or energy put into them, and thus in some ways running the group caused some distraction from the individual mission and outreach of Collinwood Road and the other two churches. Another internship student from Mansfield College, Mike Meachin, was placed with Collinwood Road for 1996-97 (Collinwood Road Church Book). Meachin became a chaplain in the Royal Navy, and so, rather unusually, he was ordained at Collinwood Road, before taking up his appointment with the navy.

In 2000 it was accepted that the group of three churches was not working as had been hoped, and it was dissolved. John Wilkinson remained minister of Collinwood Road and Marston, Cumnor was linked with St. Columba's, and Dick Wolff continued as Mission Enabler for the Synod, but now combined that with a half-time pastorate at Temple Cowley (Collinwood Road Church Book). In 2004 Wilkinson retired, and in 2005 Collinwood Road recalled Dick Wolff, whose appointment with the Synod had finished,

and he combined the work at Collinwood Road on a fifty-fifty basis with his existing work at Temple Cowley (Collinwood Road Church Book). Perhaps the most significant feature of Collinwood Road in the twenty-first century is the sharing of the building with a Korean Reformed Church since 1998. The links are growing significantly, and the future pattern of the life of the church could develop in ways undreamt of in 1945, or even 1992.

The modern ecumenical age: Blackbird Leys 1960 -

This section concerns another aspect of the exceptional story of Oxford's Congregationalism. Here we see ecumenical aspirations that had not been expressed in this way before. This was clearly influenced by the University, as the Secretary of the Oxford Council of Churches driving so much of this project was David Jenkins. It is further unique in that these aspirations were achieved before the Sharing of Church Buildings Act. Without the Congregationalists in support of the Council of Churches then this would not have happened.

Blackbird Leys is a large council estate on the south eastern edge of Oxford. It was built in the 1950s and 60s to meet pressing needs for local housing. Parts of the city centre were dilapidated, notably the Oxpens area, and the new housing in Blackbird Leys helped to provide housing both for people moved, some compulsorily, from these areas and for people moving to work in industry in east Oxford, notably at the car manufacturers, which were increasing their work after the end of the war.

In marked contrast to the process of forming a new Congregational church on the Risinghurst estate in 1945, it was the aspiration of many that any new church in Blackbird Leys should be ecumenical. The driving forces behind this were the Oxford Free Church Federal Council, the Oxford Council of Churches, formed in 1960, and several forward looking, energetic, and ecumenically minded ministers involved, not least Geoffrey Beck of Summertown Congregational Church. Beck has set out his own memories of these events (Beck, 2005). This is not so much a thorough history as a collection of primary source material, with an eye witness commentary.

As the Blackbird Leys estate was being built it became obvious that its size, position, and distance from other amenities meant that it would require special church provision, and it would be neither reasonable nor realistic to expect worshippers to travel to churches outside the estate. This became clear around 1959 when the Oxford Free Church Federal Council became concerned at the lack of a Free Church presence in new housing developments, and Ben Drewery, the Methodist minister of Wesley Memorial, and Beck thought that Blackbird Leys needed special attention (Beck, p. 12). In 1960 the Anglicans decided to accept the offer of a site on Blackbird Leys from the city council, in order to build a church (Beck, p.13).

In the years following this decision the Free Churches sought ways to finance a Free Church Ministry on Blackbird Leys. As noted above, it was the wish of the members of Tyndale Congregational Church, Cowley Road, when it closed in February 1962, that the funds from the sale of their church and site should be used towards providing a Free Church ministry in Blackbird Leys. Unfortunately, even if general trust and property laws could have allowed such a thing to happen, the trust deed, drafted nearly one hundred years earlier, did not, and so the funds ultimately went to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, which was not minded to expend them in Blackbird Leys (Beck, p.14).

Another idea proposed was that Beck would be freed by Summertown to work at Oxford Polytechnic (where he already had a little teaching) for twenty hours each week, and be paid only half of his stipend by Summertown. The half stipend saved by Summertown would then be used towards the costs of a Free Church minister. This idea did not find favour with the Summertown Church Meeting (Beck, p.16).

There remained also unsolved the problem of a building for Free Church services, as a consecrated Anglican building could not then also be used for Nonconformist worship. The Bishop of Oxford, Harry Carpenter, after much deliberation, graciously agreed to dedicate, not consecrate, the new building, so that it could also be used by Nonconformists (Beck, pp.19-20). The matter of housing was also resolved, as a council house was to be made available, which would also show the commonality of the Free Church minister with the other residents of the estate.

As the difficulties of the church building and of housing the minister had now been resolved, there remained only the issue of the money with which to pay a stipend. A serious local appeal to Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the spring of 1965, combined with some national Congregational money, brought enough together to pay a stipend. The Methodists appeared to have lost the zeal of the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians by this stage, and the Baptists had hardly ever been mentioned (Beck, p.18).

Thus, on 29 September 1965 Barry Jones, a Congregational minister, was inducted as the Free Church minister for Blackbird Leys in a, then, most unusual service involving the Congregational Moderator, the Bishop of Oxford, the local Congregational and Presbyterian ministers, and the Priest-in-charge of Blackbird Leys. Jones stayed until 1972. It was in 1973 that the Church of the Holy Family was formally constituted as Local Ecumenical Project.⁴⁵ This followed eight years of working together on the ground, and the passing of the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969.

⁴⁵ A formal agreement by which different denominations agree to work together on an official basis in a given area.

Jones was replaced in 1974 by David Rowland, a Baptist minister. He stayed until 1985, and was replaced by Stephen Heap, another Baptist, who ministered from 1986 until 1991. The next Free Church minister was Brenda Wilson, also Baptist, whose pastorate was from 1992 to 1998 (United Reformed Church Yearbooks).

After Wilson's departure it was felt both locally in Blackbird Leys and more widely amongst the Free Churches, that the moment was right for another Free Church to provide the Free Church Ministry to Blackbird Leys. After some deliberations, it was eventually agreed that the United Reformed Church would provide the next Free Church minister. By now the vacancy had been quite long, and the vacancy processes of the United Reformed Church took more time, so it was not until July 2001 that the Rev'd Fleur Houston was called as the next Free Church minister. The use of a council house to house the Free Church minister was no longer appropriate because the demographics of the estate had changed considerably with the building of considerable amounts of newer and better quality housing, the pressing need for council houses by homeless people, and the needs of exercising ministry in the twenty-first century. With financial assistance from the Methodist circuit and the United Reformed Church synod, a Free Church manse was purchased.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The role of Oxford in the English civil wars will always accord it an important place in the English political and ecclesiastical history of the seventeenth century. During the commonwealth and protectorate many Independents, Baptists, and Presbyterians held high office and standing in both the town and the University. Although it is wholly understandable, given the climate of seventeenth century England, it is worth noting that the Puritans in the University met quite separately from those in the town, to the extent that we do not know if they even had anything to do with one another. In the 1650s, Oxford University was an institution that was very separate from the town: the Puritans in the town worshipped in their meeting houses, and the Puritans in the University worshipped there in their colleges. This situation continued well into the twentieth century.

The eighteenth century in Oxford Nonconformity was remarkable and distinctive, not for the University, but for the significant and unusual degree of ecumenical co-operation between Baptists and orthodox Presbyterians. This was an incredibly remarkable degree of co-operation for the late eighteenth century, and the 1780 New Road covenant is an incredibly open and ecumenical document for its time. This ethos was largely due to the exceptional ministry of the outstanding James Hinton.

Regrettably, matters did not continue in this way, and it was this deterioration in ecumenical and open ethos after the death of James Hinton that led to the formation of a separate Congregational church in 1832. The life, relationship with the University, and Mansfield, and the ultimate closure of this church merits analysis.

In order to make any kind of assessment of Oxford Congregationalism in general, and the George Street and Mansfield College situation in particular, it is necessary to make comparisons. There were Congregational colleges in London, Manchester, Bradford, Bristol, Nottingham, Cambridge, and Oxford. A year in the middle of the Mansfield heyday, the 1890s-1960s, with good records is in 1931. In that year, the population of Oxford and Cambridge were 80,500 and 70,200 respectively⁴⁶, whilst the populations of the other cities ranged from 766,300 to 276,200⁴⁷. The number of Congregational churches in these cities range from 71 in London⁴⁸, to 20 in Nottingham. In all cases the number of churches is roughly proportional to the size of the cities, but the point is that in all English cities with a Congregational college, except Oxford and Cambridge, there is a vast population and large number of churches. In Cambridge there were just four Congregational churches, and seven in Oxford. What this meant was that in Oxford and in Cambridge, there was a comparatively small population and fewer Congregational churches for the college to influence. In London, for instance, the work of New College staff and students in local churches was divided between 71 local churches, in Manchester between 57 churches, in Bradford between 35, in Bristol between 49 churches, and in Nottingham between 20 churches. Even allowing for a few more of the village chapels around Oxford and Cambridge increasing numbers a little, the influence of the colleges on the local churches was much greater in Oxford and Cambridge than any of the other cities.

⁴⁶ All population figures from 1931 census: <http://histpop.org>

⁴⁷ The London population, 446,500, includes only those boroughs making up the area of the North and North West districts of the London Congregational Union, in which New College was located. The figure for Manchester, 766,300, includes only the city of Manchester itself, and excludes the many outlying towns and suburbs that today make up Greater Manchester.

⁴⁸ The North and North West districts of the London Congregational Union

Considering links with universities, Bradford had no university until after the Yorkshire United Independent College closed. Some students studied at Edinburgh University, but not all, and the college staff were not members of staff. In Nottingham and Bristol, the theology departments were both begun late, and the colleges never had any relationship with them. In Manchester and London, however, the colleges did have significant relationships with the university. In both cases the colleges and their staff were constituent parts of the university's theology departments when they began, and the students were able to study for Manchester and London University degrees. In Manchester and London, the nonconformist theologians were welcomed into the university, rather than fighting their way in against Anglican wishes. Whilst both New College London and the Lancashire Independent College had many fine theologians on their staff, with excellent research and publications to their names, neither became centres of academic research in the way that Mansfield did. A further point to note is that Congregationalists in London and Manchester, or indeed any other university city, were not looking for a Congregational presence within the institution in the way that they were in Oxford and Cambridge. The numbers of staff members in the colleges is also relevant. All the colleges had only two or three full-time staff, and one or two part-time, except Mansfield which never had less than four, often five, full-time staff, and usually several research fellows as well.

Thus, the only comparison that can be made is with Cambridge. Bradford, Bristol, Manchester, London, and Nottingham had populations and numbers of Congregational churches far in excess of Oxford and Cambridge. Demographically they were so different as to be incomparable. Bristol, Bradford, and Nottingham also did not have universities connected with the Congregational colleges. Manchester and London did have

universities, but the nature of the relationship between Congregationalists and the universities was very different indeed from that at Oxford and Cambridge. The only meaningful comparison can be between Oxford and Cambridge.

Cambridge was also an ancient university town, had a measure of being a commercial centre for a region, a young Presbyterian church, and a Congregational theological college. In 1932 the Congregational Yearbook George Street recorded 143 members, while Emmanuel Congregational Church Cambridge recorded 294.

In order to compare with Oxford, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the history of the Cambridge Congregationalists. The Presbyterian Great Meeting was recorded in 1687, meeting in Downing Place, somewhat away from the town centre. The church remained orthodox, becoming Independent and then Congregational. After the repeal of the Test Act, they immediately decided to build a new and impressive building in the heart of the town and the university. They adopted the name Emmanuel Congregational Church for their new edifice, built between 1872-74. This new building and its circumstances are described by Binfield (Binfield, 2001, pp. 41-42) thus:

“a cathedral built for an angular congregation on an angular site ‘in the very teeth’ of the colleges...the building committee insisted on a tower. The site precluded transepts or a large central area. How best then to design a building which witnessed adequately to the recovered place of evangelical Free Church men in the university – and so was a national statement – and yet also served the needs of a long-established people, and so was of local importance? James Cubitt made the most of the first major opportunity to put his principles into practice. The site entailed a nave in unbroken oblong. Light entailed a clerestory. A clerestory meant piers to carry it. Piers meant aisles. All the auguries were for ‘the ordinary type of church’. But Cubitt’s Emmanuel ‘ventures to deviate somewhat from the ordinary type of church’. He set out his case with relish.”

Thus we see that the Cambridge Congregationalists had built a prominent and significant building in an important and notable location, in order to demonstrate to the university, the town, and the world, that they were a true church with a permanent presence.

The Congregational theological college, Cheshunt College, moved to Cambridge in 1905 from Cheshunt, where it had resided since 1792 after moving from its original home at Trevecca in mid-Wales. By the time Cheshunt College moved to Cambridge, Emmanuel church had already had over thirty years in which to establish itself as a centre of Congregationalism in both the University as well as the town. Cheshunt College never sought to be a Congregational presence in the university, as Mansfield did.

Both towns possessed the full range of all the Nonconformist churches, including what became the closest ecclesiastical neighbour to the Congregationalists: the Presbyterians. In Cambridge the Presbyterians began to form a church in 1879, and erected a large building in the town centre in 1891, but the Oxford Presbyterians did not organise themselves until 1908, so the Cambridge Presbyterians were ahead of the Oxford ones.

The shape of the town of Oxford militated against Oxford: the burgeoning growth was on the eastern side of Oxford, beyond Magdalen Bridge, and that area almost saw itself as a separate city not looking to the centre of Oxford, which remained relatively compact. Conversely, Cambridge was one city with residential, not industrial, suburbs growing out in all directions from a more spread out city centre. Thus Emmanuel was at the geographical centre of a town which spread out in all directions, while the city of Oxford grew in a way that did not bring much benefit to George Street.

New Congregational churches sprang up in both Oxford and Cambridge, but there were significantly more Congregational churches in Oxford than Cambridge. Furthermore, Emmanuel did not spend its time, energy, and money on the work of church planting, in the way that George Street did. In fact, the Church Meeting minutes at Emmanuel barely mention either Cheshunt College or other Congregational Churches in Cambridge, whereas George Street's Church Meeting was constantly discussing the relationship with churches over which it was trying to assert control, and with spending its time fundraising on their behalf.

However, the biggest factor in the comparison must surely be the relationship with the respective universities and how the two churches responded. Before the repeal of the Test Acts, both churches were in slightly out of the way locations with almost entirely town congregations. Almost as soon as the Test Acts were repealed, Emmanuel made a conscious decision to assert their place as a true church with permanent presence in both the town and the University with their grand new building on its prominent site as soon after 1871 as they could. George Street, at this time, were concerned with the new churches at Cowley Road and Temple Cowley, and did not take any interest in the University. In 1889 the new buildings of Mansfield College opened, and the grand and elaborate chapel soon became a centre of worship for Congregationalists. A Sunday morning service was held with famous preachers, which attracted Congregationalists and others from the University and beyond. Thus, in Cambridge Emmanuel had become a centre for Congregationalists in both the town and the University, and in Oxford George Street continued as a town church and Mansfield chapel became a centre for

Congregationalists in the University. By the time that George Street eventually began to think of a new building, in 1900, the moment had long passed.

In the years leading to George Street's closure Oxford grew in such a way, with industrial developments east of Magdalen bridge, that new developments were almost a separate adjacent city and did not look to the city centre of Oxford, thus although Oxford grew, the increased population were not natural or likely candidates for membership of George Street. George Street spent much of its time, energy, and money, planting new churches. This was beneficial to the overall numbers of Congregationalists in the city, but the effort involved was severely detrimental to George Street, and the considerable exertions directed on buildings, fundraising and supply of ministry were not directed to mission and outreach. George Street did not grasp the initiative in the 1870s of access to the University. Had they done what Emmanuel Cambridge had done in the 1870s, Mansfield College would probably have been rather different. However George Street was still a dreary backwater town church when Mansfield arrived in 1886. Mansfield's buildings became the grand statement of Congregationalism to the University. Thus what was largely one institution in Cambridge, Emmanuel Church, was two in Oxford: the town church of George Street, and the University institution of Mansfield College. Furthermore, whilst the members of George Street no doubt thought they were doing the best they could in meeting the expansion of the city and the opening of the University, it now looks quite clear that the amount of time and money spent in building other churches was not the right strategy, although it may have been impossible to see this at the time.

Apart from George Street, there were a number of other Congregational churches in the Oxford area, largely founded by George Street or Cowley Road, and coming under their

influence. Cumnor and Wheatley still continue to do relatively well in the secular age of the twenty-first century. Wheatley found a new model for a village church in the second half of the twentieth century by appointing American ministers in the area who were connected with Mansfield, while Cumnor took advantage of links with, and support from, Oxford that would not have been available in the same way elsewhere. Marston and Temple Cowley received much help in the past, but now struggle to relate to their local communities and with significantly falling numbers the future looks less certain. Cowley Road, Old Marston, and the Longworth villages have not survived. Cowley Road spent far too long paying for a building that was far bigger than was ever needed, and was a financial drain in maintenance before it was eventually paid for.

It is clear that each congregation needs to have realistic expectations of the mission that they will be able to exercise in their community, and to be able to put that into practice. This is above and beyond simply being a presence in a community. They also need to have roots in their local community, not being reliant upon people coming in from outside. There also needs to be a proper balance in relationships with other churches of the same family: friendship and mutual support, but not expending too much time, energy, or money which should be directed on their mission in that place.

Congregationalism in Oxford is a distinctive story that has never before been told in one work. That story is one of strong Puritan traditions going back to the commonwealth, firmly rooted in both the town and the University; exceptional co-operation in the eighteenth century; a total failure on the part of the churches to respond to the abolition of the university tests, resulting in split efforts in the town and the University; and an over-

concentration upon forming churches in each community, without always having a proper mission there. The witness of the Congregational tradition was strong, but efforts were divided in the face of unrecognised opportunities, which left it much weaker, as the United Reformed Church, to fight the challenges of the secular age in the twenty first century.

However there can be no doubt that the story of Oxford Congregationalism is unique. The wider picture of Congregationalism is clear, and the Oxford story is quite distinctive. Without the University things would have been very different. Without Mansfield things would have been very different. Summertown, in stark contrast to the other Congregational churches, developed a new model of church that was a great success before the United Reformed Church, when St. Columba's took that place. The ecumenical advances at Summertown and Blackbird Leys were well ahead of their time, driven by Congregationalists. Oxford's Congregationalists, in the presence of the University and of Mansfield, reshaped their landscape such that it was very different from the national picture of Congregationalism from the eighteenth century until the end of the twentieth. Without doubt Oxford Congregationalism was, and is, unique.

APPENDIX ONE

The New Road Church Covenant of 1780

We, whose names are hereunder written, usually assembling for Divine Worship at the Meeting House in St Peter-Ie-Bailey, in the City of Oxford, being Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England, receiving the Books of the Old and *New* Testament as the Word of God and the only infallible external rule of our religion, faith, and practice; having solemnly devoted ourselves first to the LORD, and professed to each other our repentance towards God, faith in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and the hope of eternal life through His atoning Blood and sanctifying Spirit, to our mutual satisfaction:

Do hereby solemnly covenant and agree to receive one another in the peculiar fellowship, form, and order of the church of JESUS CHRIST; mutually granting to each other an equal right and title to, and interest in, all the privileges and emoluments of this our sacred confederation, and promising conscientiously to perform all the respective duties thence arising.

And, particularly, we promise and oblige ourselves (nothing extraordinary preventing) to meet together at all appointed seasons at His Table in devout remembrance of His sufferings and Death; and on the Lord's Days (providence permitting) and on all other occasional opportunities, to attend the Public Worship of God in prayers and praises, and hearing His Holy Word.

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

We also further promise and declare, that we will, so far as we conscientiously can, consent to and obey all such rules and resolutions of good order and discipline as the majority of the church shall agree upon and regularly appoint.

And whereas some of us do verily believe that the sprinkling of the infant children of believing parents in the name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT, is true Christian baptism; and others of us do believe that true Christian baptism is that which is administered to adults upon the profession of their repentance, faith, and experience of the grace of God, by Immersion in the Name of the Sacred Three; yet, notwithstanding this difference of sentiment, we promise and agree to receive one another into the same affection and love; and for this, among other many reasons: because we can find no warrant in the Word of God to make such difference of sentiment any bar to Communion at the Lord's Table in particular, or to church fellowship in general; and because the LORD JESUS receiving and owning them on both sides of the question, we think we ought to do so too.

We also further declare that we are willing and ready to admit to our church fellowship and communion all that are desirous of it and will give us such an account of their Christian faith and hope as shall satisfy us that they are partakers of the saving grace of God, and that their conversation in the world is such as becomes the Gospel, notwithstanding any difference of opinion as to the subject and mode of baptism; and also all such as are

recommended to us from any of the churches of different denominations on that head as sincere Christians in full communion with them.

We therefore denominate ourselves a PROTESTANT CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CHRIST, desirous to live in Christian peace and love with all men, and to hold the Communion of Saints with all Protestant churches and such as love our Lord JESUS CHRIST in sincerity.

In testimony of these things, and in the sincerity of our hearts, we have, as in the presence of the Eternal God, and of our brethren in the ministry now attending with us in our solemn meeting for this purpose and to assist us with their advice and prayers, set our respective names, this sixteenth day of November, in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty

MATTHEW BANBURY
THOMAS PLATER
E.H. ROOKE
SUSANNA WILLIAMS
SUSANNA NEWMAN
THOMAS PASCO

THOMAS NEWMAN
JOHN BARTLETT
JANE BARTLETT
ELIZABETH COXETER
M. PECK
ELIZABETH PECK

MARY PLATER

[witnessed by the ministers present:-]

D. TURNER, Abingdon
S. BROWNE, Henley
JOHN LAKE, Abingdon

T. DUNSCOMBE, Coate
HUGH GILES, Chenies
WM. MILLER, Oxford

APPENDIX TWO

The George Street Church Covenant of 1832

We, whose names are hereunto voluntarily subscribed, humbly profess ourselves and regard each other to be servants and subjects of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

We receive his Word, contained in the Holy Scriptures, as the sole authoritative rule of faith and directory of obedience; while, for the more definitive expression of our principles, we declare our conviction that the general and fundamental doctrines of the Protestant Reformed Churches (as summarily expressed in the doctrinal articles of the Church of England and the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly of Divines) are plainly asserted or implied in the Holy Scriptures.

Also, being convinced that the churches described in the New Testament are voluntary associations of believers agreeing to observe the laws of the Christ for their mutual aid in all holy obedience, in order to the glory of God, the benefits of all persons around us, and our own eternal salvation.

We do solemnly and affectionately make this covenant of church Union with each other and with Jehovah our God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, engaging both each for ourselves individually, and as a united body, that we will live and act according to the principles above acknowledged, and that we will observe, maintain, and submit to the ordinances of worship, instruction and discipline which are enjoined in the Word of Christ.

And, finally, we make this covenant not in any dependence upon our own wisdom, strength or righteousness, but in the humble reliance upon the grace and mercy of our Lord, for ability, resolution and constancy in the performance of every duty, and for the pardon, restoration and renewed establishment, against all our disallowed infirmities and failures.

Thus, as brethren and sisters, “building up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”, we commit ourselves, “unto Him that is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”; “unto whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”.

Agreed and accepted by the church of the Congregational faith and order, assembling in the Meeting House situated in George Lane in the city of Oxford, on the second day of December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-two.

deacons: SAMUEL COLLINGWOOD
 WILLIAM COUSINS
 MICHAEL UNDERHILL
 GEORGE COX

JOHN CHILLINGWORTH JAMES LUFF WHEELER
ANN JEMIMA COLLINGWOOD ANNE WHEELER
JANE COX MARY ANN BLACKWELL

FANNY COUSINS
MARY CHILLINGWORTH
WILLIAM BLACKWELL
JOHN HARRIS
SARAH DICKENS
SARAH COLES
EDWARD B UNDERHILL
MARY WAGSTAFF
SARAH MARIA CLARKE
EDWARD EDENS

THOMAS HENRY EVANS
JOHN EVENESS
WILLIAM COUSINS JUNIOR
JAMES BULLEN
WILLIAM LISTER
ELISA FLETCHER

APPENDIX THREE

Rules on the relationship of the village churches and George Street Congregational Church⁴⁹

1. That the parent church and the branch churches in the villages constitute one body with one roll of members for all, but the villages will also keep their own rolls.
2. That the list of members in the yearbook shall include also the village members, these being added under the new districts viz: 9 & 10, additional to the 8 districts of the city.
3. Members shall be admitted on profession of faith to the village churches as at present, but their election shall at once be reported to the pastor for confirmation at the next Church Meeting at George Street, until which they are considered admitted on probation. They may be received into fellowship either at the village stations or at George Street as preferred. In the case of removal their transfer will be given by the collective church at George Street, in the same way as with city members.
All transfers from other churches will also be made to the collective church at George Street Oxford; and when the members come to reside at either village, they will be placed in their proper district and entered on the branch church roll.
4. As members of the collective church, village members are entitled to be present at the monthly business meetings held at George Street and to vote on all matters, except such as concern the internal affairs of the parent church, and questions for which the financial liability would fall on the parent church.
The election of pastor and deacons pertains exclusively to the parent church.
5. The village churches shall be under the oversight of the pastor and a village missions committee elected annually in December.
6. The village missions committee shall consist of:
Two deacons of George Street Church (elected by the diaconate)
Six members of George Street Church (any of whom may be deacons) elected by the Parent church
Three members elected by the Temple Cowley Church
Three members elected by the Cumnor Church.
The pastor to be Chairman
7. The internal affairs and finances of each branch church to be managed (as at present) by the church itself, under the guidance of the village missions committee.

⁴⁹ Op. cit. George Street Church Book, September 27 1899.

8. In cases of discipline, extra financial schemes, and all matters of appeal from either village church, the final appeal is to the collective church at George Street, by the deacons and monthly Church Meeting.

APPENDIX FOUR

The English Congregational Chapel Building Society

The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal, vol. XVII, London, 1854, p. 117:

In March last a society was formed entitled the English Congregational Chapel Building Society for the purpose of erecting 50 chapels in various parts of England in five years. Various architects who had had experience in chapel building were invited to send in designs for model chapels, and out of about eighteen received the committee have selected five as most in accordance with their views. The designs selected were by the following architects: one set of Gothic and one set of classic designs with several elevations adapted to the same plans by Mr Andrew Trimen of London; one set of Gothic designs by Messrs Foster and Wood of Bristol; one set of Italian designs by Messrs Bidlake and Lovatt of Wolverhampton; and one set of Italian designs by Mr T Oliver jun of Sunderland. The committee have also commenced the erection of a chapel in Queen's Square Brighton, of which Messrs Joseph James and Raffles Brown are the architects. The whole of the chapels are to be erected by voluntary contributions and there are several donors of 1000 each. The treasurers are Messrs Joshua Wilson Arthur Morley and Rice Hopkins, and the secretary is the Rev J.C. Galloway M.A. A similar society was formed in London five years ago and it has aided in providing sixteen chapels in the metropolis. It is now erecting two large chapels, the one at Craven Hill Bayswater, of which Mr Trimen is architect, and another at Blackheath. The Lancashire Congregational Chapel Building Society is engaged to aid in supplying twenty chapels and there are several liberal contributors to its fund including Mr Hadfield M.P. £5000, Mr Kershaw M.P., Mr Barnes M.P., and other gentlemen £1000 each.

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Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence and other sundry records and papers of Summertown Congregational Church Oxford, Ox.C.C. III, Oxfordshire County Record Office

Church Book and sparse sundry papers of Frilford and Longworth Home Mission, Ox.C.C. 1V, Oxfordshire County Record Office

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence and other sundry records and papers of Wheatley Congregational Church, NC4, Oxfordshire County Record Office

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence and other sundry records and papers of Emmanuel Congregational Church, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire County Record Office.

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence and other sundry records and papers of Cherry Hinton Road Congregational Church, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire County Record Office.

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Minute Books, Membership Rolls, and other sundry records and papers of Abingdon Baptist Church, Angus Library, Regent's Park College Oxford.

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, and other sundry records and papers of New Road Baptist Church Oxford, Angus Library, Regent's Park College Oxford.

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence and other sundry records and papers of Cumnor Chapel, held at the chapel, viewable by arrangement with the Church Secretary.

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence and other sundry records and papers of Marston Congregational Church, held at the chapel, viewable by arrangement with the Church Secretary.

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence, scrap books, photograph albums, and other sundry records and papers of Collinwood Road Congregational Church, held at the chapel, viewable by arrangement with the Church Secretary.

Minute Books, Membership Rolls, Accounts, baptism Registers, Marriage Registers, Trust Deeds, correspondence, scrap books, photograph albums, and other sundry records and papers of Temple Cowley Congregational Church, held at the chapel, viewable by arrangement with the Church Secretary, but being transferred to Oxfordshire County Record Office.

Term cards for the Congregational Society, 1948 and 1949, and letter from Dr. Elaine Kaye, given privately to the author.

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