



Tilehouse Street Baptist Church Hitchin



COME WIND, COME WEATHER



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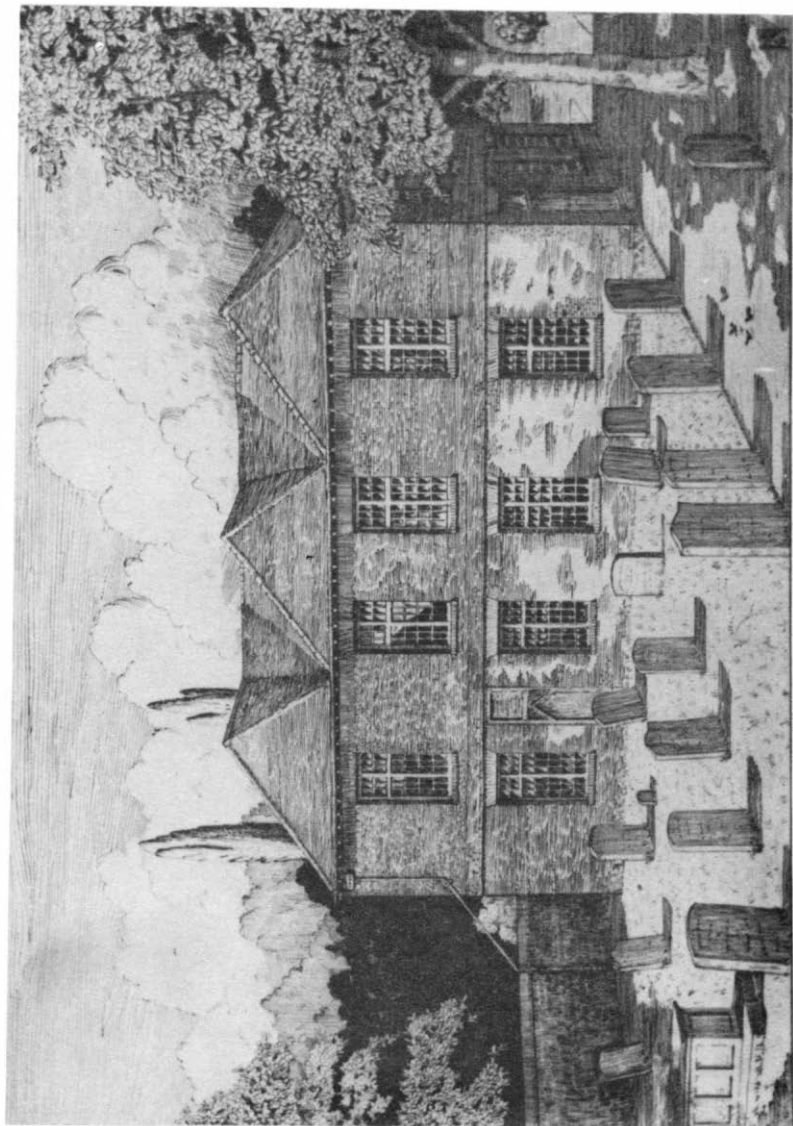
## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The quotations in italics retain the original spelling and are taken from the following Church documents:

1. The Church minute books from 1692 to 1968
2. Two books of Church Monies—1743 to 1831
3. The Church's Poor's Books,—1763 to 1892
4. Books of Incidental Expenses—1887 to 1930
5. The Private Journal of John Geard, which includes family history dating back to 1681, in addition to details of his own life—begun in 1807, in his 58th year, and finished in 1833.
6. A Register of the Sabbath School meeting in Tilehouse Street from 1812–1844
7. Sunday School Minute Books—1844 to 1968
8. The Account Book of Salem Chapel's Sunday School 1862–1900
9. Bound copies of the Church Magazine, the Messenger, N.B. (2 vols. are missing) 1908–1968

*Salem* is still the official name of the Baptist Church meeting in Tylers or Tilehouse Street, and until recently appeared on marriage certificates. Towards the end of the 19th century it was gradually superseded by Tilehouse Street Baptist Church. The obvious advantage of brevity explains its use in the later chapters.

G. E. Evans.



The Old Meeting House 1692-c1844

# COME WIND, COME WEATHER

Chronicles of  
Tilehouse Street Baptist Church  
1669—1969

by G. E. EVANS B.A.

*Sometime Gilchrist scholar of the University of London*

Published by

WHITEFRIARS PRESS LTD.

LONDON AND TONBRIDGE

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PRINTED BY WHITEFRIARS PRESS LTD.

LONDON AND TONBRIDGE

To all teenagers of the Church, present and future, this  
book is affectionately and hopefully dedicated.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all who have had a finger in *this* Printer's Pie.

To the many friends who have contributed anecdotes, reminiscences, suggestions, and articles from which material has been taken.

To the photographers whose pictures add beauty to the book.

To Miss Hidgcock, whose never flagging interest, long memory and encouragement provided the motive force for the book.

To Miss Petrie, the Hitchin Librarian, whose interest in this venture has sustained me in all the difficulties encountered.

To those who typed, retyped and sometimes re-retyped the manuscript, when new material arrived to make this necessary.

To the Rev. R. H. Tebbutt, the Rev. S. M. Stone M.A., and Miss H. M. Russell, who have saved me from many a pitfall, and to other experts who revised the proofs for me.

To the generous friends whose aid has made it possible to sell the book so cheaply.

To Mr. Geoffrey Cooling for his invaluable help and advice as my liaison officer with the publishing firm, the WHITEFRIARS PRESS, without whose aid the publication of the book would have been impossible.

My warmest thanks are offered.

G. E. Evans  
Nov. 1968





## ERRATA (June 1969)

*Table of contents* No 18 should read  
Girls' Life Brigade.

*Page 11* line six should read  
. . . their loyalty to the Baptist faith. Three of them. . .

*Page 115* line nineteen should read  
Members of the congregation might doze, but not for long.

*Page 134* last line on page should read  
perturbed lest their excited cries should disturb the rest of the

*Page 161* No 19 3rd line should read  
Halifax 1914-1919 Sutton in Craven

The picture facing page 4 has inadvertently been printed the wrong way round.

*Page 123* line twenty-seven  
the word happily should have been printed in italics and in quotation marks, as it was quoted from the minute book.

*Pages 147-148*

To the author's great regret the names of the following officers under Captain R. Sharp were omitted.

Miss Anna Kiteley	Miss Eileen Moules
(Mrs. Snuggs)	(Mrs. Rainbow)
Miss Audrey Ellis	Miss Cora Peck
(Mrs. Foster)	

*Pages 148-151*

Cub Mistress Miss Margaret Rogers (Mrs. Baker), and Scout Master Mr. Bernard Baker worked happily with the pack and troop for about three years before their marriage.

*Page 88* lines five and six should read  
As a thank offering that, except for one incident in the Walsworth area, their town had escaped destruction or damage from bombs and raids, . . .



## Wain Wood at Midnight\*

Who would true valour see,  
Let him come hither.  
One here will constant be,  
Come wind, come weather.  
There's no discouragement  
Shall make him once relent  
His first avowed intent  
To be a pilgrim.  
John Bunyan.

The night was bitterly cold, with an icy wind that held a threat of snow. It was a time, surely, for all good law-abiding people, exhausted by the day's toil, to stay fast asleep in bed. Yet in Hitchin and the villages for miles around many of them were astir, stealing from their homes in ones and twos under cover of darkness. Cautiously avoiding the turnpike road, they plodded on across the countryside, following familiar footpaths or sheep tracks. They dared not carry a lighted lantern and they spoke but rarely, muttering under their breath when words were needed. For they were bent upon business which demanded secrecy and silence, and their solemn faces showed what high importance they attached to it. "Tis well thou didst remember to bring our biggest farm apron", whispered one man approvingly to his wife. "I fear me snow will fall before the dawn". As they hurried on towards their goal, they met groups of men and women streaming in from all directions.

\*A reconstruction based on *The History of the Foster Family* (written in 1856, now out of print and very rare) and oral tradition.

Some seemed poor, wearing the clumsy hob-nailed boots of farm labourers and garments much too thin to keep out the searching wind; but an inner glow made them oblivious of its blast. Others more warmly dressed might have been artisans or tradesmen; a few riders, wrapped in long cloaks with the hoods snugly drawn down round their faces, passed by on nags, which had their hooves well padded to muffle any telltale clip-clop. All were keyed up to a state of tense expectancy and their hearts were beating fast in hope and apprehension. For earlier in the day news had spread by word of mouth among them that John Bunyan, their self-taught and self-appointed minister, would come that very night to meet them. Either he had been recently released from Bedford jail, or with the full knowledge of the warder, who had surrendered to his spell, he was enjoying a few hours of liberty, under parole to return by a stated time on the next day.

People had assembled in their hundreds to greet him, and, huddled close together, were waiting eagerly to hear him preach, and to join with him in worshipping God in a form of service of which their consciences approved. In 1664 these services had been declared illegal and all knew full well the penalty for their deliberate defiance of the law. But they had counted the cost and if detected would not shrink from paying it. Since in matters of religion they gave allegiance to God alone, no threats of fines, confiscation of their goods, prison or even transportation for seven years to one of the newly-founded colonies in North America could deter them from their struggle to win religious freedom for themselves and their descendants. So they had pressed on to Wain Wood, which lies above the road leading from Hitchin to the tiny village of Preston. Overlooking one of the loveliest stretches of the Hertfordshire countryside, this wood has a natural amphitheatre still known locally as "Bunyan's Dell" which provided a secluded and reasonably safe auditorium for their purpose. Tradition says that large crowds used to assemble in this lonely spot, and so well did they keep their secret that there is no record of any arrest made there, although they had many hairbreadth escapes. They, like the early Christians, might well have called themselves "People of the Way": the twentieth century may recognise in them "Members of the Resistance", who looked to John Bunyan as their spearhead of attack. Rejecting the claims of monarch, parliament, bishops and priests to determine their belief and decide their conduct, they,

loyal citizens though they wished to be, felt constrained to accept the challenge of the law. They believed, as Martin Luther in an earlier age had believed, that, God helping them, they could do no other.

To these men and women John Bunyan was a tower of strength. He himself had fearlessly endured persecution for his faith, and whenever circumstances allowed, he came to strengthen them in theirs. Since there was an ever-present danger of a raid by the King's Men, they used to post sentinels at key points on the Tatmore hills, to give them timely warning to disperse and to secure the safety of their preacher. Close by his side stood a little band of women ready to hold their stout farm aprons above and round him to screen him from the wind, rain and snow. There a vast congregation heard him preach in words so direct and simple that the most ignorant could understand his message; many of his audience rapt with ecstasy caught a glimpse of the Vision Glorious which his eyes had seen, and from that hour their lives were transformed.

From meetings such as this many Baptist churches were born in the neighbourhood of Hitchin and Bedford. The Church in Tylers' Street was probably one. Though its records provide no positive proof of this belief, two facts seem to corroborate it. First, Wain Wood is very close to Castle Farm, the Preston home of six brothers, Foster by name, all of them intimate friends and enthusiastic followers of the Immortal Dreamer. Their house was always open to him offering him a warm welcome and shelter in time of trouble. To them he owed his escape from arrest on more than one occasion, when, knowing every inch of the ground and familiar with all its hiding places, they passed him on from one to another and enabled him to elude the cordon of troops drawn closely round the wood. These Fosters were among the foundation members of the Baptist Church in Hitchin. Secondly, in 1674, as soon as the Church was sufficiently established to have a permanent pastor, the people turned to John Bunyan, in sure confidence that he would help them, and with his approval, John Wilson, his bosom friend and able second-in-command, was "honorably dismissed" from the Bedford Meeting to be the pastor at Hitchin. These two facts imply a specially close connection between the two communities, and the Hitchin Church from its foundation was "under the pastoral care of John Bunyan."

However, for several years after 1666 John Bunyan was debarred

from active work in any church. He was re-arrested late in the year and for a long period was held in such close confinement that no jailer however well disposed could grant him even brief leave of absence. When arrested for the first time in 1660, he had been offered release if he would promise not to hold any religious meetings again. "If you let me out today I will preach again tomorrow," had been his reply. And this same resolute spirit upheld him in his second and far more rigorous imprisonment which lasted till 1672. Then he received pardon under the Great Seal, and as one of three thousand Dissenters was granted a Government licence to preach.

While he was still in prison, it was well for the Hitchin Baptists that help was forthcoming for them from another quarter. For Francis Holcroft, one-time Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, and ex-vicar of Bassingbourne, from which he had been ejected in 1662, used to visit them and other flocks without a shepherd during the intervals of his release from prison—"such was his compassion for the souls of the neglected country people".

From the Congregational Church which he had established in Cambridge, there came an application in 1669 for two members, Mr. Waite and Mr. Beare, who had been 'cast out' from it, to join the group of Baptists meeting in Tylers' Street, Hitchin. This request, which probably arose from religious differences of opinion, created a difficult problem for the Hitchin folk. In their perplexity they wrote for guidance to the elders of several churches in and around London: the reply, signed by Dr. Robert Owen, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford during the Commonwealth, advised them to honour Mr. Waite for his work among them and to encourage him, adding "*We rejoice in the blessed success that the Lord hath crowned His ministry withal among you*".

From this reply a fair presumption may be drawn that by 1669 there was a group of Nonconformists meeting as a Church in Hitchin, for whom Mr. Waite had been acting as a temporary minister: and there is reason to suppose that this included not only those who practised both infant and believers' baptism, but also Congregationalists. Some time later, in 1690, a church was built in Back Street (known today as the Congregational Church of Queen Street) to which five members—three men and two women—were transferred at their own request from Tylers' Street meeting house.

After a few years unmentioned in Tilehouse Street Baptist



The Tithe Barn (Maidencroft Manor) dated 1615 and listed as John Bunyan's Barn by the National Preservation Trust  
(Photographed by Ernest Clayton with the kind permission of C.T. Micklem)

Church records, a reference was made in 1674 in the minute book of John Bunyan's Bedford Chapel to a plea that John Wilson, a member of this chapel, should be "*given up to be chosen for office*" among the Hitchin group. A matter so weighty could not be decided in a hurry: much discussion and prayer must first take place, and so three years elapsed before consent was given in a letter signed by John Bunyan. After granting their request and giving up.

*"Our beloved brother to fellowship with you for your mutual edification and joy of faith", it ends thus, "We need not, as some others, to commend him to you, God having before prevented that by commending him to you Himself. Now God and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, make this, both our and your well beloved brother, a double blessing to you, both in his ministry and fellowship with you and also a watchman over you, if God and the Church with you call him thereto. Amen."*

John Wilson having accepted the call and a day of prayer having been appointed, his first service took place at the end of April 1677 and was attended by representatives from London and from the Bedford Chapel. No doubt to his regret and theirs, John Bunyan could not be present, since he had gone to London to arrange for the publication of his *Pilgrim's Progress*. At this period the congregation, having no building of their own, used to meet either in a barn at the back of Bancroft, lent for the occasion, or in a house belonging to one of their members. So it was in Brother Field's house that in 1681 pastor and flock met to draw up a covenant binding on them all. This covenant, to which all subscribed by the silent lifting of their hands, declared:

*"We, who through the Mercy of God and our Lord Jesus Christ have obtained grace to give ourselves to the Lord and to one another by the will of God, to have communion as Saints in our gospel fellowship, Doe before God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Angels agree and promise all of us (the Lord assisting) to walke together as a Church of Christ in love to the Lord and to one another, and to endeavor to yeld sinceare and hartly obedience to the laws, ordinances and appointments of our Lord and Lawgiver in this Church".*

Shortly after this the people learned that Mr. Wilson had been arrested on an unspecified charge and imprisoned in Hertford jail,



news which filled them with anxiety for him and dread for themselves. Some feared the utter extinction of their infant church; others wondered if their own faith would be strong enough to withstand such a trial, and all sympathised with their pastor, doubting if he could endure a long term of imprisonment. For in the overcrowded pestilential prisons of the seventeenth century none but the very toughest could survive. No inspector visited them to insist on a minimum standard of decency and hygiene. Men of refinement and education were herded cheek by jowl with brutal and foul-living criminals. The State made no provision for their food, but gave a meagre sum from which the prison keeper provided as much or as little as he chose, and often eked out his inadequate pay thereby. However, he was always ready to sell food to any prisoner willing and able to pay his price; and for a substantial bribe he welcomed visits from their friends, bringing them food upon which he levied a high toll for himself.

Though Mr. Wilson had no friendly warder to arrange even twenty-four hours leave of absence for him, yet he had the Foster brothers to support him. No week passed when one or more of them did not arrive all the way from Castle Farm, laden with generous supplies of country food which enabled him to keep body and soul alive. That his physical and spiritual strength held out so long seems a miracle, explicable only by the sincerity of his faith and the force of his conviction that he was suffering in a righteous cause. He was allowed to keep his Bible with him, and from it he used to read aloud to some of his fellow prisoners, drawing comfort for himself and them, and he had a copy of John Bunyan's newly-published *Pilgrim's Progress*, a gift from its author. Occasionally he derived a bitter-sweet consolation when he had to welcome a fellow member of his Church, arrested as he himself had been on grounds of conscience. Regularly at the Quarter Sessions he was brought before the magistrates, and in accordance with the Act of Supremacy was required to swear an oath acknowledging the King to be the head of the English Established Church. On his refusal he was cast back into prison, no charge ever being brought against him. There he remained for seven years, languishing in health but firm in resolution, and his flock was left shepherdless.

Little surprise can be felt that from time to time some members, whose faith was of but shallow growth or whose fear of the law overrode their consciences, faltered under the strain of persecution,

and yielded to the temptation to purchase a temporary respite at the price of their convictions; the wonder rather is that so few gave way thus. Most, fired by the staunch courage of their minister and led by veterans of their faith, stood unflinching. In 1683 eighteen of them were summoned "*for non-attendance for one month at the parish Church,*" an offence which involved a fine of five shillings, steeply increased for each successive occasion. (Five shillings was the weekly wage of agricultural labourers at that time.) On the six Foster brothers, who not only lent their house but sometimes preached at the meetings, much heavier penalties were imposed—£10 and sometimes £20 a month—but for some reason these fines were not always collected, but were left to accumulate until, at the *Glorious Revolution* of 1688 and the passing of the *Toleration Act* of 1689, the balance of the debt was cancelled and freedom of worship was granted and assured for all Protestant Nonconformists.

Soon in their enthusiasm and joy at the restoration of their pastor and at their newly won liberty of worship, the Church decided that the time was ripe to build a chapel of their own. So prompt and generous was the response towards the cost of the new building not only in money but in material and labour that within two years a meeting house, affectionately called *Salem* by its members, was erected in Dovehouse Street, a little farther back than the present chapel and facing in the opposite direction. Towards its cost, £207 in all, a contribution of £89 was received from friends in London, and by 1692 the balance had been paid by the members—shepherds, carters, farmers, maidservants, cottagers' wives, weavers, tanners, tradesmen, craftsmen and scores of folk so poor that for 1691 they could afford no more than £10 a year as stipend for their minister.

In this new chapel Mr. Wilson laboured until he had completed a ministry of forty years. Towards the end he suffered increasing pain and physical disabilities, caused probably by the hardships of his imprisonment. Finally he was stricken with partial paralysis. Yet, dauntless still, he arranged for friends to carry him into the pulpit and there, seated in the chair which John Bunyan had sent as a gift at the beginning of his pastorate, he continued to serve his people. Moreover, though his feet could no longer support him, his hands and brain still retained their powers: and at this stage of his life, in collaboration with the pastor of Bunyan's Bedford Church, he edited the first folio volume and wrote a preface for the works,

twenty in all, of his beloved friend and leader. He also wrote a poem of considerable length, *Lamentation for Church Divisions*, surprisingly relevant today in the powerful plea it makes for unity among all the members and sections of the Christian Church.

Truly "There were giants in those days" and spiritually John Wilson merits inclusion in their ranks. At his death in 1716 the congregation numbered about two hundred.

## Some Baptist Personalities of the Early Days

It is difficult to speak with certainty of the earliest Baptists connected with Hitchin. Most of them owed much to Henry Denne, described as the “ablest man in the kingdom for prayers, expounding and preaching”. For fifteen years he had held the living of Pirton and he was one of fifteen Orthodox Divines appointed in 1642 by Parliament to lecture at St. Mary’s Church, Hitchin. Shortly afterwards he publicly professed himself a Baptist, resigned his office in 1644 and was cast into prison for baptizing adults. There he used to influence some of his fellow prisoners, and later as a member of the New Model Army he continued to win converts to the Baptist faith. In these efforts he was ably helped by Capt. Paul Hobson, a chaplain in the same army.

Then came John Bunyan, of whose family some members had close connections with Hitchin—a fact which may explain his frequent visits to preach in its neighbourhood. According to tradition, his wife and family took refuge with friends there during his first imprisonment, and certainly his son John came to live there in 1701 and joined the Baptist Church, though he proved to be a poor unprofitable member of it.

In 1665 when the Great Plague swept through London, claiming thousands of victims, many people fled for refuge to Hitchin. Some of them who were already infected spread the disease there, and in one month thirty died of it and there were hundreds of other victims. In the panic that resulted the Baptists, followers of John Bunyan, were almost the only people who risked their lives to tend

the sick. "Good people like the Fosters, who had the love of God within their hearts and no fear of hell and damnation",\* nursed the sufferers and by their fearless disregard of their own safety won the admiration, sometimes reluctant, of their opponents.

The six Foster brothers throughout their lives never faltered in their loyalty to the Baptist faith. Three of them were bachelors: from the other three sprang a long line of descendants, many of whom have served their Hitchin Church during three centuries. There have been few periods in its life without a Foster on the diaconate, and none when there has not been at least one Foster among its members. The full extent of their generous benefactions will never be known, since they were careful not to let their right hands know what their left had done. But the success and fame which they achieved in many walks of life and in various professions are evidenced in the important offices they held in both town and country, and the life of the Church has been immeasurably enriched by them.

A tradition in the Foster family about an incident which occurred during John Bunyan's first imprisonment has recently been related by Miss Mollie Foster, member of the eighth generation from that of the six brothers, and since, as far as she knows, it has not been published hitherto, she has given permission for it to be quoted here.

Whenever his friendly jailer ventured to grant leave of absence in time for arrangements to be made in advance, John Bunyan, on emerging from prison, used to find one of the brothers waiting at the gate, accompanied by a farm worker, with two horses. While he rode off with his friend to the meeting place, the farm worker took his place, acting as substitute for him till his return. On one occasion shortly after the preacher had begun to address his audience, he broke off in mid utterance and had a brief conversation with Mr. Foster; then to the bewilderment of the congregation the two men galloped off at such a speed that they arrived back at the jail several hours ahead of time. The substitute was relieved of his duty, and at the insistence of the preacher he and his master immediately returned to Preston.

Very soon after their departure officials arrived to make a surprise inspection of the prison and instructed the jailer to produce John

\*See Episode VI of the Pageant of Hitchin, produced in 1951.

Bunyan before a magistrate already in attendance there. Evidently the secret had leaked out and the authorities were hoping to catch the jailer *in flagrante delicto*. To their chagrin the prisoner was brought out without delay and presented for inspection.

When at their next meeting Mr. Foster asked his friend the reason for his precipitate and quite unprecedented departure from the meeting, Mr. Bunyan explained that, while he was preaching, he was suddenly warned to return at once by an inner voice which spoke with such solemn emphasis that it was impossible for him to disobey, though he had not the faintest inkling of what was in store for him.

Few details except the names have survived about the foundation members of the Church in Tylers' Street: there is a passing reference to the "concourse of people of the middle and meaner sort, mostly women and mayds", who flocked to the meetings there. But two impressed their contemporaries. Joseph Waite was deeply read in Latin, Greek and Hebrew and held certain peculiar and rigid views. He thought that the Sabbath day should begin on Saturday evening, and he abominated smoking and periwigs, especially for ministers. Then there was Dr. John Hutchinson, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, a skilled physician, expert in music and in Greek, a fluent French scholar and no mean poet. He gave valuable help to Mr. Wilson on his release from prison, particularly after his health had given way, and used to go out to preach in neighbouring villages, frequently to Bendish and sometimes to Ware, Bedford and Hertford, though he refused to accept any pastorate.

Finally, a reference must be made to Agnes Beaumont, whose loyalty to her faith and patience under the suffering which it brought upon her, have been an inspiration to many. To the end of her life she cherished a deep affection for John Wilson and for Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, though she never became a member of it. Born in 1650 at Edworth, about nine miles from Hitchin, she was the daughter of a prosperous farmer, who on the advice of a lawyer, Mr. Ffeery, bequeathed a considerable sum of money to her. More than once this lawyer tried to persuade her to marry him, but, because she suspected him to be a fortune hunter, she refused. He had already been bitter in his opposition to John Bunyan, regarding him as a heretic especially dangerous in his power over women: and finding Agnes adamant in her refusal, for which he blamed the preacher's influence, he redoubled his

efforts to discredit and destroy him. For some time Agnes and her father had been enthusiastic disciples of John Bunyan and used to go together to Gamlingay whenever he preached there. In 1674 she joined his Bedford Church, her name being the first which he wrote in its register, and it was there that she first came into contact with John Wilson before he began his ministry in Hitchin. Her father, however, influenced by the lies and scandalous rumours spread by the lawyer, not only withdrew from the meetings at Gamlingay, but forbade Agnes to attend them under pain of disinheritance. Since obedience to her father seemed to her a betrayal of her Lord, she disobeyed and arranged to go under Mr. Wilson's escort. When by an unexpected chance he failed to come at the appointed time, Agnes with her brother's help persuaded Mr. Bunyan in spite of his reluctance to let her ride pillion behind him. On the way the two of them were observed with great disapproval by several passers-by, who were shocked by their disregard for the conventions of the day. It was indeed a foolish mistake thus to flout public opinion, and Agnes soon had bitter cause to regret her error of judgment. On her return home late that evening, she found the door locked against her and her father deaf to all her entreaties for admittance. Hungry and half frozen with the cold, she spent the night in a barn praising God for the message she had heard that day and praying for His guidance. On the next day her father, enraged by her disobedience and the gossip provoked among their neighbours, stubbornly refused to admit her, unless she gave a solemn promise never again to attend a meeting. For two days she held out against him. Finally, tortured by the clash between her duty to God and to her father, she gave the promise, but added the words "Without my father's consent". Then happy in their reconciliation they retired to bed.

A few hours later she was awakened by cries for help and found her father in such agony that all her efforts to relieve him failed: distracted by anxiety for his life, with no one at hand to send, she rushed out through deep snow to summon help from her brother's farm. They arrived back at the house just in time to see their father die. As soon as the news was made known, Mr. Ffeery saw and seized his chance for revenge. He publicly accused Agnes of murder, cunningly insinuating that she and Mr. Bunyan on their ride to Gamlingay had plotted that she should poison her father on her return, for fear of forfeiting her inheritance. Immediately

Agnes and her brother insisted that a coroner and jury should be summoned, and offered to allow a post mortem examination to be made. Then after spending that night too in prayer for help and guidance, she faced the publicity of the inquest, serene in her consciousness of innocence and content to leave the issue in God's hands. The flimsy case against her was so obviously prompted by spite that it was speedily and unanimously dismissed, and the coroner in scathing words rebuked the lawyer for his heartless cruelty. Then turning to Agnes, he sought to comfort her in her sorrow. "Come, sweet heart", he said tenderly, "do not be daunted: God will take care of thee and provide thee a husband, notwithstanding the malice of this man". This prophecy was doubly fulfilled, happily, in both cases. Whether Agnes in her later years revisited the neighbourhood where she had suffered the shame of her trial is unknown. But her name and contribution of ten shillings may still be seen in the list of those who subscribed towards the cost of the Hitchin Meeting House in 1692; and when she died in 1720 she was interred, at her special request, in the burial ground there, in an unknown grave, close to John Wilson, the friend whom she had trusted and admired for most of her life. Nearly a century later a simple plaque was placed by public subscription upon the wall of the chapel to commemorate her constancy in time of tribulation.



## 1716-1773

REV. JOHN NEEDHAM, 1716-1743

Some time before he died John Wilson had accepted, first as assistant and then as co-pastor, a young student from Sheffield, John Needham. His ministry proved so acceptable to the Church that on the first pastor's death in 1716 Mr. Needham was immediately and unanimously invited to succeed him—an invitation which he duly accepted.

From the foundation of the Church its membership had been open to Christian believers, who, having been baptized as infants, had subsequently made public profession of their faith, to those who had been baptized as believers, and also to those who had not been baptized, but who had made public profession of their faith. This state of affairs occasionally created a difficulty for a minister who, on conscientious grounds, was unable to baptize infants. However, a satisfactory arrangement appears to have been made for infant baptism when parents desired it. For in one of the Church records these words occur: "*That those who differ from us, if they accept Mr. Needham as joint pastor, should upon all occasions practise their judgment and conscience without any opposition or reflection; Mr. Needham should exchange with any pastor of any church, whom they should desire to come and baptize their children, as if they had a pastor of their own: the charges of this exchange should be borne by the Church: and in case the Church became so numerous that there should be occasion for another pastor,*

*Mr. Needham should be willing that they should have one of their own judgment*". There is no evidence to prove if this promise was ever honoured, but it *was* repeated by his successors, Mr. James and Mr. Geard.

Apart from this little is known of Mr. Needham and the life and activities of the Church in his day because he did not keep the Church book and left very meagre records behind him.

John Geard however paid a very warm tribute to him in the private journal which he began to keep in the 58th year of his age, and which has recently been sent as a gift to the Church by some of his family in South Africa:

*"But the peculiar conduct of Mr. Needham towards Mr. Wilson, considering the time of life in which it was exercised, strikes me, as far as it concerned fellow creatures, as the most amiable trait in Mr. Needham's character. He was but about 20 years of age when he came to Hitchin to be assistant to Mr. Wilson, who was then getting aged and infirm, and, as Mr. Needham was afraid it might hurt good old Mr. Wilson's feelings if he should be led to suppose that the people took more notice of Mr. Needham than they did of him, he made it a rule, when he went to see the people, to go with Mr. Wilson and never to go without him. Such a nice sence (sic) of ministerial decorum, such a delicate feeling of Christian honor, such an admirable display of respectful veneration towards a father in Israel by a young minister*".

. . . Unfortunately there is a missing page in the journal at this point.

Mr. Needham in spite of a preternatural gravity (his own daughter once remarked that she had never seen him laugh more than twice in her life), was loved and respected and succeeded in attracting large numbers, especially of men, to his congregation. He also helped to establish Meeting Houses\* in some of the surrounding villages, Bendish, Pirton and Ware, was deeply interested in astronomy and wrote several hymns, some of which have still survived. He died at the comparatively early age of 57, having served the Church for thirty-seven years during which one hundred and thirty-five new members were enrolled.

\*Meeting Houses for which Salem was responsible are sometimes called 'Village Stations' or 'Preaching Stations' or 'Mission Stations' according to the period.

## REV. SAMUEL JAMES, M.A., 1743-1773

Fortunately for later generations, Mr. Samuel James, son of a Baptist minister in Hemel Hempstead and Mr. Needham's son-in-law and successor, not only kept the records in such great detail that they paint a vivid picture of the Church and its developments, but he instituted two separate "Books of Church Monies",\* a fascinating treasure store in which every financial transaction is entered in scrupulous detail, sometimes to the last farthing.

In some respects the Hitchin Baptist Church at this period was reminiscent of the Apostolic Church: almost daily large numbers of men and women, young and old, gathered at Mr. James's house for praise and prayer, and here in Hitchin a religious revival took place at a time when much of England was sunk in religious apathy. For Mr. James by the example of his saintly life spread his influence far beyond the walls of his own Church. His sympathies were generous, his views liberal and much in advance of his own day. Though he never talked of OUTREACH to THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR (a phrase not yet coined), he certainly practised it; and, long before the days of the Baptist Missionary Society,† he proclaimed to his people their urgent duty to carry the news of salvation to every corner of the earth. In this connection he once electrified not merely his own congregation but the whole town by inviting a North American Indian, Samson Occum by name, to preach. Picture the chapel on that day, packed, without a doubt, to full capacity, with all the small boys agog with excitement at the prospect of a REAL LIVE REDSKIN in the pulpit! Maybe with the boundless optimism of youth they fondly hoped to see him stride in, arrayed in all the glory of warpaint and feathers, and perhaps even brandishing a tomahawk in his hand. Vain though such hopes proved, the success of the visit exceeded the minister's wildest dreams, for on that occasion the collection amounted to £84—a stupendous sum indeed, equivalent to little short of £1,000 by the values of today.

More than a century and a half later fresh evidence and details of this visit, which had recently been found in a private diary kept by a member of the Bradly family, were supplied by Miss Esther Palmer, Ann Bradly's greatniece, and quoted by the Rev. W. Y.

\*See page 22 for a section on Church expenditure.

†Henceforth referred to as B.M.S.

Fullerton, Secretary of the B.M.S., at a branch meeting held in Hitchin. In view of the interest aroused by this fresh information the following record was made in the minutes of the Church meeting held in November 1920:

“Extract from the diary of Mr. Palmer, July 20th, 1766. ‘*Mr. Samson Occum, an Indian, and Mr. Whittaker from Connecticut came to England to solicit contributions for erecting and endowing a school for teaching the Indians of North America, and preached at the Meetinghouses in Hitchin on July 20th, 1766, when was collected at the doors of Tilehouse Street Meetinghouse £84 and of Back Street £70. . . . On Tuesday, March 10th, 1767, Mr. Whittaker preached at Tilehouse Street and Mr. Occum at Back Street Meetinghouse, and on the next day collected among the Church people: Mr. Radcliffe of the Priory gave £5 5s. 0d., the Rev. Whitehurst the clergyman gave £2 2s. 0d. and Mr. Flack 10/6d., so that they collected in the whole of Hitchin £163 0s. 0d.*’

*This extract is curious and valuable as containing the first known record of missionary collections in this town*”. To the twentieth century it is specially interesting as an example of an enterprise in which both Anglicans and Nonconformists shared.

It was in his cure of souls that Mr. James found full scope for his many gifts. As a pastor he showed himself a wise counsellor, an ever-vigilant “watchman” of the faith, a gentle, loving but inflexibly firm judge of any who offended against that faith. Though he rejoiced exceedingly to welcome all newcomers, the standard demanded from all who sought membership of the Church was unfailingly high. Each candidate was subjected to an examination by deacons of the Church, the sincerity of his faith and practice was tested over a period of time and the responsibilities no less than the privileges of membership were fully explained. To speak at a Church meeting about “the Lord’s dealings with him in his life and soul” was the final ordeal, and only when he had proved satisfactory in all these respects was the right hand of fellowship extended to him. If any doubt was felt, a probationary period was set. For no one was more zealous than Mr. James for the good name of the Church. Deeply troubled as he was for the soul of an individual offender, it was the “dishonour brought upon their Master and His Church” that caused his greatest grief. In such cases, however, even when, after a period of suspension, the dire

penalty of exclusion from the Church had to be imposed, yet if at some future date by true repentance the sinner proved worthy of it, the hope of restoration and welcome was held out to him.

For the most part it was the sin of "drinking to excess" to which reference is made. This evil, rife at the time, was viewed very gravely by the Church and stern admonitions were given to offenders leaving him—and sometimes her—in no doubt of their fate if they did not mend their ways. Other less venial sins created problems over which pastor and congregation wrestled long and hard—sometimes "irregularities of conduct and of doctrine" gave rise to serious anxiety. But the most perplexing case of all was that of the member who had created scandal for other brethren by marrying his deceased wife's sister. Neither of the two would acknowledge the slightest uneasiness at the step they had taken. Since supporters and opponents alike searched the Scriptures Old and New for arguments to bolster up their case, there was grave danger of a rift in the Church. In this dilemma, Mr. James, himself unable to decide where the greater right—or the lesser evil—lay, sought advice from external authorities, not only in churches round about but also in London. Finally after many hours of prayer, hesitation and a frank expression of regret that the two had ventured on such an action, he declared himself in favour of mercy, on the ground that their consciences seemed to be perfectly clear in the matter. Therefore no sentence of excommunication was passed upon them, and the threat of disunity was averted from the Church.

In 1750 when scandal shook the town about the conduct of the affairs of the Free School,\* Mr. James won the gratitude of all concerned for the education of Hitchin boys. The Master of this school, an ex-hatter, twice made bankrupt, whose qualifications for the post were almost non-existent, was subsequently made the parish clerk as well, and in virtue of this office was required to attend at St. Mary's Church every Wednesday and Friday morning. Since there was neither an assistant master nor even an usher to act as his deputy, it was decided that the school should all go too, and the Master exercise such supervision over the boys as his Church duties allowed. Some pupils may have welcomed the reduction in the time for formal lessons, and the opportunities for mischief so

\*Today the Boys' Grammar School.

unexpectedly provided. Most parents took a different view. Dissenters in particular were gravely troubled by the necessity to choose between evils: compulsory attendance of their sons at a service which conflicted with their principles, or their non-attendance on the two mornings every week.

Mr. James as leader of the opposition to the scheme brought to light very unsatisfactory conduct on the part of some trustees. Joining battle on this issue and undeterred by initial defeat, he carried it from one authority to another until he reached the Attorney General. With him he raised the whole question of the Free School, the inadequacy of the trustees to administer its funds properly, and the unsuitability of the Master which was almost ruining the Charity and making it of little or no use to the town of Hitchin. This protest achieved its purpose. The Lord Chancellor, to whom the case was finally referred, awarded the decision that Dissenters' children must not be barred from the school; moreover the number of trustees must be raised to twenty, six at least of them being men of standing, living outside the town and likely therefore to be disinterested and unaffected by its local politics. Lastly a new Master was to be appointed in place of the old. This decision, far-reaching in its effects on the whole town, was followed by some years of peace for all concerned.

Steadily year by year the Church grew and during Mr. James's forty years' ministry 195 new members were enrolled. Steadily, too, he built up his reputation as one of the leaders of Baptist thought. Though liberty of worship had been granted to all Dissenters in 1689, yet in some circles a certain dislike and suspicion of them still survived which occasionally broke out into open opposition. Thus in 1753 the Vicar of Stotfold, a village not far from Hitchin, delivered a series of sermons on the iniquity of Dissent. To these Mr. James made reply in a pamphlet clearly expounding and stoutly defending Baptist principles. A few years later he published "*A Life of Mrs. Churchman*". Evidently his fame and influence spread beyond his own town and country, and three years before his death won public recognition by the honorary degree of M.A. conferred upon him by Rhode Island College\* of North America.

\*It was in Rhode Island that the first Baptist Church in North America was founded in 1638.

One final claim upon the gratitude of posterity deserves mention inasmuch as Mr. James, having a fine voice and deep love of music, took the bold step of forming a choir for which at first he held separate practices for men and women, lest joint meetings should prove a snare. So far so good. But when he proceeded to distribute attractively bound copies of Isaac Watts's hymns, then a storm of protest broke out and one of the deacons, Richard Angell, so far belied his name as to prove himself a grim stubborn adversary. Since many in the Church shared his view that the tunes were "*too light and airy and not fit to be used in the solemn service of God*" many battles were fought in an inconclusive war, where neither side would yield, and it was left to Mr. James's successor, after long struggles, to reconcile the opposing factions and to find a compromise acceptable to both. It is sad that at the end of his long pastorate this jarring note should have disturbed the harmony of forty years. Mr. James died in 1773 and was buried in the ground round the chapel which he had been instrumental in buying.

# Finances 1743-1831

A few items of expenditure recorded in two Books of Church Monies from 1743 to 1831.

## DOMESTIC

		£	s.	d.
1742	Pd. for sweeping ye vestry chimney			4½
	„ Richard Thorn for taking away ye nettles and other woods by ye path to ye Meeting House	4	0	
	„ Qtr. gross of pipes (3¼d) and for burning pipes (3d)			6½
1757	„ for two burch broomes			4
	„ for removing robish from ye Meeting House gates			9
1758	„ for a Sute of Cloathes	1	0	6
1763	„ for claning cupps and plats		1	0
1768	„ for purchase of mousetrap for vestry			9
1771	„ for four handels and scrus for doors		2	2
	„ for brush and oyel		1	9½
1774	„ for severell wemen to pick up six loads of stones		7	0
	„ for mending bar of gate			2
	„ for rouling gravell to door			10
	„ for paire of tonges and poker		1	6
1776	„ Bro. Field for geting ye buckit out of well		1	0
1779	„ for new rope for well		15	0
1781	„ for puting a bottom in ye buckit		1	0
	„ for a paire of bellows for vestry		1	2



	£	s.	d.
1784 „ for mending bellows			3
1789 „ for claning and repairing ye clocke		2	6
1790 „ for loppin and cutting trees down		2	0
1798 „ Mr. Rowley for 2 carts, 2 horses, 3 men for 4 days, each 1/4 a day		2	0 0

## CHURCH

	£	s.	d.
1742 For an account book for ye Church affairs		1	0
For a pound of candels, 12 in all			8
1751 For three galls of wine		18	0
1752 For nine galls of wine		4	14 0
<i>Possibly the rise in cost was due to a better quality of wine; if so, it was evidently considered too dear.</i>			
1753 For six gallons of wine		1	16 0
1757 For a pare of spectikles for Thos. Ashwood to repeete sermons			1 6
<i>The day of the tape recorder had not yet dawned.</i>			
1771 For Psalms and Him book to lay on pulpet		3	0
1771 For a dozen botels of wine, Red port		18	0
Bricks of bread cost 3d each			
1774 Pd. Mr. Geard his expences at Cambridge Sociation		7	0
For a long time the fee paid for preaching and taking services remained unchanged at 10s 6d a day. The charge for a “pracher’s hors” varied considerably according to the inn chosen and the services given. At first the Swann Inn charged 1s 6d for stabling, but 2s 6d or even 3s if fodder was provided—sometimes the cost rose to 3s 10d, which may have included grooming.)			
1759 Pd. for Mr. Hall’s hors standing at the Half Moone for two nights		3	2
But in 1808 there is an item			
Pd. for Mr. Even’s horse at Swan and		4	6
1809 Pd. for Mr. Blundell’s horse		7	0

An insurance policy on the Meeting House was first taken out in 1784 at a cost of 7s 7d. Gradually this increased until in 1800 it was 12s 6d. In 1967 the total paid for all Church premises rose to £69 15s 11d.

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In 1807 new gates, which still stand in Tilehouse Street today, cost £10 10s.

For many years there was no expenditure recorded for postage, but in 1773 an item is given:

Pd. for a letter <i>from</i> Mr. King	6
and in 1774	

Pd. for a letter <i>from</i> Bedford	2
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(Before 1840 the cost depended on the distance travelled and except for a few privileged individuals it was defrayed by the recipient. But in that year, when Sir Rowland Hill introduced Penny Postage throughout Britain for all letters below a certain weight, he reversed the charges, and as a token of prepayment a stamp was affixed to the envelope.)

1810	Pd. for 42 yards of worsted stuff and other things for making three new gowns, one for minister and 2 for men at the ordinance of baptism	5	8	10
1811	For 2 new ventilators	2	3	8
	For a rope for chandelier		7	0
		<hr/>		
	total	14	18	7
		<hr/>		

In the same year there was heavy expenditure on the repair of the Meeting House amounting to more than £200. In this connection there is an entry:

“The following donations were subscribed by our single female friends and disposed of by them for the purposes specified”

	£	s.	d.
Pd. for New curtains, tassells and "compleat"	3	2	6
	4	12	0
Pd. for brass curtain pins		4	9
Pd. for work in putting up		7	6
Pd. for making curtains	1	1	6
Pd. for green cloth for pulpit	3	5	7½
Pd. for new covering for pulpit cushion, fringes & tassells & a brown Holland covering	1	3	0
Pd. for several little things	1	2	5½
	14	19	4
1812 Gave Mr. Eads, Clark, for drawing up a petition to Parliament for permission to send missions to India without control	1	0	0
1820 Pd. for 5 yards of superfine black cloth to hang the Pulpit on the occasion of the death of his late Majesty King George III	3	10	0
Pd. for 10 yards of narrow tapes, tassels, putting up and covers for above	1	0	0

## SERVICES PROVIDED

Two women were employed as cleaners, Sisters Ann Thorn and Mary Barns, one of whom served the Church from 1742 to 1778. Their "sallery for opening ye Meeting House" was 6s a quarter, which later rose to 6s 6d. Occasionally an additional sum of 1s 6d was paid for cleaning the windows, of which there were nine in the front alone.

In 1788 there was a rise from 7s 3d to 9s, but extra duties were required: a fire had to be lighted and tended in the vestry during the winter months, and once a year help was expected in the task of emptying and refilling the baptistry, and in washing the Meeting House in Summer.

The frequent entry "For burning pipes" may refer to a primitive system of heating. After 1771 this entry does not occur, but the regular mention of "fagets and diel" which needed "claving", i.e. sawing, suggests fires. Coal was first mentioned in 1785. The

problem of lighting did not often arise at first because the two Sunday services took place in the morning and afternoon. Later, when special evening meetings were held, the church was lighted by "candels". On these occasions care was taken to choose a moon-light night, for the convenience of members travelling in from the outlying villages, some on foot, a few on horseback, others in farm carts or carriages, which were put up at the Highlander. Besides women cleaners, men were employed for clearing the paths leading to the chapel, for lopping trees, for drawing water and for sundry tasks too heavy for the women.

Pd. Bro. Merrit for sawing and cutting up fagets 1s

Pd. for cleaning up after workmen, for several weeks 1s

How fantastic do some of these items and prices seem today!

## 1774-1831

THE REV. JOHN GEARD, M.A.

On the death of Mr. James the Church appointed days of fasting and of prayer for God's guidance in the choice of his successor. Having been greatly helped by the ministrations of John Geard, a young student of Bristol Academy (now Bristol Baptist College for Baptist ministers), they unanimously requested him to act as pastor for a period of six months. Then, convinced that he had been sent to them as a direct answer to their prayers, they warmly invited him to undertake the pastoral office and oversight of the Church. In the Journal which he began to keep more than thirty years later, he wrote:

*"Having deliberated much myself, consulted my friends and, I hope, earnestly implored Divine direction on this point, this day with fear and trembling I returned an affirmative answer to the call".* In his reply to the invitation *"I esteem it a great honour"* he declared *"to succeed such worthy eminent (sic) men as have already presided over you, and to be connected with a society as respectable as you have been, and are"*

He also stated his desire to continue the plan of open communion and to allow liberty of judgment for those who differed from him respecting water baptism. Then, humbly conscious of his own weakness and inadequacy, he desired their fervent persevering prayers on his behalf. Two innovations occurred in the final letter sent before he came—a promise that each year four Lord's days should be allowed for him to spend where he pleased, the expense of the supply being defrayed by the Church, and an

assurance that he as minister should not be asked to arbitrate in any difference of opinion between individuals or families in the congregation. Then in April 1775, sped on his way with the blessing of the Yeovil Church to which he, his father, and grandfather had belonged, Mr. Geard came to Tilehouse Street Church. At his ordination ministers were present from Northampton, Bedford, Cambridge, Hemel Hempstead and St. Albans, and a special part in the service was assigned to each.

One of the earliest entries in the Church book of this pastorate records the resignation of the senior deacon, Richard Angell, from his office and from membership. Only a few months earlier it had been his privilege to receive the new minister into full communion with the Church on the Sunday before his ordination. Since the 'warm dispute' about the choir and hymns seemed insoluble to both parties, his resignation was accepted. In the following year the Church, deeply grieved by this dissension, kept a solemn day of fasting and prayer, at which they decided to send messengers to have converse with him. Finally, they requested the ministers of the Baptist Church in Cambridge, Bedford and Hemel Hempstead to arbitrate, since they believed that such action posed no threat to the autonomy and independence of their Church. These three found their task made easier by the readiness which Mr. Angell showed to apologize for any hurt he had caused and by his obvious desire to be readmitted to the fellowship. In an open meeting of the Church, held in the presence of the arbitrators, the whole question was thrashed out, as exhaustively as if it had been a case at law. One speaker on each side opened it, three pleaded each item, pro and con, witnesses were examined, papers and documents were produced. Finally, after six hours of patient investigation, the arbitrators awarded their decision: Mr. Angell, after making due apology, should be reinstated immediately as a private member, ineligible for any future office unless the Church by a unanimous vote agreed to employ him thus. A working compromise was then evolved whereby the use of Mr. Watts's hymn book was approved, but every hymn should be sung to the one same tune, whatever its metre or length of line might be. The nice adjustments this required might well have taxed a choir of great skill and experience, and sometimes the efforts of the Hitchin singers must have been excruciating to a musical ear. However, when occasional difficulties brought the hymn to a temporary halt, one member of the choir used to sweep

them on triumphantly with his homely admonition "Pucker it in, friends, Pucker it in". And with right good will they obeyed. Thus, after months of anxiety for all, the storm was stilled and harmony restored.

This difference of opinion which may seem trivial today sheds light upon the attitude of Baptists to Church discipline and practice. Every member could exercise his right to express his own opinion, basing it on Scriptural precedents: each Church claimed autonomy in its own affairs. But if internal strife endangered peace, all members were ready to accept external arbitrators appointed by themselves, thereby showing their sound and practical common sense.

Mr. Geard, fourth in the line of succession to the ministry, set up an amazing record, unlikely ever to be equalled here. He came as a stop gap for six months, stayed to serve the Church as pastor for 58 years, and was never known to miss one single Sabbath day through personal illness. Moreover this period included some of the most momentous years in Britain's history. It was the time when thirteen colonies of North America broke away, and after a fierce protracted struggle gained their independence. What the pastor, and probably many of his contemporaries, thought about the entry of France into this conflict is summed up in his Journal.

*"As Lewis XVI, King of the French, more out of hatred to this country than out of love to America, impolitically interfered in this contest, in which, whatever may be said about the merits of it, he certainly had no business, his troops (as any man possessed of five grains of common sense (sic) might easily have foreseen), while professedly fighting for the liberties of America, picked up some notions of the rights that Frenchmen had to liberty too. And after having in concert with the Americans secured the liberties of America and after peace had been brought about between England and France as well as America, they began to talk of the liberties which Frenchmen were entitled to, as well as Americans. The dissemination of these principles, in connection with the pecuniary embarrassments which Lewis had foolishly brought upon himself by intermeddling with a strife that did not belong to him, not only brought about a revolution in France, but brought his own head to the block".*

Then came years of stubborn conflict when England faced the danger of invasion by Napoleon's fleets. At home there was severe

economic stress, and industrial social and political strife, and the tragic illness of King George III, stricken with periodic bouts of madness, overshadowed the life of the nation.

In his Church book Mr. Geard, following the excellent example of his predecessor in the detailed accuracy of his records, provides a mirror which reflects not merely current local affairs but also events of national and international importance. In almost every year of his early ministry he used to call his people to special services, which after 1788 were usually held jointly by the two Protestant Dissenting Churches of the town. Often these were prompted by the needs of a rural community. When rain fell in Hitchin almost incessantly for more than five weeks and ruined the hay, a Service of Intercession was held and soon was followed by a Service of Thanksgiving for the merciful alteration of the weather which had resulted in a bumper crop of corn. "Largesse given to labourers at harvest time, which caused grave intemperance", "fires which did not seem to be accidental", and the soaring price of wheat and barley which made a quartern loaf cost 1/8d in Hitchin and 1/10½d in London—to country folk these domestic matters caused grave anxiety, for which in simple faith they sought God's help and guidance.

A revealing light is thrown by the Journal upon the cost of living and the size of country appetites in 1775. It relates that on one occasion during this year when Mr. Geard visited his father in Somerset:

*"I treated about 50 of my father's workpeople, men women and children, with a supper. There were forty six pounds of beef bought, twelve or fourteen bundles of carrots, besides seven or eight puddings. The whole cost me one guinea. They all had a sufficiency, were well pleased and separated in good time and order. My father provided them with what was drunk, and care was taken for them to have a sufficiency without having too much".*

Repeated references are made in the minute book to National Days of Prayer, Fasting and Intercession, appointed by the King during periods when England was at war first with America, then with France, Spain and Holland.

*"1800 March 12th, being appointed by the King as a national fast day, was observed by the Church (Salem) and congregation as a day of fasting and prayer. In the prayers regard was had not only to the*



*awful war in which we as a nation are engaged, but to the excessive dearness of the necessities of life, which renders the circumstances, of the poor especially, peculiarly trying.*

*Previous to this day wheat had been sold in Hitchin market as high as £4 per load, being five bushels and barley as high as £4 per load, being eight bushels, and the quartern loaf had been as high as 15½d."*

*"1805 Dec. 5th being appointed by the King as a day of public thanksgiving on account of an important victory obtained over the combined fleets of France & Spain off Cape Trafalgar, on the 21st day of October . . . a joint meeting was this day held by this congregation & that at Back Street at both our places of worship, in the morning at Back St., and in the evening at Tylehouse Street.*

*As a fund had been established in London, called the Patriotic Fund, for the relief of wounded sailors & soldiers & for the families of such as might be killed, . collections were accordingly made at both places of worship & including what was received afterwards the joint sum was received of £13 3s 2d"*

On another occasion the "extremely melancholy circumstances of our beloved King" caused Parliament to appoint a Day of Fasting and Prayer for his deliverance, and in Hitchin the meeting took place with the people not yet knowing whether George III was still alive or already dead.

In the fateful year 1805 the journal records

*"Being in London I attended the monthly meeting of the London Baptist ministers and churches at Dr. Rippon's. Particular attention was paid at this meeting to a New Academical Institution entitled the Particular Baptist Education Society in London. The design of this Society was to afford some assistance to persons who may appear to have gifts for the ministry, but who lacked the necessary education."*

However, no later reference throws any light on the development of the Society.

Not long after Mr. Geard's arrival many Baptist Churches, facing similar problems and opportunities felt a strong need for a closer link with each other for mutual support and encouragement. To satisfy this need the Eastern Association of Baptist Churches in Hertfordshire and Essex came into existence, one of the founder members being Tilehouse Street Church, on the initiative of its young vigorous pastor. In 1780 this church had the privilege of

entertaining the Association on the occasion of its annual conference, and, as an indirect result, an important change in its services was effected. For in the course of conversation at Mr. Geard's house, Mr. Robinson\*, minister in Cambridge, remarked that errors had been made by the Church of England on one side and by Dissenters on the other.

*"The Church of England", he said, "notwithstanding the Reformation, had retained too much of the superstitions of Popery: but Dissenters, in order to get far enough away from Popery and from the Church of England, had gone a step too far, and had not only left off surplices and bowings at the altar and the cross in baptism and objectionable passages in the liturgy, but had left off readings of the Scriptures in public, because these were part of the public service; as though that service could pollute the very Scriptures!"*

Struck by the force of this argument and by the impropriety of the omission, Mr. Geard raised the whole question at his next Church meeting, left it for the due consideration of the members, and then at the next meeting carried a resolution that a portion of the Scriptures should be read as a part of their public service on the Sabbath. This arrangement has been continued till the present day and was soon followed by many other Baptist churches.

In 1781 it was deemed necessary to make definite regulations about the burial ground round the Meeting House. In view of the increasing number of requests for graves there, it was decided that in the case of non-members fees must be charged, five shillings for a poor person, for those in middling circumstances ten shillings and sixpence, and for anyone who was rich one guinea at least. Members of the Church still retained the right of burial there but payment was required for the grave to be dug.

Mr. Geard went to Hertford Quarter Sessions in 1786, when he took an oath and signed the declarations required by the 1779 Act of Parliament relative to Protestant Dissenting Ministers. This gave him exemption not only from all legal pains and penalties that might arise from his preaching, but also from all parish offices and from serving in the Militia.

Each year as the reputation of the Church grew, so many appeals for help were received that from 1791 only one begging appeal was permitted to be made annually in the presence of the whole Church,

\*Author of the well known hymn *Come Thou fount of every blessing*.

and then only if no essential repairs were needed for themselves. Such appeals were usually on behalf of other Baptist Churches, many of them far away from Hitchin, sometimes to help erect a meeting house for a newly established community, occasionally to pay for repairs or additions to an existing chapel, and once to help rebuild a chapel gutted by fire. Steady support was given to the Benevolent Fund established to help necessitous widows and children of Protestant Dissenting ministers. This must have been a cause very dear to Mr. Geard's heart, for in his Journal he has left many references to cases of hardship among families of his personal friends, which he was able to bring before the committee, travelling by coach or on horse back to London for this purpose, and frequently securing substantial alleviation for their distress.

In 1809 a collection of over £50 was sent to the Bristol Academy, Mr. Geard's own *Alma Mater*, to help towards the erection of a new hall of residence for the students there. With so many good causes in urgent need of help, it must have been difficult to make a choice. But whenever an appeal was made on behalf of foreign missions, it always received a sympathetic hearing and usually evoked a generous response. Evidently the enthusiasm which Mr. James had aroused for this field of service still burned brightly in his people's hearts. The "Society for the Abolition of the Iniquitous Traffick in Negroes on the coast of Africa" received warm support in 1789. When a few years later Parliament had sanctioned the settlement at Sierra Leone to check and counteract the flourishing Slave Trade there, the Church sent a collection for a "Black minister of exemplary conduct", who had removed himself thither, taking most of his congregation with him. These being in urgent need to procure a place of worship for themselves, the gift from Hitchin was put towards this purpose.

From records which refer to help sent to Africa, to North and South America, and to India, it is clear that the Baptist Church in Hitchin was deeply concerned for missionary work overseas, which was being promoted by individuals. At this period William Carey, a Baptist minister, at Moulton in Northamptonshire, and later at Harvey Lane Church, Leicester, proposed the formation of a missionary society, earnestly desiring that this should be on an inter-denominational basis. But he recognised that "In the present divided state of Christendom it would be more likely for good to be done by each denomination engaging separately in the work than if

they were to embark upon it conjointly; there is room for us all, without interfering with each other". Therefore the Baptist Missionary Society was founded in Kettering on October 2nd, 1792, and provided a focal point for the evangelizing activities of many Baptist churches, *Salem* among them. Indeed, its minute book records that Mr. John Thomas and Mr. Wm. Carey sailed for India in 1793, that collections of £11 14s 10d were taken for the B.M.S., and that monthly prayer meetings and special quarterly meetings were arranged in connection with them.

In the Church Book of 1794 there is a reference to a ship, *The Duff*, which was purchased by the London Missionary Society to transport various groups of missionaries abroad. After one successful voyage to the Pacific, it set sail carrying 29 missionaries who bore gifts from friends in Hitchin. On the way to the islands of the Southern Seas, when the ship was almost within sight of Rio de Janeiro, it was captured by a French privateer, and neither the passengers nor their gifts ever reached their destination. After some months of captivity they were forced to return to England with their mission unaccomplished.

Since that time there have been few if any years when the B.M.S. has not been remembered by *Salem*. In the mid-1960's an average of £460 has been subscribed annually, and all members rejoice that in its tercentenary year their minister, the Rev. R. H. Tebbutt is Chairman of the Society.

As time and maturity developed his powers, Mr. Geard by his sterling worth and loving goodness won first the deep respect and then the warm affection of his people. In the last years of his pastorate, few members incurred any rebuke from him, since all loved him far too dearly to grieve him by dissension or offences. Steadily his influence grew and spread so widely in and around the town that he became a public figure there, one whose advice was always sought and usually followed when moral issues and civic problems were discussed. With other churches in the town, his relations were excellent, and he successfully dispelled doubts and suspicions which earlier generations had entertained about Baptists. For, as Mr. Edward Foster, his senior deacon, once remarked of him,

*"Though his talents as a preacher were not superior, yet as a Christian minister he was a living epistle, known and read of all men. He was a most affectionate pastor, living in the love both of young and old and*

*held in high esteem by all whether Churchmen or Dissenters. He was a man of peace and his end was peace”.*

Of the warm feelings entertained towards him by his own congregation the story of the goose provides clear proof. Once at Michaelmas a member of the Church brought the plumpest finest goose to be found in Hitchin market and proudly handed it to the housekeeper as a gift for Mr. Geard. Judge of her dismay for she, provident housewife as she was, already had a goose hanging in the larder, bought as a seasonable treat for the minister's Sunday dinner. In her bewilderment she carried the goose to his study for him to settle its fate. After due consideration, albeit with great reluctance, he decided that the gift must be resold in the market. An hour passed. Then came a knock at the door: a second kind friend stood there, proffering the same goose. Again the same decision had to be made, resale, perhaps with the added hope that the money might be devoted to a case of need. Back to the market went the goose once more. But when for the third time that self same goose appeared (what a superb bird it *must* have been!) Mr. Geard ruefully acknowledged defeat, and with mingled laughter and regret exclaimed “Betsy, take it away and put it in the larder. It is quite clear to me now. The Lord has *predestinated*\* us to have this goose”. On its subsequent fate history is silent. Perhaps it provided a rich repast for poor members of the Church.

All through his life Mr. Geard had enjoyed magnificent health and vigour both of mind and body. In his Journal he gives his programme for one day in his life as a student:

*“Preached at Bratton (in Somerset) from 9 a.m. to 10.30.*

*Rode eight miles from here to Crocketon, preached from noon to 1.30 p.m.*

*Rode back to Bratton, preached from 3 p.m. till 4.30.*

*Rode ten miles to Frome, preached at the evening service there.*

*Such was the merciful state of health and spirits with which I was at that time blessed that I was not at all distressingly fatigued by these exertions”.*

In his 84th year he wrote in this same journal that he still had many mercies to be thankful for: he could read for hours together without spectacles, had a merciful degree of hearing as well as sight, and though his memory was much impaired, it was not wholly gone.

Yet even he now felt that the full care of his Church was a task

\*A side reference to the controversy about predestination raging at this time.

beyond his powers and he gratefully accepted the suggestion that an assistant should be appointed on the understanding that, if he proved satisfactory, he should be appointed as pastor. So in 1831 the Rev. Thomas Griffin of Prescott Street Church in London began his ministry at Tilchouse Street Baptist Church, and Mr. Geard, freed from the heavy duties of his office, continued to live in Hitchin, his dearly loved home for over sixty years. The Church in its gratitude and love towards their venerable pastor voted him a pension of £70 a year until he died in 1838.

Little wonder is it that at his death the whole town mourned, as for a personal friend, and an enormous crowd paid homage to him at his grave.

John Geard's death was the end of an epoch. For one hundred and fifty-four years (over half the life span of the Church today) four ministers had guided this Baptist community through manifold difficulties. In its infancy its members were exposed to the dangers and persecutions, which each branch of the Christian Church suffered and, alas, inflicted on its opponents in its period of temporary supremacy. For religious toleration was a plant of painfully slow growth, and until the last few years of the seventeenth century few could have understood or applied Voltaire's dictum of a later age,

"I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it".

However, when the Toleration Act of 1689 had removed the disabilities and penalties imposed upon Protestant Dissenters, Mr. Wilson and his successors enjoyed the right to live where they wished, to preach and to minister to their people in their own meeting house and to use a form of service in accordance with their consciences. From 1779 they were permitted to teach and to keep a school, if it had been opened after 1689 for the use and benefit of Dissenters. Finally in 1828 the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, which had already become almost a dead letter, abolished all restrictions on their right to hold office in town and country.

Those first four ministers helped their people to develop from a small, previously despised "schismatic conventicle" into a big highly esteemed Church. Each made his own especial contribution to its life, and all by their continuity of service gave it stability and

strength. They strove to keep the faith and to hand it on, intact, untarnished, to succeeding generations.

In their time Hitchin was a small market town, a community largely self-contained. Its people rarely travelled far afield for work or pleasure, since the horse-drawn stage coach was the only form of public transport. There were no cinemas, television or radio, no modern amusements to claim their leisure, and the theatre, shunned as a sink of iniquity by the Baptists, was beyond their neighbours' reach. Instead of the modern press pouring out its ceaseless spate of newspapers, magazines and novels, the people had a few books, mainly of a devotional nature, and the Bible. Obeying the apostle's injunction to search the Scriptures for themselves, they translated them into action in the light of such knowledge as they possessed, and in accordance with the circumstances of the age, and from their constant reading they grew to love them deeply.

For these men and women their Church was the centre of existence, and on them the four pastors had an influence beyond calculation. From them their people sought and always found comfort in distress, guidance in perplexity and help in trouble. To them thanks are due for making their Church a true family. For, loving their people as if they were their own children, they impressed upon them their own character, in the true meaning of the word, that is, their own distinctive mark or seal, so deeply that it can still be traced in their descendants: and to these they left a heritage of which they have good reason to be humbly proud.

#### Population of Hitchin

1676	1,450 all persons over 16 (Compton Return)
1801	3,161 all persons over 16 1st National Census Return
1901	10,072 all persons over 16
1911	11,905 all persons over 16
1921	13,525 all persons over 16
1931	14,382 all persons over 16
1941	21,140 Estimated return
	N.B. evacuations of 1939 & 1940
1951	19,959 National Census
1961	24,254 National Census
1967	26,240 National Census

## 1831-1857

THE REV. THOMAS GRIFFIN, 1831-1840

In the letter of dismission sent from Mr. Griffin's previous Church in London a high tribute was paid not only to him for his faithful and zealous exertions during his long ministry there but also to his wife for her Christian and prudent conduct. In accepting the invitation to the pastorate in Hitchin Mr. Griffin stated that, though he had never been a wanderer, he might wish to have a fortnight once a year to visit his friends, a course which he hoped would prove acceptable to all. Had Mr. Geard and Mr. Griffin not been the men they were, the continued presence of the former in the midst of his previous congregation might have been a thorn in his successor's flesh. Mr. Griffin however from the beginning of his ministry honoured the promise which he had given that the old pastor, whom he much esteemed, should be well treated in retirement, as he deserved, and so no difficulties arose between them.

Owing to the lack of detailed minutes only two matters have been recorded which throw light upon the Church life at this time. The links between Baptists and Congregationalists in the town, already strong as shown by the many joint services held alternately in the two chapels, were strengthened when Mr. Griffin instituted for the combined congregations a weekly Thursday evening service, also held alternately in each building.

Then there was much to be done for Salem, the Meeting House erected nearly a century and a half ago. Mr. Griffin launched a vigorous money-raising campaign to enable the necessary cleaning, repairs, and improvements to be carried out by persons



suitable for the task, some of them being members of the Church. With the co-operation of the deacons he encouraged all members and friends of the Church to take an active part in this campaign, and thanks to their united efforts the work was completed in 1834. During this pastorate of nine years, short in comparison with those of his predecessors, eighty new members were added to the Church. The minister resigned his office in 1840.

### THE REV. 'JOHN BROAD 1841-1857

After Mr. Griffin's resignation a few months elapsed before a new appointment was made, it being evident that opinion was divided on this matter. Then Mr. Broad, minister of the Kensington Baptist Church, was invited to supply the pulpit for five weeks, and won such instant warm approval not only for his preaching but for his personal qualities that he was "unanimously, respectfully and affectionately solicited" to accept the pastorate. His ministry began in 1841.

Mr. Broad differed from his predecessors inasmuch as he had been a successful businessman in affluent circumstances; but, convinced that God was calling him to a different field of service, he abandoned this career and its income of £700 a year, laboured as minister in London for ten years and then accepted the call to the Hitchin pastorate. Here he served his people with single-minded devotion, and during his ministry of sixteen years in Hitchin harmony and happiness reigned almost unbroken.

Appreciating the importance of lay preachers to the Church, Mr. Broad gave priority to the task of inviting them all to a conference, the outcome of which was a resolution proposed by him and carried by the Church meeting:

*"No member of this Church", it declared,*

*"shall be permitted to preach at village stations connected with us, unless he has first been nominated by the pastor and approved by two brethren appointed by the parent Church to hear him in the village and to judge of his gifts".*

Such approval was by no means easily obtained, and of the several candidates some were referred for further trial, and a few regretfully rejected. Others who were successful in the test continued their loyal service in the villages for many years, and occasionally a few were nominated by the Church for training at a Baptist college and then became fully qualified ministers.\*

In 1842 in consequence of a letter giving an affecting account of the severe prolonged suffering which Baptists in Denmark were enduring,

*“many of them having lost all their worldly possessions and being at that very moment in prison”*

a special collection was made and sent to those

*“friends suffering for righteousness’ sake.”*

Mr. Broad was an eloquent and inspiring preacher, in the finest revivalist tradition, able to attract and hold large congregations by the sincerity and power of his evangelism. So many people flocked first to hear him and then to join the Church that it soon became evident that *Salem* in spite of the recent improvements was no longer adequate for their needs, and a unanimous decision was reached to pull down the old and to build a new chapel. In this enterprise Mr. Broad’s business experience and connections proved invaluable; thanks to his unflagging energy and initiative plans were drawn up forthwith, and within fifteen months the present chapel was built. Doubts and fears which some members had expressed that, especially in its classical façade, it was as foreign to the teaching of John Bunyan as the Golden Calf had been to the teaching of Moses, were gently but firmly dispelled. For Mr. Broad shared the belief of some mediaeval craftsmen that a building raised to the greater glory of God must be as beautiful and fine as men’s hands could make it. To him it was a neverfailing source of joy to go almost every day to inspect the progress made, to watch and chat to the workmen in their various tasks; and sometimes on Sundays he would take his lunch, and gazing at the fine new building growing every week, he would sit in the courtyard there as long as possible, reluctant to tear himself away from that atmosphere of devotion.

\*See appendix pages 160-161.

Expenditure on the New Chapel erected in 1844 (the period of the "hungry forties")

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Cost of ground in Dovehouse Close,						
purchased of Mr. Pierson				200	0	0

Original contract:

Bricklaying etc. by Jeeves	526	0	0			
Carpentry by Seymour	1123	5	1			
Painting & plumbing by						
Newton & Son	151	3	6			
				1800	8	7

Gas fittings by Prudden	42	1	9
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Tiles for Baptistry, and Ventilator	16	0	4
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Blinds and stoves	18	19	0
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Expense of making up the ground, cost of fencing, removing gates etc.	52	9	5½
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(The present massive front gates previously stood at the entrance to the Old Meeting House, and were erected in 1807)

Conveyance	25	9	10
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Architect's fee	115	15	0
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Printer's bills etc.	13	7	8
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Expenses at laying Foundation Stones

and Opening Services	16	4	6
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Miscellaneous charges	7	4	9
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				307	12	3½
--	--	--	--	-----	----	----

Total	£2308	0	10½
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*Of the total cost, (tenfold greater than that of Salem), £1446 was raised by the opening day, and the last ha'penny was paid within a period of five years partly from contributions sent by friends outside, and partly through the exertions of the members. Mr. W. Bowyer, then residing at Tudor House, gave all the bricks and lime required, and Mr. John Gatward, grandfather of Mr. Bradly Gatward, who for 50 years was organist and choirmaster, as well as a deacon of the Church, presented the clock.*

Extract from the minutes of the Church book: "On Friday, June 28th 1844, our new Meeting House was opened for ye worship of God.



The Present Tilehouse Street Church built in 1844

*A prayer meeting was held at 7 in ye morning which was numerously attended. At 11 o'clock ye more public services commenced and were conducted as follows: The introductory prayer by the Rev. J. M. Daniell, reading of Scripture & ye general prayer by the Rev. J. W. Wayne, Sermon by the Rev. W. Brock of Norwich, Concluding prayer by the Rev. S. Kent.*

*After ye morning service about 300 friends dined in ye Old Meeting House, and a still greater number assembled to tea at ye Town Hall.*

*Several interesting addresses were delivered in ye afternoon, especially one from ye lips of ye venerable John Foster Esqre, of Biggleswade, ye family of whose ancestors are identified with ye earliest records of this Church. In ye evening, after prayer by the Rev. J. Simmons, a sermon was preached by the Rev. Jno. Leifchild D.D. and the Rev. J. Bird closed ye interesting engagements of ye day with prayer.*

*On ye following Lord's Day, June 30th, the Rev. Dr. Leifchild preached both ye morning and evening discourses and the Rev. J. M. Daniell that in ye afternoon."*

When referring to this record in the Centenary Number of the Messenger\* in Aug. 1944, the following comment was made: "That is all, and in studying the Minutes one notes how little space is given to this outstanding event in comparison with the pages devoted to frequent applications for membership, to the testimony and experience of the candidates and to their visitation by the carefully appointed Messengers proof that our forefathers were more concerned with the building up of the Church of Christ on this spot than with the tabernacle that housed its members, though no-one studying the present condition of the dignified front, practically untouched since its erection, can doubt that here too they built well."

On Wednesday June 27th 1849, a great Thanksgiving Service was held in the Town Hall to celebrate the final payment of all debts and expenses incurred in building and equipping the new Chapel.

A minimum scale of subscriptions for sittings in the new Meeting House was sanctioned by the Church Meeting of May 28th 1844.

*For sittings below* 2/6 per quarter

*For sittings in ye gallery*

*Front range* 2/0 per quarter

*2nd range* 1/6 per quarter

*3rd range* 1/0 per quarter

\*See page 63.

It was also decided to adopt the suggestions of a sub-committee that a man and his wife should be engaged as Chapel Keepers, that their duties be distinctly specified in writing, that they be paid a monthly salary and that the same parties be entrusted with the management of the burial ground.

On Wednesday, June 27th, 1849, a great Thanksgiving Service was held in the Town Hall to celebrate the final payment of all debts and expenses incurred in building and equipping the new Chapel.

In 1846 as the outcome of a specially convened Church meeting a detailed code\* was drawn up embodying the doctrinal beliefs held by the Protestant Dissenters meeting in Tilehouse Street Baptist Church. This also regulated the admission of members, the form of service and appointment of the minister, three matters on which both male and female Communicant members had the right to vote. Questions about the use of any part of the premises for a Sunday or other school were the province of the men alone, and they alone could choose, nominate and appoint other fit and proper persons as trustees, bringing the number up to twenty-one.

In 1848 the Chapel was licensed for the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony and the use not only of the burying ground, recently extended by the purchase of a new plot of land, but also of any building erected thereafter on any part of Church premises was clearly defined.

With the lapse of time the old controversy about music had faded from memory and gradually new tunes and hymns had been accepted into use. Therefore the installation first of a harmonium at a cost of £47 11s. 2½d. and then of an organ in 1853 aroused no opposition. From that time onwards choral and instrumental music has been a much appreciated part of all services.

Even as early as 1848 some anxiety was felt about the pastor's health and arrangements were discussed to relieve him of responsibility for the Sunday evening service. Four years later a suggestion was sent by the Congregational Church that the practice followed for many years of holding this jointly and alternately in the two Chapels should be discontinued.

*"Though regretful, uncertain of the necessity and apprehensive lest it harm the cause of evangelism in the town",*

\*See Appendix I page 158.

the members of Tilehouse Street Church fully recognised the

*“right of the sister community to act as they deem best in this or any other question of Christian policy without interference molestation or restraint”*,

and accordingly the proposed arrangement was put into effect.

In 1852 a collection was made for the first time on behalf of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among Jews, a cause still supported by the present generation, and another for the Aged Pilgrims' Friends' Society, founded to help retired Baptist ministers or their widows.\*

Steadily the anxiety felt for Mr. Broad's health had mounted and the medical reports had become so grave that in 1857 he wrote reluctantly to resign the pastorate in which he and his people had found joy and blessing. Unanimously the Church implored him to withdraw or at least to postpone it, offering him as much time as might be necessary to restore his health, but as he rapidly grew worse, it was obvious that such restoration was impossible. At a farewell meeting, clouded by anxiety for him and sadness at his departure, a presentation of £100 was made to him, and of £10 and gifts to his wife, by a spokesman who declared that they would both live in their people's hearts while memory lasted.

*“It is reason for our grateful praise”*, he added,

*“that you have been spared to us so long and we are conscious that our profiting has not always corresponded to our opportunities”*.

In the hope of some improvement Mr. Broad and his wife sailed to Australia where several members of their family had settled: on the voyage he so far recovered as to be able to undertake some engagements in Baptist churches there. ●nce again his ministry was so highly valued that he was begged to accept the pastorate of Geelong Baptist Church, but this request he felt bound to refuse. Conscious of rapidly failing strength, he returned home, and after landing in England in September 1858 he preached for the last time at Hastings. With a premonition of his imminent death he ended the service with the verse:

\*See appendix page 160.

“Happy if with my latest breath  
I may but gasp His name:  
Preach Him to all and cry in death  
‘Behold, behold the Lamb’ ”.

Within a week he died at the age of fifty, leaving behind the memory of one who had spent and been spent in the service of his Master. He was buried in the ground round the new chapel.



## 1858-1877

THE REV. GEORGE SHORT, B.A., 1858-1868

After Mr. Broad's resignation in 1857 several months elapsed before a new appointment was made. Towards the end of 1858 an invitation, though by no means unanimous, was sent to the Rev. George Short, B.A. He had become a Baptist in early life, and, as soon as his age permitted, had trained for the ministry at Stepney College, today Regent's Park Theological College at Oxford, and had taken his degree at the same time. His first two pastorates, one in Norfolk and the other as co-pastor of the Plymouth Baptist Church, had been fairly brief, so that he had the energy and enthusiasm of youth to counterbalance his natural hesitation in following so well loved a minister as Mr. Broad. In his letter of acceptance he stressed the need which constant prayer alone could supply for mutual encouragement of pastor and church. Evidently he regarded teaching and joint discussion of matters that caused doubt and uncertainty as an essential part of his ministry.

*"Let us make the Bible",* he pleaded,

*"the standard of our authority, and let us not come to it with pre-conceived opinions, nor seek to prove ourselves right or to establish a theory or to prove an argument, but to ascertain the mind of the Spirit."*

Possibly these words reflect the anxiety aroused by the current controversy about the origin of man, which many Christians regarded

as a direct attack on the Bible and on the basis of their religion.

At his first Church meeting Mr. Short, hoping

*“to ensure the despatch and orderly conduct of all business”*

requested members to give to himself or to a deacon notice in advance of matters which they wished to raise. This love of order and precision was shown in all his arrangements. Exact statistics were kept of all attendances; emphasis was laid upon the need for greater order and reverence, especially during prayers; ushers were appointed to welcome visitors to the galleries. In an attempt to exclude draughts and to mitigate the cold, four ventilators were placed in the corners of the chapel ceiling, and doors were added inside the vestibule. In 1860 the vestry and schoolroom were enlarged at a cost of £735, but a proposal to enlarge the galleries at the same time was rejected. The diaconate was increased by two. In 1865 when a strong desire was expressed for a new organ, a committee worked so promptly and efficiently that within a year a new organ was installed at a cost of £200. In the following year the recently compiled new Baptist hymnbook, Psalms and Hymns, which was winning general approval throughout the country, was introduced and continued to be used until it was superseded by the Baptist Church Hymnal introduced in Mr. Guyton's pastorate. At the same time the various trusts of the chapel and Burying Ground were consolidated under one board of trustees, and all property of the Church was vested in them jointly. Thus the internal and domestic affairs of the Church were regulated.

In evangelism the main effort was concentrated in the surrounding villages and districts. A rota was made of visitors to the sick and aged, and help and encouragement was given to the evangelists in the various mission stations, the same tests as before being applied to all applicants. When the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon fulfilled a long-standing promise to preach at Tilehouse Street Chapel, an invitation was extended to outsiders, who flocked in large numbers to hear him. The entry in the minute book recording this visit could scarcely be terser:

*“The services were productive of great pleasure and (it is hoped) of profit”.*

In the same year, 1867, mention was made for the first time of a preaching station which was felt to be desirable in the area near the

station. This was mainly due to the initiative of Mr. Richard Johnson, an ardent *General Baptist*, who, having been appointed Chief Engineer to the Great Northern Railway in 1861, had come to live in Hitchin. As there was no General Baptist Church in the town, he and his wife joined the Church in Tilehouse Street, which was a *Particular Baptist* cause. Being much concerned for the spiritual welfare of railwaymen and others in what is now the Walsworth Road area, he drew the attention of his fellow members to the need for the erection of a Mission Hall there. But other business caused the matter to be shelved temporarily. For Mr. Short, who had experienced difficulty in finding suitable accommodation ever since he had come to Hitchin, expressed his fear that this would oblige him to resign. Dismayed and surprised, the Church unanimously begged him to reconsider this course, and undertook to buy a house if one suitable as a manse could be found: otherwise they promised to procure a plot of land and erect a manse for him. The second alternative was accepted and the business went ahead, but after a few months, though the manse in Gray's Lane was completed at a cost of £960, Mrs. Short became seriously ill and her husband's health began to fail. These two factors compelled him to resign and the Church to accept his decision, much as they regretted it, and he left Hitchin in 1868.

Throughout his ministry Mr. Short's standard of conduct for all members of the Church was very high: from them he expected regular attendance at the Sunday services, especially at the Communion Service, and with comparatively few exceptions his hopes were realized. But it was a matter of grave concern to him that the weekly Prayer Meeting, for men only, was less well supported, and he made constant efforts to improve this state of affairs. Any reported cases of offence or sin were immediately investigated, and if substantiated were rigorously disciplined, sometimes to the extent of suspension or "withdrawal from the offending member". He himself constantly stressed the privilege of membership and its consequent responsibilities, and during his ten years' pastorate two hundred and ten new members were enrolled. In January 1868 when the Church roll was read, the membership stood at two hundred and eighty-four, of whom a large number resided at a distance, and the average number of communicants each month was one hundred and forty-five; of brethren at the Prayer Meeting it was not more than nine or ten.

Mr. Short's own enthusiasm and devotion had been infectious, and in striving together for a common purpose he and his people had grown to love and respect each other dearly. His departure was a great sorrow to them, and they always retained a deep affection for him. After a period of recuperation he accepted the pastorate of Brown Street Baptist Church in Salisbury and remained there for the rest of his life. At a special meeting of thanksgiving held in Hitchin in 1891 he was invited to preach and received a warm welcome from a large congregation. Three years later the Hitchin Church shared the pride and joy of the Salisbury Church when Mr. Short was honoured by election as President of the Baptist Union, the highest distinction then open to a Baptist minister.

By a strange coincidence George Short had succeeded John Broad. By an even stranger mathematical freak he married a bride named Square, a circumstance commemorated by a local wag in the following verse:

A deed surpassing human thought  
To do this man could dare;  
He brought her round and made her Short  
Who had been long Miss Square.

Fortunately this happened a century before the last word acquired its modern meaning!

#### THE REV. JOHN ALDIS 1868-1877

Mr. Aldis, son of a Baptist minister in Reading, began his ministry in Hitchin at a time of wonderful opportunity for the Christian church, and *Salem* had good cause for thankfulness that in character and gifts he was equal to the demands of the age and place. In its early stages the Industrial Revolution which brought vast changes to many parts of England left Hitchin almost untouched. Farming and the various crafts which sprang from it (tanning, weaving and milling were a few of them) still remained the basic occupation of its people. But in 1850, when the first train on its way from London to Peterborough puffed into Hitchin station, underneath a triumphal arch which women had decorated

with straw plait, it ushered in an age of progress for an area where the pattern of life had changed very little for many generations. The railway, which provided easy, rapid and cheap transport, brought Hitchin into touch with the wider world, jolting it out of its agelong isolation. It also brought many varied industries to the town. Since these required a far bigger labour force than it could supply, many strangers flocked there in search of employment. Factories, workshops and houses soon filled fields and meadows where crops had grown and sheep and cows had grazed from time immemorial. This rapid expansion created problems of adjustment for both old and new inhabitants, and brought great changes to their social life. In Mr. Short's ministry several proposals had been discussed, in the hope of meeting the spiritual needs of the newcomers: though these had been temporarily abandoned because of difficulties of finance and organization, a Mission Station had been opened in Walsworth Road, a district close to the railway and far away from *Salem*.

As soon as Mr. Aldis arrived, he reviewed the Mission Stations and was responsible for various innovations which emphasized their importance. The work of the lay preachers was organized on a quarterly basis, the Church issued an Appointment Card to each one and required an annual report to be submitted by each. Meanwhile, Mr. Johnson, feeling the urgent need for further action, himself purchased a plot of land at the junction of Highbury Road and Walsworth Road and erected a Mission Hall on it. Services were so well attended that within months it became necessary to enlarge the hall. On 24th June, 1869 a letter, signed by Mr. Johnson and five other members, was read at Salem's Church Meeting, requesting their "dismissal with a view to form a new Church to meet in the Mission Hall at Walsworth Road." The following resolution, supported by the Pastor and several deacons, was then proposed:

*"That considering the distance between Salem and the (Walsworth) Mission Hall: considering the large and increasing population near the latter place whose spiritual needs are very inadequately provided for; considering the encouraging prospects of the formation of a flourishing Church there: considering the practical difficulties in the way of organic union between the two congregations: it is expedient that a separate Church be formed at the Mission Hall.*

*We therefore cordially dismiss our brethren and sisters (six in all) to form the nucleus of a new Church, and we prayerfully commend them and the new enterprise to the love and care of God. We cordially desire the prosperity of the new Church. Though their beginning is small, may their latter end greatly increase. We trust that they may be speedily guided to a pastor who shall be eminently useful in the conversion of sinners and the building up of the saints. We would also desire to foster between the two Churches a most cordial understanding and the sincerest sympathy, believing that the interests of both are compatible, and that they may harmoniously though separately promote the glory of God, the kingdom of His dear Son and the welfare of souls."*

This resolution was carried unanimously and the six members were transferred to the new cause, where they were joined by eight others, who had been baptized in advance. Thus both the Particular Baptists and the General Baptists now had a Church in the town.

The words "considering the practical difficulties in the way of organic union" are clearly a reference to the Particular Baptist and the General Baptist denominations. The distinctive theology of the former was Calvinistic and taught a "particular redemption",\* that is that Christ died for the Elect: the Arminian theology of the latter taught that Christ died for all mankind. However, with the passage of time these differences ceased to be a source of conflict between the two denominations, and in 1891, both of them happily came together in the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and today both Tilehouse Street and Walsworth Road Churches are members of this Union and also of the Herts Baptist Association.

In 1871 the Church empowered Mr. Aldis to invite the Congregational, the two Wesleyan Churches in Hitchin, and the newly founded Baptist Church at Walsworth Road to join them in a series of special prayer meetings. Six meetings were held and attended by large numbers, and they were judged to have been marked by a "fervent spirit, giving grounds for hope that large blessing might result." Also a town missionary, Mr. Tobey, who had been engaged in similar work near Bridgewater, was appointed and maintained by *Salem*, and charged with special responsibility for work among the poor and sick members of the town. For two years he rendered valuable service to the community. Then he was invited to become

\*See Appendix I page 158-159

pastor of the Baptist Church at Burton, near Bridgewater, and with considerable regret at losing him thus *Salem* agreed that he must accept this call to a wider sphere of service. Though they made several efforts to find a suitable successor, they failed, and the work which he had undertaken was henceforth carried out by members of the Church.

In 1870 owing to a regrouping of the Churches in the Eastern Association the Hitchin Church joined the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Association of Baptist Churches. The summary which Mr. Aldis gave of the Church's income for this year for home and foreign purposes shows the diversity and scope of its activities and the generous sympathies of its members:—

	£	s.	d.
The pastor's income, i.e. salary	211	1	0
Collection at the Lord's Table for the poor	29	11	4
The Incidental Fund	39	16	0
Collection to defray debt on the manse	200	0	0
Stoves for chapel schoolroom and vestry	31	10	5
Stoves for Sunday School	20	13	2
Salem Dorcas and Maternal Society	12	8	0
The Baptist Missionary Society	72	6	5
The Baptist Irish Society	6	16	11
The Society for the Mission to Jews	7	7	6
The Bible Translation Society	3	4	0
The Herts. Union	14	7	0
Collection for the Sick and Wounded in the last War	7	0	0
The Aged Pilgrims' Friends' Society	19	2	0
Collection and subscription to Hitchin Infirmary	23	5	6
The Bristol Baptist College	9	3	9
	<hr/>		
	£707	13	0
	<hr/>		

As can be seen in this statement of accounts, the Church's enthusiasm for missionary work remained constant; and with unanimous approval an auxiliary branch of the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, in which recognition was given for the first time to the official part which women could play in Church affairs. For a special "Ladies' Committee" was set up "to provide trays" for Missionary meetings. Shortly afterwards two "sisters" were

appointed to visit and report on female candidates for Church membership. Since, in the words of the minute book, there were at this time "two and a half sisters to every brother", this arrangement seems a very wise deployment of the available woman power. All the visitors appointed were urged to exercise a permanent supervision and also to give sympathy and counsel to young members when they first joined the Church in order to strengthen them in their faith.

Hitherto the Church roll had included both resident and non-resident members: many of the latter, having moved from Hitchin to places where there was no Baptist Church nearby, had wished to retain their link with Hitchin. Mr. Aldis with the approval of the deacons and members revised the roll, arranged transfers for non-residents where this was possible, and omitted the names of those who had not kept in touch with the Church for a long time. Thus a true picture of the Church's strength was given. At the beginning of this pastorate, there were 225 resident members and 57 non-resident; at its end there were 250 of the former and 31 of the latter. Thus despite a decrease of one in the combined figures, the Church was effectively stronger when he left it than when he came.

In March 1877 after eight and a half years of happy labour in Hitchin Mr. Aldis resigned. In giving the reasons for his decision, he mentioned his conviction that his work was done and that it was time for another workman to take his place and for him to accept an unsought invitation to go to Canterbury where the Baptist Church was in many respects weaker, but where there was a much larger population. The news was received with surprise and very much regret, but *Salem*, thanking God for the grace given to him and for the earnest loving service he had rendered, accepted his resignation unquestioningly and made a presentation of sixty sovereigns to him, with their best wishes and prayers for God's blessing on his new work.



## 1877-1906

THE REV. F. G. MARCHANT 1877-1889

In September 1877 exactly two hundred years after Mr. Wilson had become the first pastor of Tylers Street Church, Mr. Marchant began his ministry there. The invitation to him had been unanimous and cordial in its appreciation of his past services and qualities: it also clearly stated that, since the practice of the Church was for each member to contribute as generously as his means allowed towards the stipend, no fixed sum could be guaranteed: but that it would be not less and probably more than £200 a year from which £10 would be deducted for repairs to the manse.

Mr. Marchant in his letter of acceptance referred to his faith in their kindness, their godliness and Christian zeal and expressed his hope that, possessing a large-hearted tolerance of each other in any differences, they might enjoy a warm co-operation in their work for Christ. He came to Hitchin from the Baptist Church in Wandsworth, and brought to his new office exceptional intellectual powers and a fervent eloquence which drew large congregations to the chapel. For the first few years although many joined the Church each year, yet the national shift of population, and also another revision of the Church roll caused a reduction in its numbers. Then with dramatic suddenness these began to rise: in this respect the year 1882 stands out as the most remarkable in the two centuries of the Church's life. Forty-nine people were enrolled as members after baptism and twelve more were admitted on public profession of their faith, so that at the annual Church meeting in January 1883 all rejoiced in a membership of 311. During this same year, in

which a special mission was conducted by the well known evangelists, Mr. W. Y. Fullerton and Mr. Smith, for which the Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans united, the numbers rose to 348.

Two years after his arrival in Hitchin a difficult decision confronted the Church: Mr. Marchant was invited by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon to become Classical Tutor at the recently established Pastors' College in London. This post was important for the future of the Baptist denomination, but, requiring his attendance on four days during each week of the academic term, it was bound to make heavy demands on his physical and mental energies. After long discussions not only among pastor and deacons, but among deacons and members, they all accepted Mr. Marchant's decision to undertake the extra responsibility, even though this would deprive them of a measure of his pastoral oversight. A special committee under the chairmanship of Mr. M. H. Foster was set up to devise the best means for the whole Church to share the burden, and Mrs. Marchant gave valuable help, especially in visiting the sick and comforting the distressed. By her readiness to shoulder many of her husband's responsibilities she enabled him to succeed in his dual rôle and proved herself a worthy labourer in God's vineyard. How happy and successful the Church's co-operation proved may be gauged from the fact that four years later the members presented Mr. and Mrs. Marchant with a cheque for £100 as a tangible expression of their appreciation and esteem.

But at the very time when the Church seemed to be at the apex of its prosperity, calamity overtook it. For the spirit of unity which had hitherto been a characteristic of its life was broken by a division of opinion about election to the diaconate. This led to the immediate resignation of fifty-nine members and of a few more within the next year, who all applied for transfer to Walsworth Road Baptist Church. Deeply painful and regrettable as this separation must have been for both parties in the dispute, yet in the altered perspective brought about by time, it may be seen that God in His infinite wisdom has wrought good out of evil. For the two Churches, each rejoicing in the warm love and loyal service of its members, have continued ever since to promote God's work in the town and to serve Him with constant devotion.

In 1884 *Salem* joined the Baptist Union\* at that time a federation

\*Henceforth referred to as B.U.

of Particular Baptist Churches, and from that time has sent delegates to the annual conferences. When increasing numbers necessitated an association of Baptist Churches for Hertfordshire alone *Salem* became a member, and in its second year and on several subsequent occasions entertained it for its annual conference: and now in its tercentenary year it is looking forward to entertaining the Assembly once again. Steadily the Church continued its activities in evangelism both at home and abroad, and year by year built up its depleted strength. One noticeable feature of this pastorate is the large number of "honourable dismissals" granted to and from the Hitchin Church. These enriched its life, bringing it fresh blood and vigour, widened its horizon and forged strong links between it and other Baptist communities not only in England and Wales but in countries overseas. To many members Toronto, Philadelphia and Co. Michigan ceased to be meaningless names upon a map, but became living homes of personal friends and relations. In 1881 a manual was published, giving statistics of the Church's work, the societies, names and addresses of the members, and this helped far distant friends to keep in touch with those at home.

In 1889 Mrs. Marchant died very suddenly, and almost at the same time the serious state of his daughters' health, for which only removal from Hitchin seemed to offer any hope of cure, caused Mr. Marchant to resign, to the great grief of the Church. At a farewell meeting a presentation of £66 was made to him. He did not undertake another pastorate, but having gone to live in Brighton on medical advice given for his daughters' sake, he continued his tutorial work until his death ten years later. During these years, he took every opportunity to return to Hitchin and to share in special ceremonies there, and he was buried in the graveyard of the Church which he had loved and served so faithfully.

#### THE REV. THOS. WILLIAMS 1890–1893

In May 1890 the Rev. Thos. Williams came from the Baptist Church at Coleford in Gloucestershire to begin his ministry in Hitchin. At this period the rapid expansion in the districts near the railway station had not yet affected the area round *Salem*. In Grays Lane—still a little country by-road, much narrower then than now—there stood one solitary house, the manse, surrounded by a

spacious garden. This with its orchard, wide lawns and delightful alleys, provided close at hand a perfect setting for the many functions of the Church—wedding receptions, fêtes, bazaars, parties for the Mothers' Meeting and for the various activities of their children. In the fields stretching out towards Offley and Pirton the only sign of human habitation was at Tudor House (demolished recently to make way for a housing scheme). The Highlander, once a busy inn but already seriously affected by loss of trade due to the railway, was glad to provide stabling for the horses of those Church members who rode in from distant villages and farms: others who drove in governess cars, farm carts or pony traps, used to put them up for the day in the corner of the field where Grays Lane Post Office now stands. Apart from the chapel and the Wratten with its row of little cottages, the whole district presented an appearance unrecognisable in 1969.

During Mr. Williams's ministry many improvements were carried out in the interior of the chapel. A new rostrum and pulpit were erected, and a simple ornamental front was added to the galleries to which the ground floor pews were transferred, and new ones were installed downstairs. The most urgent of all the tasks was to enlarge and reconstruct the organ. The first estimate for all these operations was £1,200; but as the work proceeded it revealed unsuspected damage in the joists and floor of the organ, which made the final bill amount to £1,757, a truly formidable total for a community which had always regarded prompt payment of its debts as a matter of honour. However all decided that there must be no curtailment of expenditure on missionary activities nor on the many good causes to which the Church was already pledged. An interest free mortgage of £400 was gladly accepted from one friend, and £300 was borrowed under the same favourable conditions from the Baptist Building Society. Mr. Bradley Gatward, a member of the same family as Ann Bradley\*, was appointed organist and musical director of the Church, but refused any fee for his services until the debt had been fully discharged. Young and old, rich and poor alike, worked in happy co-operation until 1897 when their purpose was successfully accomplished.

In the midst of their task, it was a great surprise and disappointment to receive Mr. Williams's resignation. Anxious for his daughter's health and threatened with a breakdown in his own,

\*See page 117.

he suddenly lost confidence in himself and in his ability to continue his ministry. After three and a half years in Hitchin, where they were all highly esteemed for their faithful loving ministries, the family retired to Aberystwith, from which, after a considerable interval had elapsed, he occasionally returned to share in special occasions in the Church's life.

#### THE REV. C. S. HULL 1894-1900

After a few months an invitation to the pastorate was sent to the Rev. C. S. Hull of Sussex Street Baptist Church in Brighton. In his letter of acceptance, he stated that he hoped to come to them not as a political agitator, not as a scientific lecturer, nor even as a social reformer, but as a preacher of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, as an expounder of the Word of Truth and as an undershepherd to go in and out of the flock of Christ, to minister to them in holy things, and by lip and life ever to point them to the Saviour, the Covenant Head of the people. Thus:

*"believing in the mighty energy of God's truth, in the Divine efficacy of Christ's work and in the presence and power of the Eternal Spirit to apply both the truth and the work to the hearts and consciences of men",*

Mr. Hull began his ministry in Hitchin in October 1894.

A few months before his arrival, the Church celebrated the opening of the chapel in 1844. At the Jubilee Services held to commemorate this landmark in their history, the Rev. William Brock of Hampstead preached and hymns specially composed for the occasion were sung. Then followed a public tea at which more than 300 guests were present, and a public meeting, attended by Baptist ministers from a wide area, by all the Free Church ministers of the town and by many old friends connected with the Church.

At Mr. Hull's Recognition Service on October 7th 1894, the Rev. F. G. Marchant, now Senior Tutor at the Pastors' College, returned to visit his old flock. In his morning sermon he reminded them of their inspiring heritage and the glorious part they still had to play in the service of God; in the evening he stressed particularly the opportunities and responsibilities of the pastoral office. A few days later another meeting and a second, equally thronged, teaparty concluded the week of rejoicing at the arrival of their new pastor.

For the next six years the Church kept the even tenor of its way,

steadily and unspectacularly continuing its work and witness in the town, and maintaining its unflagging interest in the Mission Field. The anxiety, which many men in all ranks of life felt about intemperance rapidly increasing throughout the country, may account for a decision made in 1895 that unfermented wine should be used at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper and for the formation of a Band of Hope (a temperance group) in the Church.

At this period there was a tendency for Baptist ministries to be short in comparison with those of earlier centuries and frequent changes among ministers were no less common than quick changes of residence among their people. To those members of *Salem* whose family memories recalled pastorates of forty or fifty years it brought a shock of dismay to learn in October 1900 that Mr. Hull had received, and had decided to accept, an invitation to become pastor of the Camberwell Baptist Church in London. His resignation was received with widespread and genuine sorrow, and the heartfelt thanks of the Church were offered to him for the manifold services he had rendered during his six and a half years in Hitchin.

#### THE REV. H. JENNER 1902-1906

During the period, a little over a year, when the Church had no pastor, the tried and trusted diaconate, led by their veteran chairman Mr. M. H. Foster, enlisted for the second time the willing co-operation of all members and friends so successfully that their many varied activities and responsibilities were fully maintained. The Ladies' Committee was set up once more, not only to undertake the visitation of the sick and to give counsel and encouragement especially to the young and to recently enrolled members, but also to assist generally in the spiritual life of the Church. The full number of delegates continued to be sent to the annual conference of the Baptist Union, and more representatives than usual attended the meeting of the Hertfordshire Union of Baptist Churches. Moreover *Salem* took its full share in the plans drawn up by the other four Nonconformist Churches for a united mission in the town and for open air meetings to be held there during the summer.

After several months, Mr. Jenner, who had for eight years been pastor of a small Baptist Church at Waterbeach, was invited to the pastorate at Hitchin for a period of three years, with the option of

renewal if this seemed desirable to both pastor and Church. In accepting the invitation and the condition, Mr. Jenner referred to his main concern about his own fitness to occupy worthily such an historic pulpit, and prayed that in this enlarged sphere God would use him to unite the Church in the bonds of peace and lead it into increased usefulness. In accordance with the expressed desire of his new Church, he came to take part in the United Free Church Mission held in October 1901 but did not begin his full ministry until January 1902.

During his first year the five Nonconformist Churches in Hitchin set up a Free Church Council which year by year played an increasingly important part in the spiritual life of the people. In 1906 when the two Baptist Churches arranged to have a joint annual meeting for the Baptist Missionary Society, keen interest was aroused by the Rev. W. Fetter, a Russian student who spoke from his own experience of the progress of evangelism in Russia. Many of the upper classes, he reported, were working nobly to enlighten those hitherto sunk in superstition; God had opened a door in Russia and for the first time religious meetings there were allowed without interruption.

Mr. Jenner's marriage in 1902 was hailed with great rejoicing in the Church and, since his return from his honeymoon coincided with the Harvest Thanksgiving service, it was celebrated by a joint party, and a cheque for £38. When the three year period of his appointment was coming to an end, it was renewed to the satisfaction of all. But it is sad to find that the high hopes entertained both for and by Mr. Jenner were not fulfilled: before long, strain and stress in his private life led to a breakdown in his health which necessitated several weeks of sick leave, for which generous provision was gladly made. However no lasting improvement followed, and with deep distress Mr. Jenner's resignation was accepted as the only course possible for all. After leaving Hitchin he went to live in Letchworth and died there. At his departure the Church membership was 215.

## 1906-1917

THE REV. W. G. HARRIS

In the first meeting after Mr. Jenner's resignation, Mr. M. H. Foster as Chairman spoke frankly of the difficulties confronting the Church and appealed to every member to support and serve it loyally. This appeal did not fall on deaf ears: no Church could have justified more clearly its belief in the Baptist principle of "the priesthood of all believers". A six months' rota of visiting preachers was arranged, every department successfully discharged its own especial function, and, despite the lack of a pastor, all showed a common resolve to promote the work and interests of the Church. After long consideration and frequent prayer meetings the diaconate proposed in August, and the Church meeting agreed, that the Rev. W. G. Harris, a mature experienced man, well known to many of them for his happy and successful ministries in Winchester and Luton, should be invited to become their pastor. In his reply Mr. Harris prudently suggested that he should undertake full pastoral duties among them for a period of six months, in order to allow the Church and himself a chance to become better acquainted before a permanent appointment was made. This suggestion was gladly adopted, there being only one dissentient who wished the period to be doubled. Mr. Harris came to Hitchin early in November 1906, when the members numbered 210, and a special week of prayer inaugurated his ministry there.

One of his first official occasions provided a very happy omen for him in his new sphere. At the annual Church meeting Mr. M. H.



Foster, senior deacon and treasurer, who was celebrating the jubilee of his membership, was presented with an illuminated address engrossed on vellum, to express the Church's thanks to God for the valuable services He had enabled him to render to the cause of Christ in Hitchin.

The impact made by Mr. Harris, ably seconded by his wife, was immediate and deep, and with profound gratitude to God the Church recognised their good fortune in having such leaders. At the end of six months they confirmed their invitation to the pastorate in terms which for cordiality and unanimity left nothing to be desired—and Mr. Harris unhesitatingly and gladly accepted it. Thus began a ten and a half year period of happiness and peace, internally, at least, for the Church. With no delay, Mr. Harris came to grips with many problems, the most urgent being the reduction and final liquidation of the debt on the organ, which stood at £116, and which was immediately increased by £100, when electric light was installed in the chapel and schoolroom.

At the Recognition Service in July the Rev. W. J. Ewing preached, and nearly one hundred of the Luton congregation brought the best wishes of their Church to Mr. and Mrs. Harris. Among many ministers present the Rev. G. Short, who had begun his own ministry in the same pulpit nearly half a century earlier, received a specially warm welcome, not only from the older members but also from many of their children and grandchildren to whom his name was a household word. Considerable excitement was aroused among the younger generation when Mrs. Harris switched on the electric light installed just in time for the ceremony.

Then the pastor, wishing to co-ordinate the varied activities of the Church, held a conference of all its workers, including the village preachers. This led to the institution of a weekly training class for the latter and to many other developments, one of the boldest and most enduring being the production in January 1908 of a monthly magazine, the *Messenger*. This had a guaranteed circulation of five hundred for Hitchin and the districts around, and, at the price of one penny, must have been one of the best literary bargains of the year. The *Messenger* was concerned chiefly with the life and work of the two Baptist Churches and their village stations; but one sentence from the leading article of the first issue merits special consideration today:

*"We are Christians before we are Baptists, and everything that involves the honour of Christ's name and the triumph of His cause, everything that has for its end the promotion of truth and righteousness will evoke a sympathetic response in the pages of this journal".*

All through his ministry Mr. Harris seized every opportunity to hasten that

*"millennial day when the Episcopal lion would be willing to lie down with the Nonconformist lamb",*

and in the meantime he strove unceasingly to co-operate with his Free Church brethren. The year 1909 was notable for the first United Sunday School Festival, arranged for the pupils of the five Free Churches. Each school, proudly displaying its flags and banners, marched in procession from its own chapel to the old Market Square, to which the infants had been taken in gaily decorated wagons. There, led by the Wesleyan Methodist band from Stevenage, they sang hymns and gave a very effective display of "rhythmic evolutions", to the delight of crowds of spectators. Then school by school they marched to the town football ground and enjoyed the programme of sports AND the lavish tea arranged by a joint committee of the teachers. This public demonstration of the strength, unity and vitality of the Free Churches left a great impression on the town.

Then came the death of King Edward VII, for which a United Memorial Service was held at *Salem* on the day of the funeral. To celebrate the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary, another united Free Church service was held in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel—and again a children's procession to the market square took place. Here the singing of the hymn "All people that on earth do dwell" by the massed congregation of 3,000 provided for many people the climax of the day. This was followed by tea, sports, a torch light procession and a display of fireworks.

Another successful example of co-operation is provided by the London University Students' Mission to *all* the Protestant Churches of Hitchin. Inspired by the Student Christian Movement and a recent Students' Conference at Swanwick, a team came to spend a week of their long vacation in Hitchin and parked their caravan at the top of Tilehouse Street in a field lent by Mr. Gatward, *Salem's* organist. There to the unconcealed interest of the whole town,

unfamiliar with such a sight, they lived in tents, did their own cooking and daily chores and sometimes entertained visitors and friends. On the Sunday some preached in the churches and chapels, and others visited Sunday schools and Bible classes. During the week evening services were held, usually in the open air, to which the lively hymns and catchy choruses drew large audiences. Discussion groups met to learn about missionary activities, and a model study circle on this subject, conducted by their leader on the last day, aroused such enthusiasm that during the winter months many circles were arranged for most churches in Hitchin to follow a common course of study under experienced leaders. Four such circles were held at *Salem* for boys and girls whose ages ranged from twelve to sixteen.

This was a period when the youth of the Church began to play a very vigorous and effective part in its work: their energies seemed inexhaustible, their schemes for service original, and quite obviously they all enjoyed themselves enormously. A Young People's Section of the Christian Endeavour Society was formed at *Salem* and, in spite of its cumbrous title, proved to be one of the freshest, liveliest and most public spirited organisations there, catering for those interested in social work, foreign missions, temperance propaganda, music, poetry, literature and recreation! This society, unhampered by ancient precedents, and open to both sexes at a time when mixed societies were rare, had the additional advantage of bringing its members into contact with Christians of other denominations, since the main C.E. society was non-sectarian. Year by year the *Salem* group carried out an ambitious programme of service to the community around them. Picnics, often shared by other branches, were followed by open air meetings on village greens; concerts and tea parties were arranged for the sick and aged, for the Sunday School pupils and, once, for the nuns living in the Biggin. Study circles, forerunners of the present-day "teach-ins", were held on missionary work and inspired the members not only to send contributions towards the upkeep of a hospital bed in China, and of the s.s. *Endeavour*, which the B.M.S. ran on the Congo river, but, greatly daring, to maintain a native lad, Bozemiso, in the mission school near Stanley Pool. When after four years' schooling he began work in a B.M.S. factory, making bricks to build a church, the C.E. members sponsored a second boy, a goatherd, who had been rescued from most demoralizing conditions,

and they used to receive regular progress reports about him from the mission teachers.

Let one example suffice to show the exuberant gaiety of this C. E. group—their version of *Trial by Jury*. For this the school-room was transformed into a court of law, where the Rev. N. Dobson, minister of Walsworth Road Chapel, presided in stately dignity as Judge. Twelve good men and true, including several deacons, were empanelled as a jury, and one of the village preachers, Mr. C. Wheeler, as Counsel for the Prosecution, indicted the B.M.S. for

*“having obtained unlawfully by divers means on various occasions monies from His Majesty’s subjects, and for having used them for purposes that were useless, unsatisfactory and unnecessary”.*

As witnesses to support the charge he called upon Mr. Globe Trotter a tourist, Mr. T. Planter a trader and Mr. Wm. Blunt a man of the world. Mr. Kingsley Russell, Counsel for the Defence, pinned his hopes to the evidence supplied by Mr. Goodman and Mr. Greatheart, an Indian and an African missionary, by Mr. Havelock a resident in India, and by Mr. Readyman a member of the B.M.S. Natives in full costume, Shorno an Indian girl, Yin Ti a Chinese woman, and Bikango from the Congo provided colourful and light relief. After cross-examination of the witnesses and speeches by the two Counsel, the Judge summed up and the jury gravely pondered their verdict. At last the audience heard, with considerable satisfaction, the Foreman of the Jury, Mr. G. W. Russell (revered deacon, J.P. and County Alderman) return the verdict “Not Guilty”, and the Judge announce his decision to award the sum of £2 10s. 6d., the highest costs in his power, to the defendant. No doubt any attempt at applause was sternly quelled by the Clerk of the Court, Mr. A. E. H. Theobalds (a deacon and the Superintendent of the Sunday School) and by his usher.

The reception given to this lively entertainment was so enthusiastic that a second performance was immediately requested, and given, this time in the Walsworth Road Chapel.

In 1911 Mr. Harris, thanks to a friend’s generosity, attended the Baptist World Congress in Philadelphia, as a delegate from Hertfordshire. Leave of absence for six weeks enabled him to enjoy the thrilling novelty of a cruise in the s.s. *Carmania*, to visit old friends who had emigrated to U.S.A., and to attend the Congress

in company with four thousand delegates representing eight million Baptists and sixty nations drawn from every corner of the earth. The mere sight of this vast assembly (many of whom were wearing national costume and who spoke through interpreters), the sound of well-known hymns sung to the same tune in many different tongues, and the accounts of persecution, dangers and difficulties still being endured by many evangelists left an indelible impression upon Mr. Harris's mind.

Shortly after the minister's return to England, Mr. G. W. Russell, who had recently completed the fiftieth year of his connection with the Sunday school, first as a pupil from the tender age of six, then as a teacher, Superintendent and Leader of the Men's Bible Class, was presented with an address beautifully illuminated and inscribed by Mr. Theobalds, who had succeeded him as Superintendent.

During Mr. Harris's ministry one of his members, Ebenezer Hounsden, went to prison, for refusing, on principle, to pay that part of the local rates affected by the Education Act of 1902, which gave assistance to schools of the Established Church. When a friend paid the sum on his behalf, Mr. Hounsden was released from St. Albans' prison, and on returning to Hitchin was greeted outside the Town Hall by a large throng of his fellow members, who cheered him when he made a speech defending his action.

Forty years earlier a non-sectarian Colportage Association had been formed in Hitchin by many of its eminent men, Seebohms, Ransoms, Pollards, Lucases, Grellets, Tukes, Halseys and many others, eager to provide good literature cheaply for the man-in-the-street, his wife and family. Their choice of a colporteur had fallen upon James Rennie, an Australian-born Scot, a member of *Salem*, and a man of wide sympathies and genial disposition, with the pawky humour of his race. He soon endeared himself as a friend and counsellor to young and old in the villages and towns near Hitchin. By December 1912 he had sold an incredible number of books, mainly Bibles, tracts and periodicals representing a sum of £30,000. At a public meeting held in his honour in the Town Hall a beautiful four-volumed Bible was presented to him by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and a cheque for £130, contributed by friends in the Hitchin area, many of them poor and some unconnected with any religious body. Among the speakers, Annie Swan, whose novels were always to be found in Mr. Rennie's pack

at the *beginning* of his daily round, spoke with moving eloquence about the value of his work.

Steadily the membership of the Church increased, and at the end of six years Mr. Harris rejoiced to know that the roll stood at 263. This addition to their strength was specially valuable at a time when a task of great importance confronted the Baptist Union. In order that an adequate minimum salary could be guaranteed for everyone of their ministers, many of whom served churches small in numbers and poor in resources, an appeal was made to raise a Sustentation Fund of a quarter of a million pounds. Towards this total *Salem* sent £418. In June 1914 a mass meeting at the Royal Albert Hall celebrated the triumphant close to a great enterprise, for their target had been exceeded and the sum of £252,239 had been received.

At the outbreak of the First World War, when many young men of the Church flocked to join the Forces, the gaps were willingly filled, at first by older men, and later by women of every age, who, their diffidence once overcome, shouldered responsibilities which they had never dreamed would fall to them. As the war continued, black out regulations and the threat of Zeppelin raids curtailed or modified some activities, but the spiritual life of the Church never flagged, in spite of all the demands made upon their physical energies. Relief parties were organized to collect funds, and working parties met each week to keep up a permanent supply of garments, body belts, socks, helmets and scarves in particular, for the troops in the trenches and surgical comforts for the wounded. Soon crowds of Belgian civilians fleeing from the German invaders arrived in England, destitute. With practical common sense this Church decided to provide a home in Hitchin for a family of refugees. Mr. H. W. Russell offered a house which members equipped with furniture, fuel and food; enough clothing was collected for the expected family, however big it might be; Sunday school pupils, a few of them only six or seven years old, knitted socks and vests for Belgian babies, and a special fund was opened and recharged week by week for the maintenance of their guests. For several months nine people enjoyed the hospitality thus offered; then the married son left with his wife, her parents and their child, to take up an appointment in Paris. In the letter of thanks sent to Mr. Russell he wrote:

*"You have been for us a providence, you tried to make us as happy as possible and you succeeded entirely. It was a great solace to feel so much sympathy cordiality and friendship around us . . . It will always be with emotion and satisfaction that we remember Hitchin and its inhabitants".*

When the five guests left England, the other four, including a wounded Belgian officer, stayed on in the same house.

In May 1916 Mr. Harris was elected as President of the Herts Baptist Association and in spite of wartime difficulties of catering *Salem* entertained a large gathering for its annual conference. In the next year the Rev. C. H. Stearn, minister of Walsworth Road Church, left Hitchin to become a chaplain to the Forces, and for an experimental period of three summer months the two Baptist churches combined for Sunday worship. Before the period had elapsed Mr. Harris accepted an unsought invitation to the pastorate of Onslow Street Baptist Church, South Kensington.

*"Nothing could have persuaded me to break so dear a tie but the solemn conviction that God Himself was calling me away"*

. . . he wrote in his letter of resignation.

*"I shall never cease to thank Him for these happy years of fellowship and service. No pastor has ever been happier than I have been with my dear friends at Tilehouse Street Church—for more than ten years we have lived in unbroken peace and harmony. To deacons, to every member of the Church and congregation I extend heartfelt thanks for their unbroken kindness".*

Though Mr. Harris had never made any secret of his opinion that a long pastorate was not always in the best interests of either pastor or flock, yet his resignation surprised and grieved the people deeply. But although they believed that a good and great work was still open to him in Hitchin, they recognised the sincerity of his conviction, and with prayers and good wishes for his future work and a substantial cheque they bade him farewell.

## 1918-1926

THE REV. JAMES McCLEERY

*“My aim shall be to **prove** myself a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, and a worthy successor of the devoted and gifted men who have preceded me in the **pastorate**. Upon the firm and true foundations that have been laid I shall seek to build”.*

Thus did the Rev. James McCleery describe the hope in which he accepted the pastorate of Tilehouse Street Church. After happy and successful ministries in Ramsbottom, Southend and Teddington, he was at the peak of his powers when he began his work in Hitchin. His arrival coincided with the most critical period of the whole war, when Sir Douglas Haig's command to the British troops to fight with their backs to the wall brought home to the nation the gravity of their situation. Mr. McCleery with his unquenchable optimism and faith that God *was* working His purpose out in His own mysterious way was indeed the right man in the right place at the right time. A handsome Irishman, so tall that the reading desk required adjustment, gay with the humour of his race, and blessed with a wife who shared all his hopes and labours, he immediately captured the imagination and won the affection of all under his pastoral care.

At this time the Sunday School used to meet not only in the afternoon but also in the morning, and children were encouraged to stay for the Church service afterwards. When Mr. McCleery stood for the first time in the pulpit, he saw assembled in the galleries a large gathering of boys and girls all eagerly waiting to



see and hear their new minister. To them he quoted the lines:

In the golden chain of friendship  
Please consider me a link,

and asked them to write these words on a card with their names and addresses and to hand it to him in person, so that he might learn each one by name and face. Half a century ago, when children were usually less sophisticated, this novel idea evoked an immediate response, and within a short time Mr. McCleery knew and was known and loved by every child. To the aged and sick he became a familiar and welcome visitor not only in Hitchin but in the three villages still linked with *Salem*, though he had neither a car nor a bicycle. Even in the darkest days of the war he was already looking ahead to the 250th anniversary of the Church and inspiring his people with his own enthusiasm to celebrate it in a worthy fashion.

In the meantime many projects claimed his attention. The *Messenger*, which had so far been a purely Baptist publication, was enlarged at the request of the Congregational Church who were giving up their own magazine. Various innovations were planned in readiness for the end of the war, many of which are still proving their value today. High among these stand the Girls' Life Brigade and the Scout Troop, formed in 1919.\*

To the boys and girls of these organisations Mr. McCleery gave constant care and was very often present for a part of their meetings. Nor was his presence merely perfunctory. On one occasion when a little group of Brigaders quailed at the thought of returning along the unlighted lanes to Charlton, unaccompanied by the older member who usually saw them home, Mr. McCleery took her place and on the way drew the attention of his charges to the stars. So illuminating was his talk that one small girl, who later rose to be Captain† of the Company still recalls details of it with great pleasure, since it aroused her interest in a subject about which no one had ever spoken to her before.

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month the Germans surrendered to the Allies. Almost incredulous with joy and thankfulness the Baptist Church held a Thanksgiving Service, at which not only the five Free Churches of the town were present but also Hitchin Urban District Council. Then all

\*See appendix pages 144-151.

†Captain Miss Irene Sharp.

members turned their thoughts to their approaching anniversary, for which Mr. McCleery compiled a History of Tilehouse Street Baptist Church. This, published at a cost of 3s. and now out of print, is regarded as a treasure today by those who possess a copy, and to it this later chronicle is much indebted. Then a programme was planned, impressive in variety and scope.

*Saturday.* Meeting in the Schoolroom for thanksgiving and praise.

*Sunday.* Services conducted by Col. Miles, D.S.O., Senior Chaplain to the Australian forces.

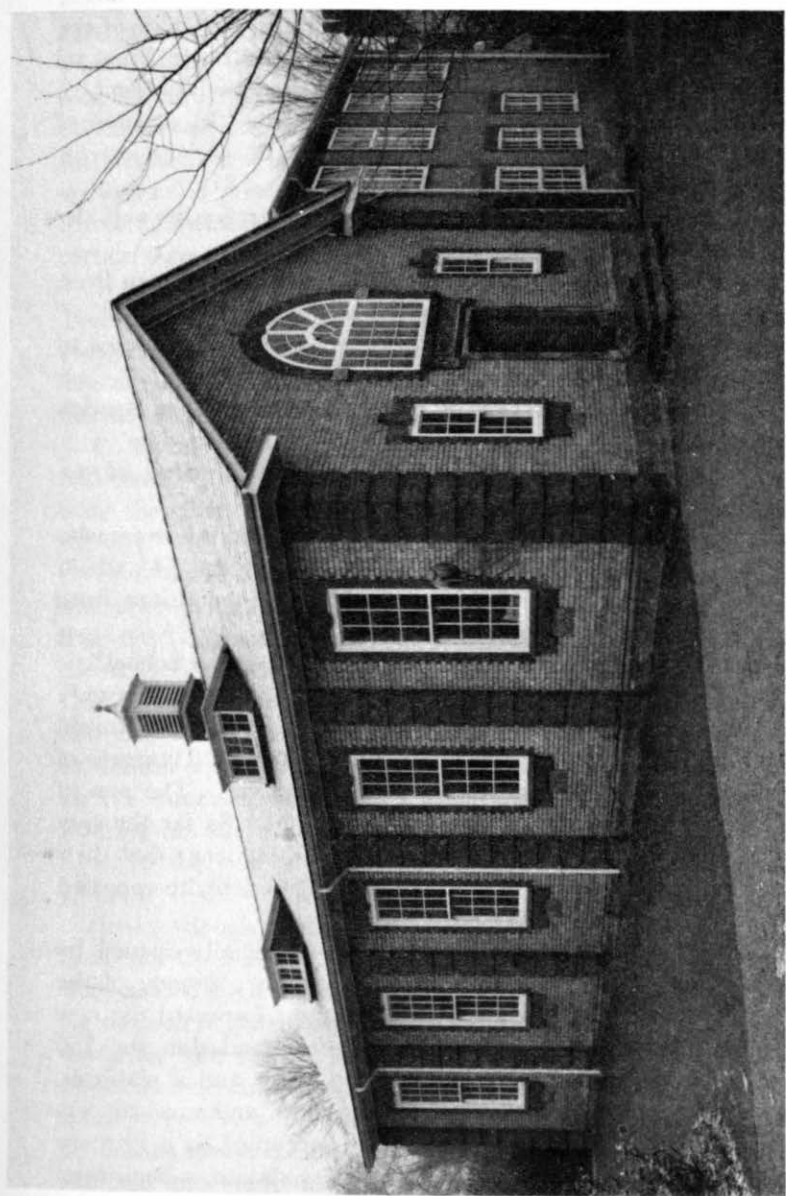
*Monday.* Public service in Bunyan's dell in Wain Wood.

*Tuesday.* Old Scholars' Reunion with Mr. G. W. Russell presiding; at this a pageant was presented of scenes in the life of the Church.

*Wednesday.* After an afternoon service and Tea Meeting for past and present members, a Public Meeting in the Town Hall. (Mr. Marnham, President of the B.U., presided from the Bunyan Chair and Lord Robert Cecil, M.P. for Hitchin, British representative at the newly formed League of Nations, gave an address which has a special interest for all Churches today. Referring to the harm caused by divisions among Christians, he stated his own conviction that on some of the great controversial subjects the divisions were more in words than reality; and he went on to ask whether, with the enormous mass of agreement between Churchmen and Non-conformists they could not work together in matters about which they agreed.)

*Thursday.* A Missionary meeting with Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, Treasurer of the B.M.S., as speaker.

The Church now proceeded to realise a long cherished hope. Since the Sunday School premises were inadequate and unsuitable for modernisation, it had been impossible to introduce the fully graded classes for which the teachers had been hoping for a long time. A gift of £250, which Mr. G. W. Russell had given before the war, was now increased to £1,000 for the construction of a new school. As a thank offering for the past and a memorial for those killed in the war, the Church decided to erect a separate block on part of the ground to the right of the chapel. With characteristic speed they opened a Memorial Fund, appointed Mr. G. H. Russell as architect and despite post-war difficulties of labour, materials and money they saw the first part of their dream come true in 1924. In July a public ceremony took place with Sir Harold Mackintosh,



The Memorial Schools erected in 1924  
(Photographed by Ernest Clayton)

President of the National Sunday School Union, in the chair, and nine people, associated with or representative of the life of the Church, laid stones. For this they used mallets made from an ancient yew tree cut down to make room for the new building.

*Miss Esther Palmer*, great niece of Miss Ann Bradly "In memory of Miss Bradly, sister-in-law of the Rev. John Geard, and those with her who started the Sunday School on May 24th, 1812."

*Mr. M. H. Foster* "To the memory of the Foster family and the faithful church workers of the past".

*Captain H. H. Theobald* "In memory of the twelve young men from our school who made the great sacrifice in the war 1914-1919".

*Alderman G. W. Russell* "In acknowledgment of God's goodness to the Church and Sunday Schools during their long history".

*Mr. H. Marnham*, Treasurer of the B.U., "On behalf of the Baptists of Hertfordshire".

*Mrs. Bradley Gatward* "On behalf of the women workers of the Church".

*The Rev. James McCleery* "In memory of the thirteen ministers who have been pastors of the Church". (The cheque for £44 which Mr. McCleery laid upon this stone included contributions from friends in his three previous Churches.)

*A Scholar* "To the glory of God on behalf of the Sunday School".

*Mr. Fred Foster* "On behalf of the Walsworth Road Baptist Church".

At a very well-attended meeting in the chapel at which Sir Harold Mackintosh once again presided, Mr. G. W. Russell, Treasurer of the Memorial Fund, submitted the financial report. The cost of building and equipping the schools was £5,000. So far the sum in hand amounted to £2,574. Reminding his audience that their Church had never allowed itself to remain long in debt, he appealed to all to wipe out the deficit with all speed.

On March 4, 1925, the new schools were officially opened by Miss Marjorie Russell, Captain of the Church's company of the Girls' Life Brigade. Then after tea the visitors inspected the new building. The main hall has seating accommodation for 250 people, a library and class rooms opening off it, and a platform, subsequently equipped as a stage for dramatic and musical performances. The rest of the ground floor is occupied by a Primary department with separate cloakroom accommodation, a Beginners' Department, a Staff room and a well-equipped kitchen. Upstairs there is an assembly lobby, a Junior Department, and separate

rooms suitable for senior and Bible classes. It is indeed a Memorial Hall second to none in the county. In the Second World War, when a flood of London evacuees poured into Hitchin, and was soon followed by others from Eastbourne in 1940, the block of buildings was used as a day school for the newcomers, and certainly the teachers recognised their good fortune in having the use of such well-planned premises. In 1967 and 1968 the Hitchin College of Further Education rented the same accommodation and facilities for certain days of the week.

At an evening meeting on the opening day Mr. W. Parkinson, Treasurer of the Baptist Building Fund, handed to Mr. McCleery (whose birthday it happened to be) a cheque for £1,000 as a loan, free of interest and repayable in ten years. Then the Rev. J. C. Carlile, D.D., O.B.E., Acting Secretary of the B.U., and the Rev. J. F. Walkley, O.B.E., the Area Superintendent, gave delightful addresses. After a brief speech from Mr. McCleery and an anthem from the choir the Hallelujah Chorus provided a grand finale to the day.

A few weeks later a two day sale was held in the Town Hall as a first attempt to reduce the debt of the Memorial Fund. On the first day Captain Delme Radcliffe welcomed Dame Margaret Lloyd George, who opened the sale. On the second day Major Guy Kindersley, M.P. for Hitchin, presided, accompanied by his two daughters, the elder of whom declared the sale open. An exhibition of antiques, a concert and a museum drew many people. In the museum the brazier's anvil used by John Bunyan when working at his craft in Elstow attracted particular attention. Later in the year a second sale brought the total receipts up to £710.

Heavy though their own financial commitments were at this time, the Church did not neglect other claims. Essential repairs were carried out in Preston chapel, the congregation there contributing to them as generously as their means allowed. Collections were made for the British and Foreign Bible Society, for the Aged Pilgrims' Friends' Society and for the Hitchin Hospital. It was a shock to receive a bill for £120 from the Urban District Council, by whom Grays Lane, where the manse stood, had just been widened and made up as a public road. But this seemed a very trivial matter in comparison with the resignation of Mr. McCleery at the end of November 1925. He had received an unsought

invitation from Zion Baptist Church in Cambridge, where work among young people was rapidly expanding, and after long consideration he and his wife had reached the conclusion that God was calling them to undertake it. Such a solemn conviction no one could gainsay, and so with mutual sorrow mingling with happy memories of the past eight years, pastor and flock bade each other farewell in February 1926. Six years later Mr. McCleery's body was brought back for burial in the graveyard of the Church.

## 1926-1934

THE REV. R. F. GUYTON

*“If God takes one minister away, He will provide another”*, was the comforting assurance in Mr. McCleery’s last letter to the Church, and after a six months’ interval his prophecy was fulfilled, when the Rev. R. F. Guyton accepted the invitation to succeed him. In his letter he wrote:

*“We are looking forward to a happy fellowship with you and pray that God will help us to be useful in your midst.”*

This happy fellowship became a reality to many privileged to work with their new minister and his wife: of their usefulness many can give eloquent testimony today.

By force of circumstances the Church during the previous ministry had plumbed the depths of many emotions, anxiety, sorrow, relief, joy, pride, hope. In marked contrast Mr. Guyton faced the less outwardly exciting, but no less exacting and rewarding tasks of consolidating all that was good in their tradition and of building up their strength, material and spiritual, after the long strain of the war. Experience as Vice-President of the local Y.M.C.A. during his pastorate in Gloucester, war service as a private and an officer, and his ministry in Kingston during the difficult post-war period made him as well equipped for his new sphere of duty as his predecessor had been for his. One great asset both men possessed, a wife admirably fitted by temperament, training and strength for the arduous life of the manse, and each of these contributed much to the success and happiness of her husband’s ministry.

At the Recognition Service held on November 17th, 1926, no one could fail to be impressed by the widely different speakers, all united in affection for Mr. and Mrs. Guyton and by Kingston's regret for their "great loss of consecrated talent and for Hitchin's corresponding gain". On their part the newcomers were deeply touched by the warmth of their welcome. Each possessed the happy knack of putting all at their ease, thereby bringing out the best in them and winning their ready co-operation. The first innovation which Mr. Guyton introduced was a Junior Church Roll to be a link between Church and pupils in the Sunday School, and to prepare them for full participation in Church life by teaching the basic truths of Christianity, and the meaning of the Sacraments and membership. A Young People's Guild (Y.P.G.) was formed to cater in the winter for interests similar to those previously pursued by the C.E., with the added attraction of tennis on the manse court and cricket later in the year. Meanwhile Mrs. Guyton, whose special gift lay with women and girls, was elected President of the Mothers' Meeting, which under its new name, Women's Meeting, soon became one of the most active sections of the Church with a membership of 92. Being herself a musician of high quality and able to inspire others with her own love of music, she formed a string orchestra which was soon in great demand both inside their own walls and beyond. Then came her boldest step of all, the selection and training of a women's choir of 50 members. So rapid was their progress that in 1928 both orchestra and choir took part in several classes of the open Bedfordshire Music Festival. What a fillip was given to all performers when, hardly believing their ears, they heard the verdict on their first efforts. Seventy-eight per cent was the lowest mark of any section; their 'cellist won a bronze, and their violinist a gold medal, and their soloist, accompanied by Mrs. Guyton, received an excellent criticism from Mr. Plunket-Greene, himself a famous singer. Two years later the orchestra was placed top of the elementary section of the Hertfordshire Music Festival by Mr. Ernest Read, thus proving that their initial success was not due merely to beginners' luck, and from then on they all went from strength to strength.

During the early years of this ministry there were unusually heavy financial obligations to be met. There was still a deficit upon the Memorial Schools' Fund, and of the £1,000 loan from the B.U., £700 still remained to be paid. To free themselves from the incubus



of debt, every organisation in the Church played its part, not by occasional efforts but with steady resolution maintained for several years. Expenditure upon their own needs was pared to a minimum, teachers in the Sunday School redecorating the Primary and Beginners' Departments. Later when a surveyor's report confirmed suspicions that the roof and ceiling of the chapel *must* be given immediate attention, enthusiastic advocates of the do-it-yourself policy offered their services. Though the deacons gratefully but firmly declined their offer for the exterior, where high scaffolding was required, they gladly accepted it for the repainting of the gates, railings and doorways of the chapel, but employed skilled labour for the redecoration of the exterior and interior. Since this necessitated the closure of the building for September, services were then held in the Town Hall, and printed invitations were sent to residents in the town known to be unconnected with any place of worship. As soon as the workmen vacated the chapel, members of the Women's Meeting took possession and with loving care scrubbed, dusted and polished every inch until they judged it fit for reoccupation on October 6th. In the hope of clearing the cost of renovation and of rewiring the Chapel, a Thanksgiving Day was arranged. So successful was this that by April 1930 the Secretary of the Renovation Fund reported a balance of £30 3s. 4d.

In 1928 the Church took a very active part in the national tercentenary celebrations which commemorated John Bunyan's birth, Mr. Guyton being appointed as a member of the committee. At the service held in Wain Wood dell, a crowd of about a thousand people from far and wide, many of them having no connection with Baptists, assembled to do honour to the preacher's memory. The service began with a Thanksgiving Hymn, written *c.* 1856 by Edward Foster, direct descendant of the John Foster who had been sentinel on guard in the days of persecution. Reginald Hine, Hitchin's well-known historian, presided and Dr. John Hutton, editor of the *British Weekly*, gave an address which brought home vividly to his audience at what a price their freedom of worship had been bought. Then a cast drawn from the Congregational and the two Baptist Churches of Hitchin gave tableaux of scenes from the life of John Bunyan and from the *Pilgrim's Progress*, arranged in such a way as to present a complete story. The collection at the meeting was sent to Hitchin Hospital.

One new outside claim was made at this period upon the generosity

of the Church; in July 1927 the Baptist Union appealed for £300,000 as a Superannuation Fund to provide pensions for aged and disabled ministers and for ministers' widows and children. This fund was to be augmented every year by an annual payment of five per cent on the stipends of all who joined the scheme, half to be paid by the Church and half by the minister himself: thus he would be assured of a pension of £80 a year on retirement and his widow would receive a pension of £45. Each church was asked to contribute by the end of 1928 as liberally as its means allowed. This appeal, although it came at a time of financial stringency for *Salem*, could not be disregarded, and accordingly they sent £450 to swell the fund.

To celebrate their 30th anniversary in March 1930 the Women's Meeting held two special meetings, the second of which took place on a Sunday evening when a solid phalanx of more than 100 filled the centre of the chapel. In this year eleven of them applied for Church membership, many referring with gratitude to their Sunday School days, and most of them paying tribute to Mrs. Guyton's unfailing interest in them and their families. By this time membership had risen to 130, with an average weekly attendance of 85, made possible by the institution of a crèche, and a separate *Women's Committee* was elected to give supervision and help to young people and new members. But soon, in quest of new worlds to conquer, they appointed one of their number not only to be in charge of domestic affairs in the Church but to act in conjunction with the two *Fabric Secretaries* recently appointed on Mr. Guyton's suggestion. By their ingenious schemes, the Meeting raised considerable sums for Church needs. Finally, perhaps to the astonishment of their male companions, they introduced a trading scheme and pledged themselves to raise at least £60 a year until the B.U. loan had been repaid—and, what is more, they exceeded their target by a fair amount. Not surprisingly, the men, though numerically still much inferior, were spurred on to undertake responsibility for the remainder of the loan.

At this period when Sunday Schools throughout the country were reporting a loss of teenagers, a *Youth Week* was held, in the hope of checking such a drift at *Salem*. In addition to separate services for boys and girls, young men and women, a conference of Church members discussed *Claims of Youth upon the Church*, and followed up this meeting with a social gathering of parents, when Mr. Guyton

explained the part they could play in the religious training of their children. In the following year a similar week of meetings took place for which an outside speaker was invited. As one result of these a Senior Department, consisting of two classes each for boys and girls over sixteen, was formed for which Mr. Gibbs, a member of the diaconate who had watched with special interest over the Y.P.G. since its foundation, was appointed leader. For their use the old school room at the back of the chapel was newly decorated and furnished.

Mr. Guyton meanwhile was playing a bigger part in the world outside his Church. He accepted the post of chaplain to the R.A.F. at Henlow Camp, joined the Rotary Club of Hitchin and became its President in 1933, and became first a member and then padre of Toc H., organisations which brought him into close touch with business and professional circles of the town. In 1932 he proposed a separate Finance Committee for the Church, on the ground that financial affairs should not be the minister's responsibility and that the diaconate should be primarily concerned with the spiritual life of the Church. Two years later, on the recommendation of the deacons, it was decided to transfer all trust property, the chapel and Sunday Schools of *Salem* and the Preston village church to the B.U. for them to act as trustees for these charities.

Since Mr. Guyton had a brother and sister on active service with the B.M.S. in India, naturally the Church's permanently keen interest in foreign missions was intensified. The Rev. J. Jardine from India and the Rev. W. Hancock from the Congo came to Hitchin to preach in the chapel there and also at Wymondley and the Women's Meeting, on work in their respective fields, and it was arranged for Mr. Guyton's brother and sister to spend some of their summer furlough in Hitchin. In January 1934 under the auspices of the North Herts. Auxiliary of the B.M.S., a three days' missionary exhibition was held at *Salem*, in which more than 130 members from all Churches in this association took an active part, as stewards, as public relations officers and as members of the refreshment committee. Two demonstrations of work abroad were given by the Young People's Fellowship of the two Baptist Churches—and children from the two Sunday Schools delighted large audiences (and themselves) by playing native games in costume. At the end

of the series a sum of £40 was sent to the B.M.S., and, it was hoped that

*“the spirit of fellowship engendered between the Churches and renewed interest in the foreign field will lead on to greater efforts on behalf of the kingdom of God”.*

Early in 1934 Mr. Guyton received and accepted an invitation to the pastorate of Wokingham. He and his wife left behind them a Church whose membership, during their eight years in Hitchin, had risen from 258 to 277 (after a fresh revision of the roll), at a time when many Churches of all denominations were facing a drop in numbers. Reginald Hine, a good friend to this Church and its pastor, referred to him in an address he gave to the Herts. Baptist Association, of which Mr. Guyton was President, in these words: “Gratefully as a Hitchin man”, he said, “I think of all those many pastors who have succeeded John Geard, right down to R. F. Guyton, who resembles John Geard in rotundity of body, and in mind and devotion to the secular as well as the spiritual concerns of the parish where he lives”—a fine tribute by a fine man, an Anglican who recognised the value of one who served the town as well as his Church. Another tribute, also from an Anglican friend, came from the Rev. R. F. Routh, vicar of Hitchin, who unable to attend the meeting wrote when on holiday: “Thank you for allowing me to join in your gift to Mr. and Mrs. Guyton. Tilehouse Street is losing a first class minister and I am losing the companionship of a very good friend”.

## 1935-1949

### THE REV. G. SHERIFF JOHNSON

Mr. Johnson, son and nephew of Baptist ministers, came from a twelve years' pastorate at Fishponds Church in Bristol to begin his work in Hitchin at a time of national unsettlement and anxiety: once again, as so often in the past, the minister proved equal to the needs of the Church and the age. His Recognition service was notable for the presence of two non-Baptist friends, the Vicar of Fishponds, who spoke appreciatively of the mutual understanding and fellowship between Mr. Johnson and himself, and Reginald Hine, who referring to the minister as a fellow author, paid a graceful compliment to his book, *Digging the Old Wells*. Within a few weeks Miss H. M. Russell as President had the pleasure of welcoming her own minister and his colleague, the Rev. T. G. Black, minister of the sister Church in Walsworth Road, into membership of the Herts. Baptist Association.

From the day of their arrival both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson felt instantly at home. Having had long experience of pastoral work, they were impressed by the "delightful sense of fellowship and freedom" which greeted them. Their first years in Hitchin were overshadowed nationally by the widespread unemployment, and internationally by the mounting tension caused by the rise of Fascism and Hitlerism. In 1937 to counteract the industrial depression a Government Training Centre was set up in Letchworth, for boys between 16 and 18, many of whom were billeted in Hitchin. These lads, often homesick and lonely, found a welcome at the manse, and personal friends in Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. A team of

visitors, chiefly drawn from the Y.P.F. went to every house, inviting each one of the 150 trainees and the families with whom they were living, to the Social Hour held in the hall after the Sunday evening service, especially for the younger members. On the first occasion, an exceptionally stormy day, only two were bold enough to venture. But they found Mr. Johnson at the chapel gates, waiting in the torrential rain to welcome them, and evidently they reported very favourably on their reception, since many more turned up in the next few weeks, and soon were reinforced by young recruits stationed at the R.A.F. camp in Henlow. Many of these became regular attendants at the Church and joined some of the organisations there, to the mutual benefit of all.

In this period, new housing estates which were being developed in many areas throughout the country provided great opportunity for all Christian Churches. Gladly accepting this challenge the B.U. initiated their *Forward Movement*, a ten-year scheme planned on a county basis, in the hope of raising one million pounds\* between 1931 and 1941, in order to expand or rebuild their existing churches or to build new in places where none existed. The prompt and generous response to their appeal enabled the first fruits to be seen in Hertfordshire early in 1940 when Miss Russell, the only woman County Commissioner in the country, had the privilege of opening a new Baptist Church in Welwyn Garden City, where for twelve years the congregation had worshipped in hired halls. But though the target was exceeded by £20,000 before the period had elapsed, part of the fund was diverted of necessity to the immediate relief of Baptist ministers and their Churches, 225 of which had been destroyed or severely damaged by 1943.

After Munich in 1938 the plight of Jewish refugees, escaping or expelled penniless from Germany, became widely known in Britain, and aroused such sympathy in Hitchin that the town undertook to maintain twelve of them for two years, so that they might be taught the language and a trade. Early in the next year Mr. Kingsley Russell went to Dovercourt to select boys for whom work had been guaranteed, and by April most of them were reported to be already at work, and living in two houses put at their disposal, each with its own warden. Of the annual expenses estimated at £500 Tilehouse Street Church promised to provide £40 each year; but the outbreak of war prevented the full implementation of the scheme.

\*To the appeal Tilehouse Street Baptist Church sent contributions of £637.

On Sunday, September 3rd, 1939, the morning congregation came out to find the forecourt filled with London schoolchildren evacuated from Enfield, together with a group of expectant mothers, all waiting to be taken to their billets. From that day the lives of many families in the town were conditioned for the next six years by the needs of their evacuees.

Gaps in the organisations of the Church were filled in many cases by newcomers, some of them teachers in the schools evacuated to the district. From November 1939 until July 1945 boys from a Hornsey school occupied the Memorial Schools. When the Battle of Britain began, the vestry, sandbagged outside and boarded inside, became an air raid shelter. The large schoolroom behind the chapel was claimed for a variety of purposes. At first Eastbourne mothers and their children who arrived in the second evacuation of 1940, thankfully used it for a social centre in the afternoons and as a rendezvous for their husbands at the weekends. Later when the mothers were absorbed into war work, a nursery school was held there. Finally at the joint request of the Welfare Department of H.U.D.C. and an Army Welfare Officer a club with a canteen was opened in 1944 for members of the Forces and their friends. This very quickly became famous for its comfort, amenities and friendly atmosphere, and as its visitors' book showed, it was visited by men from almost all the countries of the Allies. During its twenty months of life it was staffed every evening by volunteers from the Church, and served more than 93,000 hot drinks and 54,000 meals, thanks mainly to a mother-daughter combination of the Brook family, always imperturbable in the face of wartime shortages of food or equipment and ready to cope with all emergencies. What this club meant to men and women too, some of them foreigners and all uprooted from their homes, was summed up in a letter from one of them: "I miss the canteen: I shall always have a warm spot in my heart for your chapel and for the people who spent their leisure in making it possible for the boys to have a little home comfort".

At the end of hostilities prisoners of war, who were still working on farms in the neighbourhood and living at St. Ibbs\* and in Offley, were offered the use of the club for two nights a fortnight until they were repatriated. Then it was decided to turn it into a

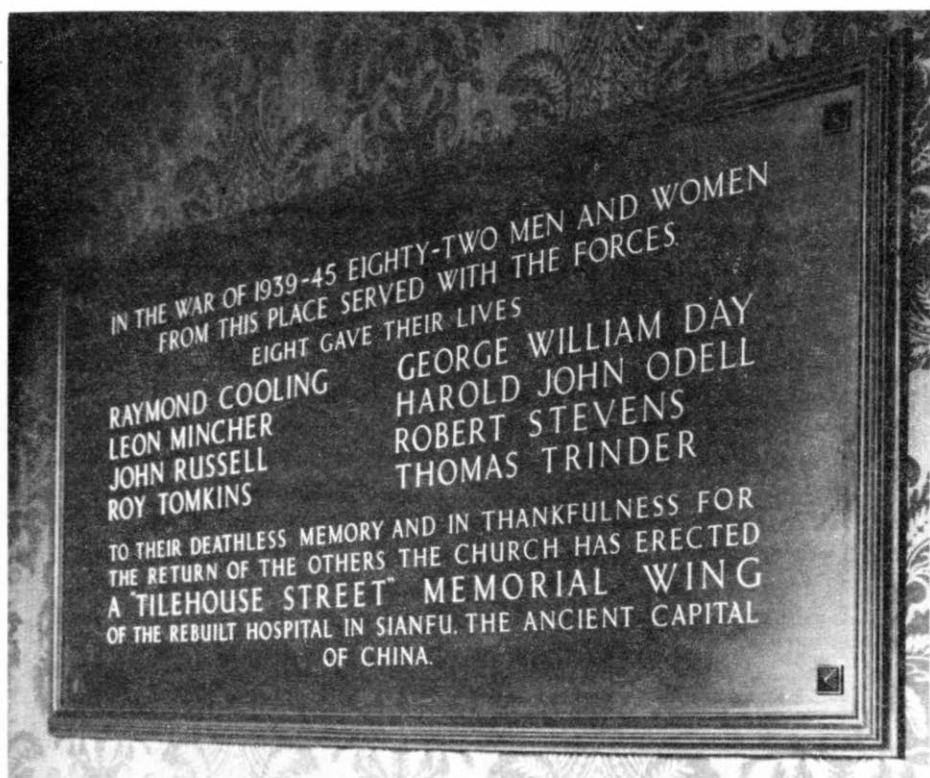
\*St. Ibbs is a large house on the London Road.

Men's Contact Club, open to all in the town who wished to share its activities and interests; some of these were purely social, others philanthropic and cultural, but all were governed by a desire to extend Christian fellowship to anyone ready to accept it. This club is still flourishing today, and each session plans a very varied and lively programme, offering scope for many activities, among which their horticultural shows have been greatly enjoyed and their efforts in the shrubbery of the grounds particularly appreciated.

Throughout the war Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, spreading abroad the infection of their own good courage, gave magnificent leadership to their people. By means of regular letters he kept in close touch with members serving in the Forces, whether they were on Arctic convoys carrying vital supplies to the Russian front or fighting in one of the widely scattered theatres of war, or helping Malta to uphold its title as Britain's unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. In 1939 eight members departed to their several units; by the end of the war their numbers had risen to 82, dispersed among all branches of the Services except the W.R.N.S. Mrs. Johnson made the manse a haven for the lonely and unhappy, and while enthusiastically supporting wartime appeals, never neglected the good causes which she had helped in peacetime. Since Mrs. Bradley Gatward, an excellent organiser and needlewoman, was secretary of the local branch of the British Mission to the Jews, to which Mrs. Johnson had devoted herself for many years, the two co-operated so successfully that each year the Church's contribution to its funds reached unprecedented heights. And equally satisfactory results were achieved for the B.M.S. by means of film shows, lectures and exhibitions, augmented by sales of work, which were often held in the manse garden.

During the grim months of 1943 when the war situation gave scant cause for optimism, the Church showed its unwavering confidence in the future by raising £1,119 5s for overseas missions and opening a War Memorial Fund. Though no attempt was made to settle any details, the general principle was established that the fund should be used to help rebuild a war-wrecked hospital, in whatever part of the world the greatest need was found. Even when much of southern England and London, above all, was exposed to daily, and sometimes hourly, bombardment by pilotless planes (alias flying bombs and doodle-bugs), no month passed without substantial





The Plaque in the vestibule of the present church  
(Photographed by Ernest Clayton)

additions to the fund, and when peace was proclaimed it already amounted to £1,873; final efforts brought it up to £2,833. Fifty-three pounds of this sum was retained, just enough to pay for a simple plaque recording the names of those who had been killed, which was erected in the chapel vestibule and unveiled in 1947. As a thank offering that no part of their town had been destroyed or even damaged by a single bomb, as an appreciation of Britain's Far Eastern ally, China, who at the cost of grievous suffering and sacrifice had contributed much towards final victory by her heroic resistance to the Japanese invaders, as a "worthy memorial to the eight men of the Church who gave their lives for a just, free and friendly world, and as a token of gratitude for the men and women who had returned safe and sound", the balance of the fund, £2,780, was sent to the B.M.S. with a request that they should use it to build a new out-patients' wing for their hospital at Sian in the province of Shensi. This hospital had been built in 1903; during the revolution of 1911, when its staff had nursed the wounded of both sides with a selfless disregard of their own safety which had brought death to two of them, it had been utterly destroyed. In gratitude to the doctors, nurses and missionaries the victors gave a site upon which the B.M.S. erected a second hospital. During the Japanese invasion of the Second World War, this too was razed to the ground and all its equipment was lost. Since the Rev. William Upchurch, a member of Tilehouse Street Church, had been serving in the mission field of China since 1935, very understandably the Church chose Sian as the site of their Memorial Wing. Early in 1948 news arrived that the hospital had been rebuilt and that twenty missionaries and doctors were already engaged in Church and medical work there. Shortly afterwards, at the earnest request of the Chinese Christian leaders, these twenty were withdrawn, not to safe-guard their own lives, but to prevent Chinese Christians from being regarded, and consequently persecuted, as agents of a Western power. In November 1954 news reached Hitchin that, though the hospital was in Communist hands, Christian doctors and nurses were still responsible for the work there. Though all religious propaganda was forbidden, yet their mere presence gave a wonderful opportunity for them to spread Christianity by action and example. Today scarcely any reliable news filters through the bamboo curtain, but there is no reason to believe that they and their successors are not still continuing to exercise their healing ministry among the Chinese people.

During this pastorate 283 new members were received into fellowship—a net gain of 100—which brought the Church's numbers to 372, the highest peak it has ever attained. The verdict of one may explain the reason: "No one can ever estimate how much Mr. Johnson's pastoral visitation has meant to our people in these times of stress: he is inspired". At no time did the Church work in happier co-operation with other Protestant Churches in the town. For example, Canon Kempe, Vicar of St. Mary's Church preached in *Salem*, and on another occasion presided in the Memorial Hall, while Mr. Johnson took the chair in St. Mary's schoolroom. A united Service of Intercession in St. Saviour's Church was attended by Free Church members, whose ministers took a part in it. Open air meetings, youth campaigns, lectures and missionary exhibitions, were supported by members of all denominations, and when the Church of England's report "Towards the Conversion of England" was published in 1947, a discussion group met at Tilehouse Street Church to study it in detail, and to plan a joint programme as a follow-up. In the following year the Free Church Federal Council, which now included Churches in Letchworth and Stevenage was reconstituted, and the Hitchin and District Free Church Federal Council was formed.

After a ministry of fourteen and a half years in Hitchin (the longest since John Broad's) Mr. and Mrs. Johnson felt that the time had come to depart, and accept what each knew would be their final pastorate at Bessels Green in Kent. Here they gave the same loving ministrations to their new flock and received the same love and loyalty from them. On the completion of their time there they retired to live in Hitchin, to the great delight of the Church. Though both were growing feebler, and Mr. Johnson was often incapacitated by attacks of bronchial asthma, he still continued to serve *Salem's* village Churches and frequently preached in his old pulpit. Even after his wife's death in 1963 he laboured tirelessly to visit and comfort the lonely, the aged, and the sick, and courageously overcame, or disregarded, the physical disabilities that beset his last years. His death at the age of 83 came in a manner typical of his whole life. He took the morning service at the Baptist Church in Clifton, came home for a few hours, and as he was preparing to set out for the evening service he peacefully entered into his rest.

No mere catalogue of Mr. Johnson's gifts and achievements can explain his influence over those brought within his range. The

MAN far transcended the sum total of his qualities. No one glancing at his slight figure could have guessed his energy and fortitude. Himself an experienced mountaineer, he delighted to share his own love of the Alps with novices, and conducted several parties to Switzerland. He was a skilful bee-keeper. His scholarship and love of good literature were evident in the clarity and beauty of his sermons, for he possessed the art of making music with words. But far more important than all else was the fact that he was an outstanding combination of a practical man of business and a visionary. As the former he set the finances of the Church on such a sound basis that, after his early years there, no special gift days or appeals were required for the Church's own internal needs; as the latter he inspired his people to heights of sacrificial generosity and service which matched his own. He did in very truth possess that "royalty of inward happiness and the serenity which comes from living close to God" and the ruling passion of his life was his love for Christ, which was reflected in his love and compassion for his fellow men.

As a permanent memorial to Mr. Johnson's life and work, the Church opened a fund in 1964, which, largely as the result of Mr. Arthur Deamer's initiative as Treasurer, realized £318: of this £300 has been invested, and the interest is used to increase the sum disbursed from the Communion offerings to members in need. With the balance an oak lectern, simple and beautiful in craftsmanship, was made, which now stands in front of the rostrum in the chapel and a family Bible has been placed upon it.

## 1950-1954

THE REV., RALPH DARVILL

Once again the pastoral care and conduct of Church affairs devolved upon the diaconate, with Mr. A. S. Foster as their chairman. Several important decisions were made during this short interregnum. Pondering the need to win and to retain young people, who had perhaps outgrown the Sunday School but who were not yet ready for the Contact Clubs, and hoping to encourage them to look upon the Church as their spiritual, cultural and social home, the Church decided to throw open the Youth Fellowship to those over thirteen and under twenty-five, and thus to try to train a succession of leaders, eager and able to play their part in the Church of the future. The *Messenger*, which had been fighting a long and losing battle against rising costs, was obliged to increase the annual subscription from 2s to 2s 6d; yet even so it still remained a quite remarkable bargain. The Men's Contact Club branched out by organising a badminton club which soon had a membership of 40 seniors and 24 juniors, by arranging a rota of visitors to the male wards at Chalkdell Hospital, and by replanting the shubbery in the grounds with commemorative and other gifts. Later on they dug and filled the rosebeds, which flanking the centre path still do much to beautify the approach to the chapel. The Scouts redecorated their own room, and much was done to maintain and improve Church property. Finally the Women's Meeting collected £50 and made new curtains for the manse in readiness for whoever might come.

Early in 1950 the Church sent a unanimous invitation to the Rev.

Ralph Darvill. As a boy of fifteen he joined the Merchant Navy and served in it for several years; then after training at the Manchester Baptist College, and at the University there, he undertook a nine years' pastorate in that town and followed it by a six years' ministry in Blackpool. His letter of acceptance reveals the motives which had influenced his decision:

*"I shall enter upon my ministry immensely fortified by the sense of the Divine leading which both the Church and I have been moved to confess. Nothing must move us from this prime conviction, as we put our hands afresh to the task to which together we are called. As your minister I shall need not only your loyal support in the actual work . . . but also your prayers. For my part I assure you that I shall not spare myself in endeavouring to fulfil the great demands and the sublime privileges of the preaching and pastoral office. It will be my purpose . . . to try, given health, strength and the Grace of Christ, to honour the great trust your invitation lays on me".*

Then came a few weeks of intense activity both inside and outside for the two Contact Clubs and for the Women's Meeting. An amazing amount of elbow grease, soap, polish and paint was lavished on the Schools and chapel and on the renovation of the manse from top to bottom. As they lovingly laboured at their tasks did they perhaps recall George Herbert's lines

"Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws  
Makes that and the action fine"?

Certainly they achieved their purpose, and made all fine to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Darvill and their two young children Gillian and David. Meanwhile a squad of men were busy in the garden, repairing or renewing the tennis nets, and cutting, rolling and marking the court in readiness for the new season's play.

By happy but fortuitous timing Mr. Darvill's first service as minister coincided with the Sunday School anniversary (always a Red Letter day in the Church's calendar) which gave him an early opportunity to meet parents and teachers at the *Social Hour* arranged for the following evening. Immediately the vitality and enthusiasm both of their new pastor and his wife delighted all. In those post-war years his varied experience was invaluable to a community which was adjusting itself, sometimes rather painfully, to a peacetime way of life. Very important in his mind was the place of the

Church in the outside world, a fact which may underlie his great interest in the B.U. Home Work Fund, of which later he became Chairman of Committee. Very soon the men of the Church found in him a man after their own heart, one who shared their interests and fellowship, and who tirelessly strove in all their activities to lead them into the service of the Church. No less active and public-spirited was his wife, who in a very short time became a much loved member of the Church which she served devotedly, especially in the Women's Meeting which she helped to reorganize, and in the Women's Contact Club, of each of which she became President.

With a young and lively family occupying the manse, it was natural that the youth of the Church should find understanding and sympathetic leaders there. If Mr. Darvill was indeed a man's man, he was no less a boy's boy, able to share the adventures of the Scouts (and of the Jelbies\* too) and the interests of the Youth Fellowship. Among the mature members of the congregation, it was his preaching, forceful and direct, which remained most vivid in their memory. The power of his argument and presentation was such that after the service or meeting the comment was often heard "He leaves little room for questions; he has answered them all before you could even ask them".

In June 1951 an event of national importance occurred—the *Festival of Britain*, celebrating the centenary anniversary of the *Great Exhibition*, which the Prince Consort had organized in the Crystal Palace erected in Hyde Park. Since up and down the country, towns and villages were arranging their own celebrations as part of the Festival, Hitchin, intensely proud of its long and certainly not undistinguished past, produced a *Pageant of its History* which was graced by the presence of the Queen, now Elizabeth the Queen Mother. When the Pageant ended, Mr. Delme Ratcliffe and H.U.D.C. kindly gave permission for the covered stand which the latter had erected in the beautiful Priory grounds, to be used for a United Free Church Service. There in the glorious beauty of a June evening a vast congregation, drawn from the five Free Churches of the town, whose own chapels were closed on that occasion, expressed their thanks to God for the progress and achievement of the past century.

This Pageant took place half way through the six months'

\* Name used for members of Girls' Life Brigade—the G.L.B.

preparation for a Students' Mission to Hitchin which had been arranged for the end of August and the beginning of September. For the six months before the Mission began, steady pressure was maintained of planning and praying both among students and Church members. It was made clear to all involved in this visitation that the students were coming not to show how the work should be done and still less to imply any previous failure, but to work with and through the local Church, in the hope of winning more souls for Christ. To ensure wide publicity brochures were distributed, 3,000 homes were visited and a series of house meetings in different parts of the town was arranged, in order to bring little groups into close personal contact with individual members of the team. Constantly in the course of the six months the Church held Prayer and Intercessory meetings, recognising the truth,

*"If we have prepared to the best of our ability, and if we carry on to the end of the mission in the same spirit of faith and loyalty, then we may confidently leave the results to the working of the Holy Spirit."*

After the Mission had ended, the students expressed warm appreciation of the advance preparations made on their behalf, of the prayer and support which they had received, and of Mr. Darvill's inspiration and co-operation: moreover they gratefully confessed how much they themselves had learned and gained from the fortnight's experience. Not only in the immediate future but in the course of the next year, testimony was received from different quarters of the abiding influence which the Mission had exercised in the lives of many who shared in it actively or passively.

In June 1952 a Sunday School weekend was arranged, during which a Teachers' Rally took place at Brand Street Methodist Church on the Saturday. On the next day a number of schools in the North Herts.' Sunday School Union assembled in St. Mary's Square, and, preceded by the Stotfold Salvation Army Brass Band, marched to Tilehouse Street Church for the annual Scholars' Rally.

There was a treble cause to rejoice in 1953 when Mr. Darvill was elected President of the Free Church Federal Council of North Herts. and appointed as Free Church Chaplain to the Lister and North Herts. hospitals, and Miss H. M. Russell became National President of the Baptist Women's League. When at her induction she delivered her presidential address first in the Kingsway Hall and later in the Central Hall, Westminster, (since neither was large enough to



accommodate the great number who attended) she was supported and heartened by the presence of seventy women from her own Church, and by the knowledge that those left behind were praying that God would give her strength equal to her great task, not only on the opening day but throughout her term of office, as she toured the country visiting Baptist women everywhere.

After nearly four years of active ministry Mr. Darvill was confronted with a very complex and difficult problem. The needs of the Church at Manvers Street, Bath, were presented to him so forcibly that after much thought and deliberation he was led to accept the call to the pastorate there. To the universal regret of the Church in Tilchouse Street and of a wider circle in the town of Hitchin and beyond, Mr. Darvill preached his farewell sermon on August 1st, 1954, and all wished him and his family Godspeed with a sharp pang of sorrow in their hearts.

At the farewell meeting the dominant note in the Church was one of joyful thankfulness for a ministry so richly blessed. Mr. Darvill, for his part, commented on many factors which had made it happy for himself and his wife, on the vital devoted leadership in the village Chapels, and on the harmony of the mother Church which augured well for his successor. Paying their last tribute to their minister, the large number of his people who attended his Recognition Service in his new pastorate showed their esteem and affection for the family.

Though this ministry was almost the shortest in the Church's life, it has left a deep mark on all the members, and it is a great joy to all when Mr. and Mrs. Darvill are able to revisit Hitchin. After a fruitful pastorate in Bath from 1954 to 1965, Mr. Darvill was appointed General Superintendent of the Western Area, a post of great importance and influence, for which his wide and varied experience fitted him admirably, and in which his gifts of personality and character find full scope.

## 1955—1966

THE REV. EDWARD T. SMALLEY 1955–1966

During the interval before a new appointment was made, Mr. William Upchurch, the senior elder, presided at Church meetings, guiding their deliberations with

*“modesty, courtesy, sanctified common sense, true broadmindedness and Christian charity”.*

Acting on a hint from Mr. Darvill about the financial and domestic difficulties of maintaining the garden and the manse, erected in the more spacious but less labour-saving days of the Victorian era, the Church decided to sell the property. Until a new manse could be bought or built, they gladly accepted the offer of temporary accommodation in a house which a member owned in the Offley Road, conveniently near the Chapel.

In August 1954 a month's exchange visit took place, whereby members of the Youth Fellowship of St. Mary's and Salem's Churches were entertained by, and themselves entertained similar groups from Churches in Dusseldorf—an enterprise largely due to the enthusiasm, initiative and organization of Mr. Tom Slade, (secretary of Salem's Sunday School), who, with the Rev. D. Graebe, jointly conducted the Hitchin party of twenty young people. This visit which “forged a strong link in the all too short chain of international goodwill” was repeated with equal success in the following year, and for some time afterwards the Inter-Church fellowship, formed between Hitchin and Dusseldorf, continued to be a source of mutual benefit and happiness to all who shared it.

In March 1955 an invitation to the pastorate was sent to and accepted by the Rev. E. T. Smalley, who after training as a mature student at Bristol Baptist College had been pastor of Rockingham Rd. Baptist Church, in Kettering, for five years. Having accepted the invitation, he made his first contact with his new Church through the pages of the *Messenger*. Referring to their fine tradition as a mighty testimony to the power of God in the lives of consecrated men and women, he reminded them that tradition alone cannot carry a Church onward to perform the tasks which God would have them accomplish, and urged them to remember that this power, once so great, was still the same.

His Recognition and Induction Services in May were attended by a large representative gathering from Hitchin and by seventy friends from Kettering. It soon became clear that Mr. Smalley was a man of wide interests, vividly aware of the claims of the outside world upon the Church, and eager to join with Christians of all Churches in promoting evangelism at home and abroad. Begging the first Church meeting to regard the Tuesday meeting for prayer and Bible study as their priority during the week, he asked them to co-operate in an *Inner Mission* for themselves, as a preparation for an *Outer Mission* in the next year. Recognizing young people's need for guidance and instruction to equip them for effective Christian service, he gave a course of training in teaching and preaching, of which twenty of the Y.P.F. took advantage.

Since a rehousing scheme was being carried out in the Burford Way area of the town and new housing estates were being built elsewhere, a team of volunteers made house-to-house visitations in the hope of drawing within the orbit of the Church those unconnected with any place of worship. Occasionally *Guest Services* were held on Sunday evenings, and attracted many strangers, including a group of twelve men and women from the U.S.A. Air Force Station at Chicksands, where the Chaplain was a Baptist. With the willing co-operation of the staff, a Sunday evening service in a ward of the Lister Hospital took place as an experiment. Since it obviously met a real need and gave pleasure to many patients, it soon established itself as a regular part of the hospital routine. Today, a different group goes each week from various Churches in Hitchin and conducts, not only in the Lister but also in North Herts Hospital, a simple service in which members of their choirs and Youth Organisations play an important part.

In 1957 four Russian students training at Spurgeon's College were entertained by the Hitchin Church and aroused great interest by their up-to-date account of conditions in the Churches of their country.

For the first time the Sunday evening service was broadcast by the B.B.C., to the great joy of the members, both in Hitchin and in far distant places. Perhaps because letters arrived from many absent friends to describe their delight in listening to this broadcast, a tape recorder service was arranged shortly afterwards for those debarred by age or infirmity from attendance in the chapel. When Mr. George Cooling resigned his office as deacon and fabric secretary, owing to reasons of health, the Church, in recognition of his services bought a tape recorder, which has been in constant demand ever since, both for him as long as he lived, and for other members. Each week a record is made of the complete Sunday evening service, which in the next few days is taken by volunteers to all who wish to join in this form of worship in their own homes.

A little later an opportunity of great scope and importance was provided by an invitation from the Herts Baptist association to the two Hitchin Churches to unite with Bunyan Chapel, Stevenage, in sponsoring a new Church there. To absorb some of London's overspill population, a big expansion of that town had been planned, to bring its numbers to 60,000, and sites in Stevenage New Town had been offered to Churches of many denominations. The B.U. had accepted considerable financial responsibility for one in Hydean Way, and Bunyan Chapel being too small to undertake such an ambitious project unaided, it hoped that the two Hitchin Baptist Churches would support the new venture by all means in their power.

Their hopes were fully realised. Mr. Smalley as Chairman of the Sponsoring Committee aroused and steadily maintained the interest and enthusiasm of the three Churches throughout the five year period required for the scheme. At every stage, in the initial planning, in supervision of the construction and in the early problems and difficulties, he discharged his task efficiently and happily until a fine new building was erected, a minister was appointed, and in 1964 Tilehouse Street Church handed over its final instalment of the £750 which it had pledged itself to raise. Even after this ceremony, Mr. Smalley continued to give practical help and counsel until the new Church was strong enough to stand alone.

This commitment was not allowed to hamper efforts in other directions. A new manse, smaller and more convenient, was bought in Mount Pleasant (John Bunyan, surely, might have chosen such a name for a Baptist Minister's home), within easy reach of the chapel.

At the end of 1961 a two day Bible exhibition was held in the Memorial Schools, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Hitchin Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society. On the first day the Vicar of Hitchin, on the second, the Rev. W. Grant, President of North Herts Free Church Federal Council, presided. Conducted tours were arranged for schools to see

Contemporary exhibits of the Bible at work

Tape recordings of different ways to use the Bible

A display of ancient and modern Bibles in many tongues

"Speed the Word"—a film of the Society in action

The Bible on stamps

In the afternoon a Bible Play, *A Treasury of Most Costly Jewels* was produced by Mrs. Daphne Guyton (daughter in law of a former pastor): on the second evening the 150th annual general meeting took place, with Martin Maddan, Esq., M.P. for Hitchin, in the chair.

During this period extensive reconstruction and repairs were urgently required for almost all the premises including the Schools. Nor was this surprising, for the Chapel was well over a century old, and though it had been redecorated in 1930, its last major overhaul had been in 1891. During the renovations, one almost forgotten treasure came to light, linking them with those carried out seventy years earlier. A table cloth was found, 7½ feet square, made up of 519 alternate squares of white and red linen, each beautifully embroidered by Miss Charlotte Gatward, with the initials of those who contributed to the expense of the reconstruction. Here could be seen, sometimes arranged in little blocks together, initials of many old families prominent in the Church and still linked with it by their descendants, and also initials of newcomers, who later became grandparents of some who are serving it today.

Following their long established tradition, men, women and scouts (88 out of a membership of 353) carried out some of the work, including all lighting installations: within a surprisingly short time the whole task was completed and the chapel was reopened in the autumn of 1961. The bill for £5,800 took rather longer to discharge.

Many gifts both in kind and money were made, among them a flood lighting installation for the Chapel façade, which commemorated the 70 years' membership of Mrs. A. E. H. Theobalds, whose family for three generations has given much devoted service to the Church. By 1963 the Church was no longer "in the red", and could enjoy, without a single qualm of conscience, the brightness and beauty of the redecorated Chapel.

In the Easter holidays of 1962 a team of boys came under the auspices of the *Student Christian Movement in Schools* to work for a week, mainly in the newer portion of the graveyard. They left behind very welcome proof of their muscular strength and capacity for sheer hard work, equalled only by the zest with which they joined members of the Y.P.F. in various outings—to Pegsdon hills and to Cambridge, and in evening activities in the canteen.

This was the year of two Ter-Jubilee celebrations for Tilehouse Street Church—the first for the B.U., the second for the Sunday School. To commemorate their approaching 150th anniversary the former issued an appeal for £300,000 as a fund from which loans could be made to individual Churches wishing to extend their premises, and to Baptist Colleges which were expanding or modernizing their buildings. To this appeal, spread over a period of years, Salem sent £750.

Much of the time and energies of the Church in 1965 was devoted to its Christian Stewardship Campaign. From a B.U. leaflet, issued to explain its purpose, the following extract is quoted "Christian Stewardship is the practice of systematic and proportional giving of time, abilities and material possessions, based on the conviction that these are a trust from God, to be used in His service for the benefit of all mankind, in grateful acknowledgement of Christ's redeeming love."

Five groups of carefully chosen members studied and reported on aspects of Church life and work under the headings Spiritual, Financial, Organizational, Denominational, Citizenship. As a result of their constructive proposals, a livelier sense of responsibility was aroused in individuals and greater opportunities were given for their effective service in the Church and community. The campaign culminated in a *Students' Mission to the town* when fifteen undergraduates joined many members in visiting five hundred homes connected with the Sunday School and Church and in making new contacts with families, which in many cases revealed their need and

desire for help from the Church. In her final report given at a Church meeting, their leader stressed her belief in the value of the mission for the students themselves and her hope that it would help younger members of the Church to feel closely integrated in its life.

Early in 1966 Mr. Smalley received and accepted an unsought invitation to become the minister of the Union Church of Hutton and Shenfield, where 40% of the members were Baptists, 30% Congregationalists, and the rest Methodists or Presbyterians. Such a Church offered wonderful scope for Mr. Smalley's special gifts and interests, for throughout his ministry one of his chief aims had been to bridge the gulf between the various denominations in the Universal Church. His valedictory service in mid-April made it clear how successful he had been. Father Philip Lemmon, the Roman Catholic priest, paid a warm tribute to him (the first Baptist minister to whom he had ever spoken) in the words "Mr. Smalley has done an enormous amount of good in the town and in Tilehouse Street Church". The Vicar of Hitchin testified to the value of the work he had done for Christian unity, in his capacity as the first Vice-Chairman of the Hitchin branch of the Council of Churches, and Mr. Kingsley Russell summed up the feelings of Salem when he said "Even more important than what a man does is what he is; to us Mr. Smalley has been a devoted minister and a truly loveable man, whom we happily remember for his friendliness, modesty and complete sincerity". Finally, indicative of Mr. Smalley's deep interest in education and social conditions was the presence at the farewell party of fellow Rotarians and Headmasters for whose schools he had served as a member of the Board of Managers, and whom he had invited as his personal friends.

As their last tribute to Mr. Smalley and his wife, who had loyally supported his work throughout his ministry, and who had given much valued help as President of the Women's Meeting, and to their family, now increased to three by Alison, the first baby born in the manse for over fifty years, more than one hundred members travelled to Shenfield in order to attend his Induction Service there.

1966—

THE REV. R. H. TEBBUTT

Immediately after Mr. Smalley's resignation the Church adopted for the first time, a procedure for Ministerial Selection which was becoming common practice in Churches belonging to the B.U. In accordance with this, recommendations made by the Area Superintendent are weighed by the deacons, and a candidate is invited to an informal meeting with them, at which there is opportunity for full and frank discussion on both sides. Following this, a proposal may then be sent by the diaconate to the Church meeting, that a Minister who has been thus interviewed shall be invited to spend a weekend in Hitchin and to conduct the Sunday services in the chapel. Then at a specially convened Church meeting the final decision to invite him to the pastorate may be made.

It was cause for deep thankfulness that the very first recommendation of the Area Superintendent led straightway to the appointment of the Rev. R. H. Tebbutt: after training at Rawdon college he had held his first ministry of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  years in Nottingham, and his second, of seventeen years, in Leicester. In both these towns he had made a great contribution to the life of the Churches and the community, and in Leicester he had most successfully discharged a responsibility of great complexity and importance which had arisen from the necessity to amalgamate two Baptist Churches. One of these, a very long established Church, over 315 years old, at Friar Lane, in the centre of the city, had to be demolished to make way for a road widening scheme; the other at Braunstone, where he had been minister since 1949, was a recently formed Church which was



rapidly outgrowing its temporary building. To weld two such dissimilar communities into a corporate unity was a task requiring great delicacy and patience—the present prosperity of the joint Church that was formed shows how successfully Mr. Tebbutt accomplished it.

Moreover, his special interests—in pastoral care, in young people of the Church and Sunday School and in the mission field—are those particularly dear to the Hitchin Church. There was a further reason for rejoicing inasmuch as he was able to begin his ministry early in July 1966.

In the interval Mr. Philip Davies, the Treasurer, gave the highly encouraging news that the recent Christian Stewardship Campaign had resulted in a 38% rise in the collections for the current year.

This was a time when all the Churches of the town were joining wholeheartedly in supporting the *Christian Aid Week* held in May. Salem's representatives on the joint committee formed for the whole town inspired such enthusiasm among their own members that a sum of £110 2s 3d was raised. With their consciences sorely troubled by the dire needs of many underprivileged nations of the world, the people decided that a similar campaign should become an annual event, indefinitely, and that they would extend the range of their efforts to help by joining the newly formed Hitchin branch of the *Save the Children Fund*. In the brief period since the decision was made, this organisation has received strong support from *Salem*, in its clothing drives for the benefit of Vietnam and Biafra, in raising funds and in sending gifts contributed in response to their Christmas appeal.

The Induction Service on July 2nd was conducted by the Rev. David Highton, B.A., who had acted as Moderator during the interregnum, and who presided at the tea meeting that followed. After short speeches from the Church Secretary and from Mr. Tebbutt himself, he was inducted into his new ministry by the Rev. Douglas Hicks, General Superintendent of the Central Area, in the presence of sixty friends from Leicester, and a large gathering which included representatives of all the Churches and most organisations of Hitchin. The charge to the minister was given by the Rev. W. J. Grant, M.A., General Superintendent of the East Midlands Area, and the Rev. S. M. Stone, M.A., pastor of the sister Baptist Church in Hitchin, led the prayers.

Tea (if that is the right word for the meal that followed) in the

Memorial Hall provided an opportunity for the Hitchin and Leicester contingents respectively, to congratulate and to condole with each other in gaining and in losing a minister, who had for so long been "a brother beloved" in Braunstone, and valued by all his fellow ministers in Leicester. Then the pastor of Walsworth Road Church, the Vicar of St. Mary's, Father Lemmon, the Congregational and Methodist ministers each assured Mr. Tebbutt of the warm welcome awaiting him as a fellow worker with them in Christ's vineyard, and his wife and daughter. After accepting Mr. and Mrs. Tebbutt's invitation to visit the manse in its semi-rural setting on the outskirts of the town, their Leicester friends must have returned home with the comforting assurance that they were leaving them with real friends.

Though Mr. Tebbutt's ministry is still not yet three years old, several important developments have already occurred in it. When the periodic revision of the Church roll was carried out, on his suggestion, *Associate Membership* was introduced for those no longer in active membership who still wished to preserve a link with the Church. These retain the right to attend Church meetings and other events, but they have no power to vote on any matter. More formal recognition has been given to the *Youth Council* of which he is Chairman, and to which each separate youth organisation of the Church sends two representatives—the G.B., the Scouts, the Sunday afternoon, and the Youth Fellowship, the Sunday Schools and the Boys' Club. New ground has been broken in their united efforts for the common weal and a closer spirit of cooperation is being fostered among all these groups.

During the winter and spring of 1967–1968, selected members, representing widely diverging views, met at fortnightly intervals, first to study and discuss under Mr. Tebbutt's chairmanship, the booklet "Baptists and Unity" issued by the B.U., and then to examine the constructive proposals put forward in it, and to consider if unity among Christians can be achieved without the sacrifice of vital principles for any denomination. The nine meetings, exhaustive, provocative, and stimulating, did much to promote a deeper understanding of the complex issues involved and a wider sympathy with conflicting opinions among all the members who took part in them. It is a striking tribute to the Chairman's skill and tireless patience that this committee succeeded in drawing up a joint report which

was passed unanimously at a Church meeting and finally forwarded to the B.U. committee.

In March 1968 a committee of the Wymondley\* members at their own request met Mr. Tebbutt to discuss their proposal that a completely independent Church Fellowship should be established in their village. Many cogent reasons had prompted this proposal. The population was still expanding and many people felt that it had now become big enough to justify the formation of a separate Christian Fellowship. Several of the newcomers had no special links with Tilehouse Street, and for several years the work in Wymondley had been carried on without direct help from the Church in Hitchin. Considering the great opportunities for evangelism in their village, the people firmly believed it right to concentrate their responsibilities in their own immediate area. They therefore asked to withdraw their membership from their Mother Church, and to become foundation members of a Christian Fellowship in Wymondley. Cherishing happy memories of their past links with Salem, twenty-two of them gladly took advantage of the recently introduced Associate Membership, and expressed their warm appreciation of the friendship and encouragement given by members and a long succession of ministers from Tilehouse Street "It is our earnest prayer that God's richest blessing may continue to rest upon the work in Hitchin," said one of them. "We hope that the link of Christian Fellowship will continue to be fostered and strengthened through the years that lie ahead, and we ask for your prayers as we move into the future".

In explaining this proposal with great clarity and sympathy to the Hitchin Church meeting, Mr. Tebbutt emphasized the essential unity of the two groups in the service to which they were called, and made all see that, far from any feeling of regret, they had good cause to rejoice in this evidence of Wymondley's ability and eagerness to shoulder such responsibilities. On May 6th many friends from Hitchin were present in the Wymondley Chapel when he conducted a Service of Recognition and Communion, which was deeply moving in its simplicity and significance, "May God give the increase" is the fervent prayer of all friends of both communities.

Two other occasions stand out as real letter days in 1968. On May 1st when the annual Missionary Rally of the B.M.S. took place in Westminster Chapel, London, Mr. Tebbutt, supported by a big

\*See page 113.

contingent of his members, entered upon his year of office as Chairman of the Society, happy in the knowledge that his Church, proud and delighted at this distinction, was as eager to back his missionary enthusiasm as Mr. James's members had been to support Samson Occum's efforts in 1760. On October 26th a *gift day* was held (the first for some years) in the hope of raising funds for the installation of oil fired central heating in the Chapel, at a cost of about £2,000. To this appeal the members made a magnificent response by contributing £1,284 in a few hours: several of them waiting their turn to go into the vestry with their best wishes and offerings will long remember the excited look on a ten year old's face, as he took his place in the queue of grown ups clutching his contribution saved up from his pocket-money for this great occasion. An older member's offer of an interest free loan of £500, supplementing the £500 taken from the Reserve Fund for such an emergency has banished any anxiety about a big outstanding debt for the Church to liquidate.

And so, the Church, standing on the threshold of its fourth century of life, is looking forward with happy confidence to the future, knowing that in their pastor they have a leader who, with tender care for his flock, with the mature judgment born of long and varied experience and with a firm grasp of business and financial affairs will direct them into new avenues of service. Already the programme has been arranged for a week of tercentenary celebrations in March 1969—and plans are being laid for a concerted effort in evangelism to follow shortly afterwards. May Mr. Tebbutt and his wife continue to inspire their people to “expect great things from God, and to attempt great things for God”.

## Village Churches

Applying to themselves the admonition “Freely ye have received; freely give”, many of the early Baptists boldly ran the risk of arrest by preaching in hamlets and villages near Hitchin, especially when these were remote from any Church. As soon as liberty of worship was granted to Nonconformists, *Mission Stations* were set up, and in spite of difficulties of distance were regularly visited by senior members and lay preachers authorized by *Salem*. In the course of time some stations, which had been meeting in a private house or barn, grew strong enough to build a chapel for themselves; some merged with Nonconformists of other denominations and a few ceased to exist. Of several village stations once connected with Tilehouse Street Church, one has recently become an independent Church and two remain still closely linked with it. Members of these two are members also of the Hitchin Church, entitled to vote at its Church meetings, and from time to time the Hitchin minister visits these daughter Churches. When there is special need, each community gives help to and accepts it from the other. In fact the tie between them is one of mutual confidence and warm respect.

## STONDON BAPTIST CHURCH

Stondon, once a tiny hamlet about five miles from Hitchin, has grown considerably since the war of 1914, when an R.A.F. camp was established at Henlow. Nevertheless it still retains enough of the homely friendliness of bygone days to be interested in the casual stranger who walks along Station Road. Here stands the Baptist Chapel founded in 1863 jointly by the Churches of Shefford and Hitchin. At an unknown date the link with Shefford was broken, and Stondon now looks to *Salem* as its mother Church. Its chapel which has accommodation for 80 has the beauty of simplicity with its blue colour-washed walls, pine panelling and gay cherry coloured carpet. Much of its equipment has been given to commemorate past members. Each Sunday morning there is a family service, conducted at present by a rota of lay preachers; in the afternoon about 40 children attend Sunday School, and sometimes the evening service takes the form of community hymn singing with Mrs. Heslop at the organ, her regular post for more than 30 years. Members of the Ladies' Fellowship work tirelessly to raise funds, sometimes for their Church's domestic needs but usually for many good causes, especially Dr. Barnardo's Homes, the Blind and the B.M.S., and also for national appeals. Sometimes a Faith Tea or Supper is held. For this only time and place are announced. On the appointed day guests arrive, each bringing a generous supply of food, which is pooled for all. Invariably they find their faith triumphantly justified when after the meal the surplus food is sold and a substantial sum realised for their funds.

In the Second World War great help was given in the Sunday School by Hitchin friends, especially by the deacons, Mr. A. E. H. Theobalds, Mr. Palmer and Mr. Reed, superintendent for 26 years. After the war Mr. Sneath, an old student of the All Nations Bible College, who had been Stondon's lay minister for 9 years, was officially appointed as its voluntary lay pastor. Under Mr. Sneath's leadership the Church laboured to translate into reality a project dating back to 1919, the building of a Memorial Hall to honour those members who had fallen in war. For a Church with fewer than 30 members this might have seemed an impossibly ambitious hope. Nevertheless it *was* fulfilled through the faith and devotion of that little band. On a plot of land given

by Mr. and Mrs. Simkins, Mrs. Heslop's parents, a Sunday School was built in such a way as to provide a centre for weekday activities as well. Week by week money was raised for the Memorial Fund, not only by the Stondon congregation, but also by sympathetic friends, as different from each other as a Salvation Army Brass Band and the Ladies' Choir of a Methodist Church. Children amassed £12 in ship ha'pennies. Two unexpected gifts stimulated all to further efforts, an anonymous gift of £100 from a Hitchin friend and a cheque for £2 sent from Australia by a Henlow airman, who had been welcomed in the chapel during the Second World War, and who, like many others, still keeps in touch with Stondon friends.

In 1950 the Mother Church negotiated a loan of £500, interest free from the B.U., and also undertook to defray half of the annual repayments spread over the next ten years. Two years later the first public ceremony took place, when three foundation stones were laid, by Mr. Simkins in gratitude for his parents' gift, by Mr. Kingsley Russell representing the Hitchin Church, and by Mr. Sneath on behalf of the chapel and Sunday School. Then followed a Memorial Service for the Fallen, at which members of the British Legion were present, and Mr. Sneath read the Roll of Honour which hangs in the hall today. A few months afterwards the hopes of more than seven years were realised by the completion of the Memorial Hall at a cost of £1,200 and many friends from Hitchin watched one of their number, Mrs. Reed, the late superintendent's wife, perform the opening ceremony. The hall is a fine building, admirably suited for its varied purposes, and, like the chapel, enriched by many commemorative gifts.

After many years as lay pastor Mr. Sneath resigned, but as a private member continued to preside at the monthly Communion service. Two members, Mr. Presland and Mr. Heslop, the Church secretary and trustee of the chapel, were elected elders. In 1962 a Young People's Fellowship was instituted and proved a welcome addition to the Church's other activities, and in 1965 Mr. Ansell, who had been superintendent of Shillington Congregational Sunday School, became Church secretary and a teacher in Stondon.

As soon as the ten years' loan had been repaid, a second fund was set up for the renovation of the chapel in readiness for a week of centenary celebrations in 1963. Among many functions enjoyed

not only by past and present members but also by many villagers, one was specially memorable, the Sunday School Pageant, beginning with Robert Raikes, founder of the Sunday School movement in Bristol at the end of the 18th century, and ending with a demonstration of all youth organisations of 1963. For this performance several of the villagers gave much appreciated help, and themselves enjoyed the chance to co-operate in an effort which delighted their whole community. All children in the Sunday School received a surprise gift suggested and made possible by Mrs. Hayward and Mrs. Shade, a silver spoon engraved with the dates 1863-1963. On the last day of the celebrations the Rev. G. Sheriff-Johnson, whose ministry was remembered with warm affection, conducted the Sunday services, and many friends from the Hitchin chapel attended the Communion service which he held at Stondon.

Though no records have survived to tell of the foundation members, the names of two lay pastors, Mr. Peck and Mr. Sneath are still cherished by some of the older members who remember their long association with their Church and also the names of Mr. and Mrs. Ball\*. All today gladly pay a tribute of love and thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Heslop, who "steadfast in faith, rooted in hope, and grounded in love" have continued for many years to hold the members together in the bonds of peace and harmony and to fight a good fight in the cause of Christ. This Church has been characterized by a sturdy independence in shouldering its responsibilities, financial and domestic, by remarkable generosity and faithful devotion to the Master. Long may they show what can be achieved by a community, which though it may be small in numbers, is yet rich in the love and service of its people.

## THE BUNYAN CHAPEL, PRESTON

Since the Industrial Revolution life in many villages near big centres of population has gradually exchanged its basically agricultural role for that of a dormitory community. It is in their capacity to offer a respite from the hectic life of town and city and to provide a chance of relaxation and recreation that beautiful villages like Preston make their mark in 20th century England, their essential permanent function as the granary of the country

\*See Page 162



often being overlooked. In previous centuries, however, when society was less urbanized, villages, often grouped round the manor house, were not infrequently dynamic centres of whatever social and spiritual movements were active at the time, and, in this respect, Preston has certainly made a valuable contribution.

There has, apparently, been a village community near Preston from the time of the Romans, and tradition says that the open area between it and King's Walden witnessed the disastrous battle of 61 A.D. when Queen Boadicea and her Icenii warriors were defeated by the Roman general, Paulinus Suetonius, an event important in the development of Britain as a province of the Roman Empire. Through the activities of neighbouring Minsden (of which the now ruined and supposedly haunted Church, almost overgrown by encroaching shrubs and ivy, is the only reminder of a once thriving community), and those of the Knights Templars at Temple Dinsley (now Princess Helena College for Girls), the area continued to manifest its influence in North Hertfordshire. From this district in the 17th century men of Puritan sympathies joined with the Parliamentary forces who opposed King Charles I. Later during the period of persecution which followed the Restoration, and brought heartache to the "free worshippers of Preston", Baptists there still continued to hold their meetings despite their illegality, and Castle Farm, home of the six Foster brothers, became a secret sanctuary for a number of Nonconformist preachers, among whom John Bunyan was undoubtedly the most famous visitor. The first non-secret meeting, made possible by the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, took place in the cottage of Widow Heath in the village, and with occasional lapses there has been a Baptist community in Preston ever since, though it was not until the Act of Toleration of 1689 that Nonconformists could breathe freely.

With the passage of time a barn at the rear of the present Post Office was made into their meeting house: this barn which once had echoed to the spiritual challenge of the Bedford tinker, stood for many years in the garden of Mr. E. Hallam, who for over half a century worshipped in the Bunyan chapel, and it was only five years ago that it finally yielded to the elements. The present chapel, built across the green opposite the old barn, as "an Ebenezer of the Foster family", owes much to the energy and vision of Tilehouse Street members and to descendants of the Fosters, one of whom, Edward Foster of Cambridge, laid the

foundation stone in 1877. From that time at least one deacon from the parent Church has regularly assisted the daughter Chapel, and has frequently supplied preachers for the services, while at other times preachers from near and far have sought to continue the tradition established in the moonlit secrecy of Wain Wood. The link fostered by such deacons as Mr. Upchurch and Mr. Roberts in the early part of this century has in more recent times been strengthened by the family of Mr. and Mrs. Whaley, who for many years travelled the ten miles from the Three Counties Hospital at Arlesey to assist the cause in Preston, and who still maintain a close connection with it. Helped by Mr. and Mrs. Munt, who lived in the village and kept open house for the young people of the chapel, other Hitchin members, scouts, brigaders, the Young People's Fellowship and Women's Meeting have continued to play their part in building on the foundations that had been laid.

Such is the past: but what of the present and the future? Gone are the days when preachers arrived on chestnut mares or on Shank's pony, footsore from the long trek up the hill: and come are the days of buses and cars. But the work and challenge are essentially the same. In October 1962 the Rev. David Highton, a Baptist minister from Yorkshire, joined the Divinity staff at Hitchin Boys' Grammar School, and accepted the oversight of the Preston Church. Today this has two dozen children in the Sunday School and a nucleus of fifteen members, who together with those who have served it faithfully for many years, look forward to the future with confidence. Today the old agonies of intolerance have ended, one hopes for ever, and united services are now possible between St. Martin's Church, built in 1900 as a daughter Church to St. Mary's Hitchin and ourselves, and it is hoped to continue this pattern of co-operation.

Enough has been said to show the essential connection both in history and personnel between Preston and Tilehouse Street to help the reader appreciate our feeling that in many respects 1969 is also our tercentenary; and as the open air service in Wain Wood, one of the highlights of the commemoration, recalls echoes of long ago, we too will determine to continue in the goodly heritage of faith into which we have been privileged to enter.

*Based upon Mr. Highton's article.*

## WYMONDLEY BAPTIST CHAPEL

In this village early in the 19th century there was a Congregational College, which half way through the century moved to London, leaving no Free Church place of worship there. On leaving Hertfordshire the College gave a plot of land on which the present Chapel was erected and opened in 1859 free of debt, thanks to a generous response to appeals. Though the deeds of both land and building still rest with the Congregational Union, Tilehouse Street Baptist Church undertook responsibility for the work of the Chapel, since several members of the Foster family were living in Wymondley, and the Rev. G. Short, its minister, Mr. M. H. Foster, one of its deacons, and the Rev. A. Rowland were appointed as trustees.

After the First World War, the Foster, Caine and Berry families were the mainstay of the Chapel, and certainly the Church today is still benefiting from their faithfulness and prayers. Mr. R. W. Berry, grandson in law of the colporteur, James Rennie, has been its organist for forty years, and though today he plays an electrically blown pipe organ there are those who still remember the wonders he achieved with a pedal harmonium; others can recall days when the Sunday School children were taken on their annual outing in an old London bus, drawn by carthorses along the quiet traffic-free lanes of Hertfordshire.

During the ministry of Mr. Sheriff-Johnson, Wymondley and Tilehouse Street Church were drawn very close together as Mr. Johnson visited regularly in the village, and many Wymondley people joined the Hitchin Church. On several occasions, when village folk have been baptized there, the Wymondley Chapel has closed and the congregation has come in by coach to join the service at *Salem*.

During the 1950s the work at Wymondley expanded so much that more room was needed. A plot of land was purchased and a wooden hall erected, all the work being carried out by Church members under the leadership of Mr. Eric Peters, and the cost being met partly from anonymous gifts and partly by special events. This hall, which accommodates 120, was opened by Mrs. R. B. Foster in 1957, and ever since has proved a valuable addition to the social amenities of the village. At the time of its opening, the Church appointed a Student Pastor from Spurgeon's College to

lead the work, under the Rev. E. Smalley; over the next few years there were three such pastors but services today are conducted by a rota of preachers arranged by the deacons.

Two special occasions stand out in the life of the Church, its jubilee when about two hundred past and present members flocked into Mr. Foster's barn, first for tea and then for an evening service, (since the Chapel was too small for such a large number)—and its centenary. Recently a simple baptistry has been built in the chapel, and young believers are glad to be able to give this act of witness in their own village. A short time ago the Church has had the joy of seeing one of its members, Mrs. J. Clark, née Norma Smith, go out to Brazil with her husband under the auspices of the B.M.S. Others who have grown up in the Church have gradually assumed leadership at Wymondley and elsewhere.

In May 1968 a service was conducted by the Rev. R. Tebbutt in the presence of friends from Tilehouse Street to mark the independence of the Wymondley Church, which will in future have its own separate membership and complete responsibility for its own affairs.

"When I first attended Sunday School in 1918," wrote Mr. Foster, "it used to meet in the chapel in five classes, one in each corner and the fifth either in the vestry or gallery. Two aunts, Miss E. and Miss L. Foster, were responsible for all School activities assisted by a staff of five, one of them the daughter of the village blacksmith, Winch by name, a well-known Hertfordshire character. Miss Foster used to play the organ on the front of which hung a tapestry panel, encouraging the singers to 'make a joyful noise unto the Lord'—an invitation to which they gladly responded. But on some occasions when a manually pedalled harmonium was used, it broke down, leaving them at first to sing unaccompanied, and then to follow its example. Whether they ever succeeded in reaching the top notes depended entirely on who was bold enough to re-start the hymn.

"On every Wednesday evening there was a Prayer Meeting, a practice which has continued for fifty years. Sunday services were held for the School at 11 a.m. and at 2 p.m., and for the Church and congregation at 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. No collections were made at any service, but a free will offertory box was placed at the back of the chapel.

“When the Misses Foster left the district, Mrs. Stanley Foster became secretary and treasurer and her husband was appointed superintendent of the Sunday School with Mr. Walter Berry, Mrs. Moss and Mrs. Caine to help him.

“About 1928, with considerable help from *Salem*, a mid-week Fellowship was formed, mainly for the young people, but since it proved very popular, it was eventually thrown open to all. A successful Girls’ Life Brigade Company and a Scout Troop were formed, the former having Miss Mabel Morris as its first Captain, and Miss Irene Sharp as its last. The Church has always been fortunate in having a good choir, which under its organist, Mr. Berry, used to give many musical items in addition to the regular service of song. The anniversary services used to attract not only many members from Hitchin but from other Churches round about, and the singing of the scholars always gave great delight to the audiences.

“In the old days, I remember, Mr. Rennie often used to preach on Sunday afternoon. Perhaps during his sermon one or two members of the congregation might dose, but not for long. For he would pause, bang his fist on the pulpit desk, then when they were sufficiently awake, he would continue his sermon, but kept a vigilant eye on the culprits and should they offend again, he would repeat his action.”

*Article and reminiscences contributed by Mr. Chas. Foster and Mr. R. W. Berry.*

The Church today has a membership of thirty, and there are about sixty pupils in the Sunday School, for whom there are Junior and Senior Fellowship meetings in the week. Once a quarter some of the older ones attend a Youth Weekend and others spend a happy holiday at Capernway Hall in the Lake district, enjoying the chance to meet, and discuss matters, grave and gay, with friends from other parts of the country. In a village small enough for each individual’s help to be recognised and valued, these young people play an important part in Wymondley, and from their early days do much to help their neighbours. Boys chop and bundle wood, girls make or knit little gifts especially for the aged and lonely at Christmas time—

regularly some of them undertake shopping for the housebound, and visit the Old People's Homes at Whitney Wood and Minsden. Once a month they take a service in a ward at the Lister Hospital—and support by gifts and contributions the London City Mission at King's Cross, which a party of them often visits at Christmas time.

Long may this Church maintain the fine tradition of loving service which they have inherited, and may they flourish and abound in all good works, to the greater glory of God.

## Sunday School

One of the Church's greatest treasures is the *Register of the Sabbath School Meeting at Tilehouse Street*. In this sheepskin covered book most of the yellowing pages containing the records of the first nineteen years are in the tiny exquisite handwriting, and the endearingly unorthodox spelling of a few words, of Ann Bradly, co-founder and co-superintendent of the School with Thomas Field. She was the daughter of a maltster living at Maidencroft Farm near Gosmore where the brewhouse with its huge vat and copper pump can still be seen today. Born in 1766, she was 46 when the School began, 65 when she retired from it, and 93 when she "died in a heavenly calm" and was laid to rest beside the ten brothers and sisters whom she had outlived at Salem. As a great granddaughter of one of the six Foster brothers and a sister in law of the minister John Geard, she was intimately connected with Salem all her life, and, in Reginald Hine's words, the School seems to be the spiritual child of this devout spinster. Even after retiring from office in it, she still kept in close touch with its fortunes and continued for some years to make cakes for the pupils' annual treat. An interesting link between her and the present generation is found in Esther Palmer, whom a few older members of the Church still remember keeping a stationery business in the shop now occupied by Notts in Hitchin High Street. In the closing pages of the *Register* she is mentioned as one of the teachers in the School. Born in 1833 and living until 1929, she was a great niece of Ann Bradly, and an aunt of Bradly Gatward, a deacon and the organist of the Church, whose



Ann Bradly 1766—1859



children, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren are still connected with it.

The school was opened on May 17th 1812, with eight girls and four boys: by May 1813 these numbers had increased to seventy four and fifty four. There were thirteen male teachers, assisted by fourteen females, and at first there is mention of seven classes. The first pupils came, as was to be expected, from near at hand, from Hitchin, Preston and Offley. But as the fame of the school spread, it attracted boys and girls from a surprisingly wide area which stretched from Great Wymondley to Purton, and from Walsworth and Ikkleford to Holwell and Cadwell. What stalwart walkers they were in those days.

The earliest records give the full names, the place of abode of each pupil, and the date of admission: in the case of girls a new entry was made from 1817 to 1821 which gave reason for the departure of some pupils.

1817 Mary Price—Preston April 17th *Left and gone to the Church School.*

1817 Sarah Jarvis—Hitchin Aug. 10th *Dismissed to service* (the usual fate for girls).

1817 Mary Grey—Ippolit March 21st *Dismissed honourably.*

1818 Jane Jarvis—Hitchin Aug. 10th *Died in January.*

1818 Martha Olney—Hitchin Nov. 12th *Removed by death.*

1819 Mary Ann Tomlinson and her sister—*Dismissed for non-attendance.*

1819 Emma Wagstaff—Hitchin April 30th—*Removed to Bedford.*

By 1821 a school had been opened in Wymondley, and ten girls left to join it.

Pupils who completed their course "with credit" or "honourably" were publicly dismissed by the minister or by one of the deacons, and rewarded with a book; John Day in 1814 received Watt's Psalms and Hymns, a Testament, a Bible, and for his good behaviour, Rippon's Selections. In 1818 Ruth Warren and Sarah Simmons each received a Bible, but Sarah's was only a little one, since she had not been quite as diligent as her companion. Was it cause and effect that in 1819 it was agreed that "*Patience and Perseverance shall be the motto of our school*"?

Fortunately there is a wealth of information about the school's finances. Between May 17th 1812 and May 24th 1813 there was collected:

<i>"By Private Subscription amongst Salem members</i>		£10	3	2
<i>Received out of the boxes at diffrant times"</i>		2	16	11½
		<hr/>		
Total		£13	0	1½
Expenditure		12	17	1½
		<hr/>		
Balance (a ½d out)			3	0½
		<hr/>		

In May 1813 the Rev. Wm. Freeman *preached a Charity Sermon for the benefit of the Sabbath School* on the text "Come ye children: hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord".

<i>"Then was collected at the doors</i>		£10	0	5½
<i>Pd. by Mr. Geard part of a collection made for books</i>			3	11
<i>Received out of the boxes at Diffrant times</i>		1	2	2½
<i>Balance"</i>			3	0½
		<hr/>		
Total		11	9	7½
Expenditure		10	8	2½
		<hr/>		
Balance		1	1	5
		<hr/>		

Mr. Freeman's sermon was printed and sold, for in the accounts for 1814-1815 there is the item "*Received of Mr. Geard from Mr. Freeman, being part of the profit of the printed sermon* £2-10-0.

From that time forth for many years the annual sermon provided the larger share of the Sunday School funds, and the custom then established of inviting a well known preacher for the anniversary services has usually been followed. Steadily year by year the budget has increased, and, as the financial statement for 1967 reveals, it handled £569-16-5 in that year.

In contrast to the abundant evidence about the School's finances, there is a tantalizing lack of information about its curriculum. On the analogy of contemporary schools in other parts of the country, and from references to "tablets for the infants" and a "box of letters", it seems likely that some instruction in reading and writing was given. For there was little point in presenting Bibles and other books to children who were illiterate, and not much reason to commend them for diligence unless they received some formal lessons. In 1814 it was agreed "*to introduce hymns for the Sunday School*



**Maidencroft Farm, the home of Ann Bradley**  
(Photographed by Ernest Clayton with the kind permission of T. C. Micklem)

and for the use of young persons in general, by Sutton'', and in the next year to begin school by singing two or three verses and to follow these with prayer. From the very beginning the School enjoyed singing and early in its life it appointed a master and on one occasion paid him the large honorarium of 15/- "*to learn the children the hymns for the anniversary*" on a Friday evening. As staff was large, the classes could be so small, that some individual attention could be given. Probably girls and boys were taught separately: certainly the female teachers worked in pairs at first. Occasionally if a teacher was unexpectedly absent, the best scholar in the first class was sent to assist in the lowest, by an early example of the monitorial or pupil-teacher system that flourished later in day schools. Some such assistants were later honoured by an invitation to join the teaching staff, and if successful, would steadily work their way up from the junior to the senior class, which was regarded as the post of greatest prestige. At a meeting held in the vestry on May 25th 1814, it was unanimously agreed that the teachers meet once a quarter, and that a General Meeting be held once a year to settle the accounts and new classes of the children. The minute ends thus: "*Rechosen by the teachers—Thos. Field and Ann Bradly, Superintendents, Treasurer and Secretary*: evidently a sturdy democratic spirit flourished on the Staff. At the early meeting held in June 1815 there was an arrangement made for the first time for a special anniversary treat for the School. The children walked after the afternoon service across the park, i.e. Pain's Park, with their teachers to Thos. Field's yard (in Bancroft), and after a hymn, prayer and grace partook of tea as a reward for good behaviour:

*"the teachers distributed cake and ale among the children—there was upward of 30 teachers and friends at tea, and the number of children being 142, this was a very pleasant sight. At 5 o'clock the children with their teachers and other friends walked down the garden and up the back way into the road and went throug (sic) the town, two by two in a very orderly manner and arrived at the meeting in good time"*.

Cakes were also distributed to the children on Christmas Day.

For the generation of 1968 there is a very salutary and sometimes startling revelation given by the *Register* about the social and economic factors conditioning the lives of children in the early 19th century. No welfare State made provision for schools or any kind of education: no medical service watched over their health: no children's courts existed and there was no probation officer or social

worker to guide and help young offenders. Few, if any, ordinary children could read or write. Their lives were hard, they were often illclad, poorly shod and undernourished, especially in the "hungry forties". Families were usually large but many children died young, and no attempt was made to shield those who survived from the stark realities of life and death.

*"On May 12th 1816" wrote Ann Bradly, "Mary Kirby was buried aged 11 years and 9 months. She was received into the School in June 1812 and had been a constant and diligent attender ever since, while her health would admit of it. Six of the children in the first class held the Pall, the four first classes, about 30 in number, followed the corpse two by two from the middle of Ratten to the grave, then sang the XIII hymn in Dr. Watt's Songs for children, viz: "Why should I say 'Tis yet too soon'?" Mr. Geard gave a suitable discourse from Matthew 6 ch. 33 verse.*

*This is the first breach that hath been made amongst us by Death, but now it hath entered into the School. It was upon the whole a solemn season. May it make and leave abiding impressions upon the hearts of the dear children. It being a very stormy day, a great deal of Snow falling, many of the children were not present."*

Then followed the names of the six that held the pall.

This first death was soon followed by that of several pupils, of a

*"Female teacher, a much esteemed young friend, a very amiable young lady, very active and diligent in her station as teacher",*

22 years of age who left five pounds for the benifit (sic) of the School, and of a teacher, a very zealous warmhearted young man who promised much usefulness, but who died very happily.

A few months later *"I was called"* related Ann Bradly *"to a most painful task, viz, that of suspending one of the children from the Sunday School for her bad conduct, viz, Elizabeth Day, who had been guilty of stealing and then denying it in a most awfull manner. She had previously been before the magistrates and committed to prison for some hours, but on her confessing and asking pardon, & on being reprovded, she was set at liberty. It was then judged proper that some acknowledgement should be made by her to the Superintendents and the female teachers, which was done in the vestry after the afternoon service. Then Mr. Geard addressed her in a very sollemn and affectionate manner and gave her a*

*paper to read, which was drawn up by Mr. Field for that purpose as an acknowledgement of her guilt and sorrow on the account of it.*

*The poor child was much affected indeed and appeared very much humbled. She asked pardon and was forgiven of all, each of our friends took her by the hand and gave her some good advice entreating her to seek for pardon of God through the merits of Christ, she then had the Bible and Watt's Songs given to her & dismissed.*

*Present on this affecting occasion".*

Then followed the names of six *friends*, i.e. members of the Church, the two Superintendents and six female teachers. Afterwards all adjourned to the gallery in the Meeting House, when Mr. Geard affectionately addressed the children, warning them against falling into similar snares or temptations. "*It was a very solemn & affecting season*". It is comforting to find that two months later, after due inquiry had been made respecting her conduct since her suspension, Elizabeth was received into the School once more, in the presence of Mr. Geard, the Superintendents and 8 female teachers and 8 *friends*. After repeating the passages of Scripture deemed *suitable for the occasion* she was given her books back again (presumably her lesson books) and several of the *friends* gave her good advice. She was much affected, and thanked them and the teachers for receiving her back into the School again.

Though a modern psychologist may shudder at such strict treatment of a young delinquent, yet it seems to have been justified by results, and Elizabeth completed her full course at the School, lived down her lapse, and in 1822, six years later, was dismissed privately, receiving a Bible, but no stockings, which by this time were given as a reward for good behaviour. From a study of the relevant dates it appears that she must have been no more than seven, or at most eight years old when she committed her crime. Yet the punishment she received was extraordinarily merciful and mild at a period when in accordance with the strict letter of the law a boy of ten was hanged in 1846 for petty pilfering.

"Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis." Times change and we, too, change with them.

Space allows only one further instance of the many harrowing hardships suffered by children in those distant days. In October 1820

*"their were dismissed by Mr. Geard five motherless children who were going to be sent to the parish, viz the House of Industry (euphemism*

for the Work House) at Bedford. *This was a very affecting scene, the dear children wept much, as did many others*".

Each received a Bible or a Testament or one of Dr. Watt's hymn books, sixpence apiece from the Superintendents, and a book apiece from Mr. Geard.

In January 1817 teachers were requested to visit children in their classes who were ill, and empowered to give them a trifle, sixpence or a shilling as well as to converse with them. The next year gives the first hint of difficulty in discipline, provided by the request sent to

*"those of our friends who had been in the habit of dismissing the children by prayer, that one of them should sit with them during the sermon to keep them more orderly. Unfortunately, it not being convenient for our friends, that plan was obliged to be given up.*

In the next year, when Dr. Rippon preached the anniversary sermon, the collection brought in £27.3.0 and the income of the School rose to £48.8.10½, from which, after bills had been paid, a *ballance* of £15.15.4½ was left. This may perhaps account for a proposal that an alteration should be made in the gallery of the Meeting House for the accommodation of the female teachers and children, provided that the *expence* were not too great, and that an estimate was obtained for it. The alteration was sanctioned by the Church, and the bill of £6.9.6 was paid, not out of School funds, but by *some of our friends*.

On May 23rd 1819, the weather being stormy, Mr. Field's ground being occupied and Mrs. Palmer having kindly offered her garden for the children's accommodation, it was *cheerfully* accepted. After the afternoon service,

*"children with their Teachers walked down the Burying Ground to the High Lander (sic), through Pains Park down the Quackers Alley to Mrs. Palmer's back gate, where forms were provided for their reception. About twenty minutes before six o'clock children with their Teachers etc. etc. walked through Bucklersbury to the meeting, sang twice, then listened to the excelent and superfine sermon.*

Unfortunately there is nothing to show what or who etc. etc. were.

Soon it was *concluded* to give the pupils rewards for good behaviour and regular attendance. At first these consisted of scarves such as would tie round their necks for the boys and shawls for the girls; and

on a November Saturday in 1817 88 girls came to the vestry to receive their gifts from Ann Bradly, Naomi Geard (her niece) and another teacher, while Mr. Field distributed the boys' gifts separately to between fifty and sixty of them. Stockings soon replaced the previous gifts, to the delight of the girls, but boys were allowed to choose between hats and stockings, a change welcomed by most of them. Perhaps they regarded hats as a status symbol or a sign of approaching manhood, for in 1822 when 111 girls had stockings, only four boys chose them, and the other sixty seven preferred hats. The entry on this occasion records that

*"those who had recently been received into the school did not have rewards, and a few had forfeited them by there not behaving quite so well as they ought to have done."*

By this time there were about two hundred pupils in the school, and problems of discipline began to loom larger especially for Ann Bradly, who always attached great importance to things being done decently and in order, not only in the School and chapel but also in the streets. In 1825, when two anniversary sermons were preached, one in the morning and one in the afternoon

*"to accommodate our out-town friends who live at a distance", she sadly reported "it being shown that their was not the the order that could have been wished, when thay came to Mr. Langford's yard, the singing was omitted",*

though whether this was as a precaution or a punishment she did not say .

In 1829 to the great regret of all, Stephen Woodfield resigned. As he had been a very zealous, active, diligent teacher for seventeen years, his resignation caused general consternation, expressed in Ann Bradly's entry in the Register

*"I fear it will be the breaking up of the School, as there is reason to fear that others will follow his example. I much lament the occasion of it",*

and then she added in brackets 'A wet evening'. However, before long Mr. Woodfield resumed his office and later as Superintendent served the School for many years.

At the October Teachers' Meeting in 1831 Mr. Griffin presided, and a note was read from Mr. Field tendering his resignation, which was respectfully accepted with the thanks of the teachers for his long



and zealous exertions on behalf of the School. A similar note was also read from Miss Bradly, but as it was considered that her resignation was not perfectly decisive, two teachers, a male and a female, were requested to wait upon her in order respectfully to ascertain her views on the subject, and after the interview a week was allowed for her finally to decide. Meanwhile Mr. Woodfield was unanimously elected Superintendent of the Boys' School (it would be interesting to know if both female and male teachers voted on these occasions), and when Miss Bradly confirmed her resignation, Mrs. Griffin was unanimously elected Superintendent for the Girls. Then the rules of the School were read, revised and amended, and submitted to a member for him to produce a fair copy which for a considerable time hung in the Schoolroom and was read once a year at a Teachers' Meeting.

Various alterations were carried out during the next year, and a proposal frequently discussed in the past; was put into effect, whereby a library was established in the vestry for the use of Sabbath School pupils and teachers and young people of the congregation. Shelves were fitted, and from then onwards grants were frequently voted from School funds to purchase books, and as many gifts of volumes and magazines were received from friends, a considerable library was built up.

In 1834 a resolution was carried that children should be rewarded with suitable gifts or wearing apparel to the amount of 3/- each, with a proviso that this must not be regarded as a precedent: it was, in fact, found necessary in the 'hungry forties' to reduce the sum to 2/6. This was the year, too, when it was at first planned that boys should be regaled with cakes and beer in the vestry on the treat day, while the girls should go to the nearby inn, the Highlander, to drink tea there, if a room was available for this purpose. However second thoughts on this matter prevailed and the resolution was rescinded. This year was the last in which beer or ale was provided for the treat, for tea was thereafter drunk by all, pupils and teachers alike.

In an attempt to ensure punctuality and good conduct, an ingenious scheme was evolved in 1836—to every scholar who arrived in good time a ticket was given—twelve such tickets were exchanged for a token, for which one penny was given at the end of twelve months. Also boys and girls in the respective first classes, whose conduct merited it, received Rippon's Selection of Hymns, and a book entitled "The Bible the Best Teacher"; the *lesser* boys were

given Watt's Divine Songs. The precise meaning of "*lesser*" not being defined, it is not clear if that term applied to age, conduct or achievement.

An innovation introduced in 1836 gave opportunity for social intercourse among the pastor, teachers and friends who, after the annual treat was over, gathered together to drink tea in the vestry, each friend contributing sixpence towards the expense. Two years later this *pleasant and profitable* arrangement was extended to include teachers connected with the Wesleyan and Independent (i.e. Congregational) Sabbath Schools, as a return of hospitality provided by the *Back Street Meeting on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Coronation*.

By this date it was customary for the treat to be held by the kind permission of Mr. Lucas in the Close opposite the Meeting House, forms being provided for the children's use. The 30th anniversary was celebrated there by the annual treat held later in the year than usual, on a very stormy September day, when the children listened with great attention

*"to an address admirably adapted for its simplicity and appropriateness to interest and benefit their youthful minds,*

and then proceeded to partake of the usual entertainments.

*"Blessed be the name of our God that so good an institution should have been so well and so long supported"*

is the comment in the Register, which added that there were then 157 children in the School. In October of this year each child received a medal struck to commemorate the jubilee of the Baptist Missionary Society. Alas—that James Humphries, who had been expelled a few months earlier *for his persevering misconduct*, missed such a treasure! Yet even such a penalty and such a loss were ineffective as deterrents, for a few months later the Teachers' Meeting resolved that Thos. Worboys

*"should be made an example of, for his incorrigible behaviour and expelled the school."*

And as far as is known, these two scally-wags were never readmitted.

1842 was notable for the introduction of a *Shoe fund* for the benefit of pupils, who in some cases were prevented from attendance by the lack of footwear. It was arranged that

*"children should be allowed to bring one halfpenny each week and at the*

*end of the year the same amount thus contributed should be taken from the funds of the School, provided always that if a child should neglect bringing one halfpenny for two weeks, such child shall be excluded from the benefit of this proposal, and shall be paid back the amount previously subscribed”.*

Contributions were to be received by the teachers from their respective classes and paid to the Treasurer at the next monthly meeting, and *teachers* were to buy the shoes, where they wished.

This scheme was almost ruined by its success. In the first year so many took advantage of the chance to get the bonus of 2/2 that the funds of the School were nearly exhausted. Therefore the weekly contribution was raised to one penny, and a sum not exceeding 1/1 was given to each participant at the end of the year. Even in this modified form the scheme still gave valuable help at a time of terrible economic distress, and was continued for many years. Later on a clothing club was set up which encouraged habits of thrift among parents and children by offering terms no less favourable and this survived until the Second World War, after which the Welfare State made such a scheme redundant.

One item recorded in 1846 gives an account of the expense attending the annual treat in that year.

	£	s.	d.
140 lbs. of Cake by Messrs Carling and Maldin at			
6d. a lb.	3	10	0
2 lbs. of tea		10	0
9 lbs. of moist sugar		4	6
4 lbs. of lump sugar		3	0
1½ lbs. butter		1	9
Bread		1	6
2½ gallons Milk		2	6
Steers and wife (presumably the Chapel caretakers)		5	0
Helpers		1	6
Firing		1	0
		<hr/>	
	5	0	9
Received from friends for tea		7	6
		<hr/>	
	4	13	3
		<hr/>	

A second entry gives the Christian and surnames of all the boys in the school, their place of residence and the names of the two teachers attached to each class. There were 102 boys and twelve classes and all the teachers were male. Apart from a few pupils who came from Gosmore, Pirton, Wymondley (Great and Little) Preston, Charlton and Little Almshoe, all the boys lived in Hitchin: two of them came from the workhouse there.

It is a matter for regret that a similar list does not exist for the girls, who probably outnumbered the boys considerably: even so, 140 lbs. of cake seems a prodigious amount even for youthful appetites, just as 1½d. a pint for milk seems absurdly cheap to the housewife of 1969.

Soon efforts were required to tighten up discipline, this time on the Staff, for in 1847 it was agreed that any teacher absent for two consecutive Sundays, except for illness, without providing a substitute, should be dismissed. Two years later *friends* were requested to visit the School alternately on Sundays and to report their findings to the Church. But far worse was then threatened. At a Teachers' Meeting in 1851 the main subject for discussion was

*"the desirableness of adopting some plan to ensure their more regular and punctual attendance at the School. To meet this wish a system of forfeits was proposed, but as some objected to it, it was determined to make trial for a time of a roll book of the Teachers, marking down those who are late and having their names read over at the Quarterly Meetings"*.

Discipline *was* discipline indeed in those days, and the mere threat of such public ignominy must have cured the trouble, for no record occurs of any name being thus read over.

In 1852 it was resolved that the Pirton Sunday School be invited to become and to be considered as a Branch School of Salem Chapel, and sustained out of the funds and a grant of the Scriptures and Watt's Moral Songs be made to them: this was supplemented in the next few years by other books, including reading books. In 1856 the two Superintendents Mrs. Hainworth and Mr. Richard Lane wrote a letter and then waited upon the Superintendents of the Wesleyan and Queen's Street Congregational School to ascertain whether they would or would not, cooperate in canvassing the town for Sunday School scholars. Replies expressed full sympathy with the proposal, but suggested such a canvass would be more convenient

after harvest. As soon as this canvass had been completed, at the season suggested, teachers of the Baptist and Congregational Sunday Schools held a joint meeting at Queen's Street Chapel to consider the report drawn up. This showed that out of 549 families visited, 853 children attended Sunday School, and 119 did not: however, as the result of the canvass, it was promised that 67 of these would be sent to school in future. This announcement was followed by a prayer from each Superintendent, returning thanks to God for the measure of success which had attended the canvass; and it was resolved that a United Teachers' meeting should be held half yearly alternately at Salem and Queen's Street Chapel.

In August 1857 the question of accommodation for the school was raised once more—and it was agreed that every effort should be made for the erection of separate school rooms with a view to the more efficient organization and instruction of the children. For this purpose the teachers pledged themselves to give or to collect the sum of £59 before Christmas. Mr. Broad promised to give £50, if five other subscriptions of the same amount could be obtained. But in consequence of his resignation on the score of serious illness and his death in 1858, it was thought expedient to abandon collecting for the proposed new Schoolrooms pro tem.

Three years later the question of better accommodation for the School was revived—this time successfully, and the vestry and schoolroom were enlarged by seventeen feet at an estimated cost of £300 to £400. Unfortunately, no details of the scheme have been preserved, but it was accomplished with remarkable speed, and was already in use towards the end of 1861.

In 1863 three separate instances brought the School into close touch with events of national importance: Church members, teachers and pupils all co-operated with the Sunday School Union in supporting the fund raised to relieve distress among Lancashire operatives—twenty four collecting books, provided by Mr. Short, the minister, were distributed among the children, so that they might collect at home from their parents and friends connected with the School. The second occasion was the marriage of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) to Princess Alexandra of Denmark. All the Sunday Schools of the town assembled on March 10th, in St. Mary's Church, where the Vicar gave a brief address, and all the scholars joined in singing Keble's Wedding Hymn. Then the children, after receiving a medal of the Prince and Princess,

proceeded to their respective schools, where teachers and pupils were regaled with tea, the expense being defrayed by the General Committee of Management, set up for the purpose. Moreover, each school provided for itself flags and banners suitable to the occasion, for which an entry in the *Register* records an expenditure of £3.0.0. One month later the School sent a subscription to a fund opened for the

*“Presentation of a copy of the Holy Scriptures together with a writing desk, to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales.*

The third instance occurred on May 10th, when the teachers, who had been requested to stay awhile after school had been dismissed, gave unanimous approval to a suggestion made by Mr. Johnson that they should send two petitions, one to the House of Lords, the other to the House of Commons, begging that public houses should be closed on the Sabbath Day. The petitions, produced on the following Sunday, were signed by thirteen male and sixteen female teachers and despatched in the course of the week to Mr. C. M. Pullen, M.P. for the County of Hertford, with a letter soliciting him to present and support them. This was the first, but by no means the last, occasion when the teachers showed their active concern about the intemperance which was one of the greatest social evils of the age, and joined wholeheartedly in efforts to combat it.

In 1864 the two Superintendents, Mr. Richard Lane and Mrs. M. A. Hainworth resigned from office: and a very happy precedent was set when teachers, scholars and friends expressed their warm appreciation of their long and faithful service by presenting the former with a *very handsome timepiece*, and the latter with a *very elegant silver inkstand*, the cost of this second item being £6.5.0, no mean sum one hundred years ago.

The new Superintendent, Mr. Johnson, elected in 1864 for both the Girls' and Boys' Schools, was responsible during his brief tenure of office for certain innovations. The official registers issued by the Sunday School Union were introduced, in which the teachers occasionally affixed symbols of their own invention beside a pupil's name. Thus X indicated that a child's absence had been due to illness, V that he or she had been visited by the class teacher. A library committee was set up, which at first consisted of four female teachers, but which was enlarged later to include males as well. Numbers in the school rose considerably. It was now customary for

the minister of the Church to preside at the Quarterly Teachers' Meetings which continued to manifest the old democratic spirit. Thus invitations to those recommended as teachers were discussed and decided by the existing staff. The choice of a preacher, of the hymns and, later on, of the anthems for the anniversary service was in the hands of the teachers, who regarded it as a privilege to serve the School.

The Education Act of 1870 empowered local authorities to provide schooling for children of a certain age and subsequently training (or normal) colleges for teachers were introduced: these exercised a great influence over the Sunday School, and affected both the content and method of the instruction which it gave. Teachers, no longer under the necessity to teach the basic elements of reading and writing, could now devote time and attention entirely to the religious instruction of the children, and to give them more individual care than was possible in the large classes of the elementary schools. Visual aids, primitive indeed by the standards of 1969, provided entertainment of a novel kind—charts and pictures were bought for the schoolroom, and *dissolving views* shown on a magic lantern aroused great excitement among children who had never seen a cinema. Magazines, usually devoted to missionary activities, were available for those who wanted them, and provided a small but steady income for the School funds. Library grants were voted increasingly. The clothing club, first mentioned in 1863 continued to be a great boon to parents, who year by year were drawn into closer association with the teachers. In 1871 there was the first mention of "*tea for the parents*" provided at the annual treat, at a cost of £2.16.5½, the children's tea on that occasion costing £7.6.5. Gradually all departments of the School became more ambitious in their scope. A meal, however lavish the supply of cake, ceased to be considered adequate for the children's delight, nor was Mr. Lucas's field or garden large enough for their entertainment. Swings were the first form of amusement provided at a cost of 8/9 for labour, and for several years, though the cost mounted high, these were a regular item of the annual treat. Later a programme of sports, games and races, was arranged, and a nearby field was hired, at first for the sum of 5/- for the afternoon. In 1877 a slightly ominous note may be detected in the festivities, inasmuch as a policeman was posted at the gate (at a cost of 2/6), either to exclude gate crashers, or to maintain

law and order. Since in subsequent years 5/- was paid to policemen for similar services, their duty was evidently no sinecure.

Fortunately first hand evidence about the Sunday School in the first decade of the 20th century is supplied from the vivid memories of Mrs. Grant, who, brought up in the Church from babyhood, began school there as a child of five. The infants used to meet in what is now the scouts' room, which then consisted of a kitchen and a schoolroom. Clamped to the far wall rose a tier of seats, upon which the boys and girls were tightly packed: and well does she remember her acute anxiety lest the boots of the child behind should soil her Sunday frock. On reaching the appropriate age, she mounted to the Senior Department, which met upstairs in the very large room now called the Canteen\*. In the centre by the fireplace stood the Superintendent, who, from this strategic point, kept a benign but vigilant eye upon all that went on. At a desk close by, piled high with registers, documents, collecting boxes and sundry other articles sat the School Secretary, Mr. Kingsley Russell (later the Superintendent) who used to receive the Clothing Club contributions each week. The rest of the room was packed to overflowing with separate classes of boys and girls, seated on forms arranged as three sides of a square, the fourth side of which was occupied by the teacher. A young men's Bible Class, which sometimes numbered more than thirty, was held in one gallery of the Chapel, and a similar class for young women in the gallery opposite, the first conducted by a distinguished member of the Church, Mr. G. W. Russell, church secretary for fifty five years and the second by the minister's wife. The school used to have not only an afternoon, but also a morning session from 9.45 to 10.45, after which gentle persuasion was brought to bear upon the pupils to stay on for the full morning service in the Chapel.

The highlights of the year were the annual treat, to which many references have already been made, and the anniversary. For the latter most girls felt the day would have been almost unendurable without a new hat, and a new frock, complete with buttonhole to grace the occasion. The shutters (long since removed) which separated the upper schoolroom from the galleries of the Chapel were drawn back, to allow parents with babies to sit there, not unduly perturbed lest their excited cries should disturb the rest of the

\*See page 85.



congregation. By dint of careful management, an enormous number of children was crowded into the galleries—and the infants sat on forms at each side of the organ, where they could admire Mr. Bradly Gatward as he played the organ. Afterwards these forms were carried downstairs and stacked ready to be placed in the aisles, when all the pews had been filled long before the evening service, no fire regulations having yet been made to forbid such overcrowding. Many tributes were paid to the singing of the children, which reflected the expert training of the organist: and today the same high standard, achieved by Miss Harris as choir mistress never fails to delight all who hear the anthems and the specially chosen hymns.

It seems fitting that the child whose memories are here recorded grew up to serve the Church as an officer in the G.L.B., as a teacher in the School which she dearly loved, as an official Church visitor, and as Secretary of the Cradle Roll, and that two of her grandchildren are now members of the junior choir. Of the Superintendents, whom she recalls, the first was Mr. A. E. H. Theobalds, a deacon, who, being a staunch teetotaler, was for many years the leader of the Band of Hope, which, affiliated to the Sunday School, used to meet in the week. The other was Mr. H. Reed, also a deacon, who later became Superintendent of the Sunday School at Stondon.\*

Salem's branch of the nationwide Band of Hope had been formed towards the end of the 19th century, mainly on the initiative of Mr. H. W. Russell, a deacon, who for many years was its leader. As there were several similar groups in Hitchin, he used to organize a gigantic treat, usually to the seaside, in which hundreds of children joined. On the first occasion when it was decided that they should travel by train (an experience completely new to many of them) excitement rose to fever heat. One octogenarian member of the Church still chuckles as she relates how her mother, reluctant to rob her of such a treat, yet fearful of the risk she ran, finally confided her to an older sister's care, and insisted that as soon as they reached their destination, a telegram should be despatched to announce the glad tidings. The telegram, reporting with laudable economy of words "Safe so far", temporarily assuaged the mother's anxiety: but soon this flared up once more and was not finally dispelled until several hours later she welcomed her two children back on Hitchin Station, safe and sound after their bold adventure.

\*See page 108.

From the crowded conditions described by Mrs. Grant it is easy to understand why teachers pressed so long and so hard for much bigger and better accommodation for the Sunday School, in order to permit the fully graded classes which were considered essential for its proper development. Circumstances forced them to wait for many long years, but when at last their hopes were realised, their successors had a splendid building,\* admirably suited to their needs and as time passes, the foresight and the wisdom of those responsible for it become more evident.

In 1931 a special resolution was passed at a Deacon's Meeting referring to Mr. G. W. Russell whose generous help and never-failing interest had done much to bring the project to completion.

*"We desire to place on record the fact that in August of this year our esteemed Church Secretary, Mr. G. W. Russell, J.P., completed 70 years' continuous association with our Sunday School. Most of those 70 years have been spent in active service for the School, and we deeply appreciate the long and honourable service our brother has been enabled to give. We record our gratitude to our Heavenly Father for sparing Mr. Russell to us for all those years, and for endowing him with the necessary health and strength for this service. We pray that God's abundant blessing may continue to rest upon him.*

The Church has no less cause today to thank God for his son and daughter whose ability and enthusiasm for service are combined with loyalty and devotion as great as his.

In the centenary year of the School, though various causes still conspired to delay the new building for which all hoped, a modest beginning was made in modernizing the infants' class. In February 1912 an appeal was issued by the officers of the School for financial help to equip an uptodate primary department with suitable materials and furniture. The generous response provided not only the required equipment, but also a new Broadwood piano. Soon, instead of perching rather precariously on the crowded tier of benches, the tinies had the miniature chairs and tables suited to their size, and under the skilful guidance of Miss Bertha Stapleton and her enthusiastic band of young teachers, began to prove the value of the new methods they were adopting. Early in May the department was in full swing.

\*See page 74.

In July the United Sunday School Festival organized for the Free Church Sunday Schools of Hitchin made it desirable to postpone the centenary celebrations until late in the year. On December 1st the Rev. C. S. Hull, whose pastorate was remembered with affection by many, returned to preach to his old flock. On the following Wednesday the world-famous evangelist, Gipsy Smith, preached in the afternoon and lectured in the evening to packed congregations, who hung upon his words as he described the triumphs of the Gospel in far-off lands. The tea interval between the two meetings provided a welcome opportunity for a vast number of old scholars to vie with one another in reminiscing about the past: when a request was made for those to stand whose memories embraced at least forty years of the Sunday School, a surprisingly large number jumped to their feet amid a storm of applause. Then came a chance for visitors, friends, parents and members to see the newly equipped primary department in action and to watch a demonstration class taken by the Leader.

As an account of the Memorial Schools has been given in chapter 10\* no further reference to them is made here.

During the forty-five years since they were built, vast changes have occurred in the methods, syllabus, equipment, discipline and organisation in day and Sunday Schools of all types. The public examinations now common in State, public, and private schools have their modest counterpart in the Scripture examinations organised by the Sunday School Union, for which pupils in Tilehouse Street have been warmly encouraged to enter since the early years of the century, and special week night classes are arranged and usually well attended for every grade. The Sunday School supports the B.M.S. as faithfully as does the Mother Church, and joins in efforts to help children in need both at home and abroad, particularly at Christmas time when collections of money, toys, and gifts are sent sometimes to Spurgeon's Orphanage, sometimes to Dr. Barnado's Homes, and sometimes to the Welfare Officer for the needs of local children. Two innovations in recent years must be briefly mentioned.

The house-to-house visitation made in the Burford Way area during 1957 revealed that half of the newcomers there had no link with any Church—though many were interested in a Sunday School for their children, the distance of one and half miles each way prevented

\*See page 74.

parents from sending them along busy roads to Tilehouse Street. At first teachers and friends used their own cars to transport children to and fro, but soon the increasing weight of numbers made this impracticable. After a successful trial period, when a special bus was chartered for the purpose, the Church decided to continue the scheme indefinitely, and to finance it from private subscriptions among members. Recently, however, the Church has undertaken to defray the expenses out of its own funds. For the period from June 1967 to June 1968 an average number of sixty eight children under adult supervision has been transported each week, and for special occasions to which the parents are invited a mini-bus supplements the usual two-decker.

In 1959 the morning Sunday School was replaced by a Junior Church: now children who accompany their parents stay with them for the first part of the service in the Chapel, and then go across to the schoolroom for a special session suited to their age. This venture has developed very successfully in the past few years and now has a membership of thirty, under the enthusiastic leadership of two young members, assisted by a staff big enough to give some individual attention to each child.

As an experiment in 1963 a Sunday School class was arranged for children in Lister Hospital: this, enthusiastically supported by the Matron and many of the nursing staff, received such a warm welcome from the patients that a class which lasts from 9.30 to 10.15 a.m. has been held regularly ever since. In a rota of sixteen teachers from the Sunday School, a pair consisting of a pianist and a leader conduct a simple service in an annexe attached to the Children's ward. Many of the children come from Stevenage and villages far from Hitchin: few of them go regularly to a Sunday School, and some of them have never been inside one. Since the ages of the boys and girls vary from four to fourteen, the service must of necessity be adapted, often on the spur of the moment, to their needs. When asked to suggest hymns, many make "Onward Christian Soldiers," or "All Things bright and beautiful," their first choice, and sing it as lustily as their strength allows. Carols too are favourites, not only before and at Christmas, but often long afterwards. Two stories are usually told, one taken from the Bible, and the other dealing with children living in far distant lands: and a card which often depicts a foreign scene, is left for each child to colour later in

the week. All who take part in this service find it richly rewarding, and occasional letters from appreciative parents testify to its value and to the pleasure it gives their children.

A short summary of the reports given by each leader at the annual general meeting in February 1968, and the financial statement for the preceding year may give the clearest idea of the Sunday School's range today.

**THE CRÛCHE:** There are eight helpers on the rota, and teenagers sometimes volunteer their services: babies from a few weeks and children under five are supervised from 11 a.m. till the morning service ends, and numbers vary from two to ten, according to the weather and season of the year.

**THE CRADLE ROLL.** Names of babies are added, and kept on the roll until they reach the age of three; an annual Cradle Roll service is held, and a pram party is given in a teacher's house. For 1967 there were 33 on the roll.

**THE BEGINNERS' DEPARTMENT**—had 31 on the roll, some additional small children under three, who came with older brothers or sisters, and a loyal and efficient band of teachers, full of ideas for expression work, which often needed long and careful preparation. A summer picnic took place.

**THE PRIMARY DEPARTMENT**—numbered 66, the majority being boys: events included a visit to the Old Peoples' Home at Minsden, where school was held on the Sunday after the anniversary and the children's singing was much enjoyed—a visit to Headlands to see God's gift of hens and animals and flowers—a summer picnic at Watton at Stone shared with the Beginners—a garden party at Ickleford for parents and friends, and a Christmas party.

**THE JUNIOR DEPARTMENT**—Events included a film show given by Miss Nancy Sampson\*, showing slides and objects from New Guinea—a carol concert and a short Nativity play to the Minsden Home and a special series of lessons on the work of the B.M.S.

\*See page 162.

THE SENIOR DEPARTMENT—the room was redecorated and fitted with lined curtains so that it can now be darkened for films and film strips to be used: a Guest Service attracted a number of visitors, and as part of a series of lessons on the history of the Church, a conducted tour of St. Alban's Abbey took place. As a result of a self denial effort organized in conjunction with a series on "Feeding the hungry" £4.0.0 was sent to Christian Aid; the summer outing was a car treasure hunt, ending with supper at a friend's house in Breachwood Green, and parents were invited to a Christmas party.

THE SUNDAY AFTERNOON FELLOWSHIP—was attended by girls only, the boys meeting on Wednesday evenings. The former met in the small room which was built in the Canteen and equipped by members of the Youth Fellowship: subjects which pertain to the Christian life were discussed, as well as matters of topical interest and importance to the members: a special Christmas service was held to which parents and friends of the Church came in larger numbers than usual. Every member of the group entered for the Scripture examination, for which Mr. Tebbutt held a special training class. The possibility of reorganization is being considered to enable the group to include boys.

\* \* \*

THE BOYS' CLUB—A very recent innovation is the Club formed in 1968, which meets in the canteen one night each week and caters for the special interests of senior boys. Since this club is fortunate in having two keen leaders, young enough to understand and to sympathize with teenage difficulties and problems, there is good reason to look forward to its future with hope and confidence.

The Sunday School sends two representatives to the joint Youth Council of the Church, which is showing increasing vigour and initiative; recently a sponsored walk in which brigaders, cadets, scouts, cubs and young people joined (including a three year old for six miles of the route) raised £43 for the Ter-Centenary fund and many gave valuable help at the recent Autumn bazaar and are planning a lively programme for the immediate future.

\* \* \*

Teachers today may arrive in mini skirts or mini cars. Classes may take place in the large bright schoolrooms, gay with pictures (often

of the children's composition) flowers and even toys, or in the Old People's Home, or in a field or farmyard. A freedom of movement, self-expression and discussion may be encouraged of which Ann Bradly never could have dreamed. Concerts, musical and dramatic entertainments often reveal unexpected talents among both staff and pupils. There is the same spirit of adventure, the same eagerness to test the value of new ideas, and, most important of all, there is the same devotion and love manifest in the teachers and officers of the Sunday School in 1969 as inspired Ann Bradly and her fellow workers in the dark days of 1812. The prayer which was uttered on the School's opening day may still sum up its ideals and hopes for the present and the future.

*“May this small structure which is raised in much weakness be firm and lasting, so that children and teachers may have cause to bless God to an endless eternity that it has begun, and may much glory redound to His Holy Name.*

## TILEHOUSE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, HITCHIN, HERTS.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL ACCOUNT

Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31st December, 1967.

## RECEIPTS

	£	s.	d.
Offerings	35	1	2
Special Offerings:—			
Baptist Missionary Society	£121	4	2
Self Denial	21	3	9
Baptist Union Homework Fund	5	18	9
Sundry	6	0	0
	<hr/>		
	154	6	8
Covenant and Income Tax Refund	8	10	3
Donations	1	8	0
Grant from Church	100	0	0
Wonderlands	2	6	6
	<hr/>		
	£301	12	7

## EQUIPMENT FUND

Balance 1st January, 1967	61	19	5
Proceeds from Garden Party	45	0	0
Deposit Account Interest	2	9	5
	<hr/>		
	£109	8	10

## BUS FUND

Balance 1st January, 1967	10	0	10
Donations	5	15	0
Envelopes	31	2	2
Grant from Church	67	10	0
Proceeds from "Tyrolean Evening"	44	1	3
Bank Interest		5	9
	<hr/>		
	£158	15	0

## PAYMENTS

	£	s.	d.
Balance 1st January, 1967	21	11	10
Grants to Departments	46	4	1
Attendance Prizes	22	19	0
Scripture Examination Prizes and Expenses	11	10	7
Subscription— <i>North Herts Sunday School Union</i>	1	0	0
Christmas Parties	18	8	4
Special Offerings— <i>as opposite</i>	154	6	8
Wonderlands	4	16	0
Anniversary Expenses	11	8	10
Sundry Expenses		5	0
Donation— <i>Youth Council</i>	3	3	0
Balance 31st December, 1967	5	19	3

£301 12 7

Purchase of Tables	39	9	9
Balance 31st December, 1967	69	19	1

NOTE: £65 has been spent on Equipment since 31/12/67

£109 8 10

Birch Bros. Limited	135	0	0
Mr. Thorpe	12	0	0
Balance 31st December, 1967	11	15	0

£158 15 0



## Youth Organizations of the Church

In *Salem's* 250th year, when the Boy Scout movement had already become almost a household word in the country, the Church enthusiastically approved the formation not only of a Scout troop but also of a Company of the Girls' Life Brigade. These two groups had much in common, inasmuch as they owed their inception to Mr. McCleery's initiative and experience of similar groups in his previous Church. Though each at first restricted membership to those associated with the Church and/or Sunday School, the basis of admission was subsequently widened to include boys and girls whose families had no connection with either: these often proved a valuable link between home and church, and were sometimes instrumental in drawing parents, sisters and brothers to the services there, in particular to the monthly Church Parade. Moreover, both organisations were inspired by the same hopes and aims, provided similar opportunities for the all-round development of their members, and in the latter part of the 20th century were far sighted and flexible enough to adapt their appearance, methods and syllabuses to the needs of a rapidly changing world.

## THE GIRLS' LIFE BRIGADE

"The Girls' Life Brigade! What on earth is that?" was a question often heard, but at first rarely answered in Hitchin during the early summer of 1919. For few people in the town had ever heard of this organisation. As for its "Four Point Programme" not one in a thousand understood how it can contribute to the spiritual, physical, educational and social development of its members. Enlightenment soon dawned. Mr. McCleery was well aware that Brigaditis, given the right conditions, is no less contagious than German measles, and its period of incubation much shorter. His plan of campaign to publicise the movement in Hitchin was simplicity itself; he merely invited a little group of officers and girls from his previous Church to spend a short holiday there, and left propinquity to do its work. On their last day the visitors gave a display, of course in uniform, which was considered very smart in 1919. The result was the foregone conclusion upon which the minister had confidently counted. At once girls from the Sunday School pleaded for a company to be formed for them, and in July 1919 the First Hitchin Company of the G.L.B. came into being, with thirty members under the leadership of Captain Miss H. M. Russell assisted by three lieutenants.

Now came the problem of uniform! The war had not long ended, materials were scarce and expensive. But that was no barrier. Money was lent, materials bought at cost price, and a host of needlewomen set to work with such a will and skill that at the first Church Parade in November every girl was present in full uniform. It was sheer joy to work with such an enthusiastic team. Schemes were soon on foot to raise money towards the cost of the Memorial Schools, now being planned, by a series of Open Evenings and displays which, incidentally, proved a highly successful recruiting ground. The first public display given in 1922 was so popular that henceforth only the Town Hall was big enough for all who flocked to see it. Moreover not only did it add £22 to the Building Fund, but it established a tradition of co-operation in Church activities, which has been faithfully maintained by successive generations of Brigaders, especially when those activities are in aid of children in need, the under-privileged and the hungry.

Soon a junior section, the Cadets, was added for girls under ten,

who had been clamouring to join their older sisters and friends, not only in the fun and business of the club room, but also at the monthly Church Parade. How proud they felt, when they, too, received a banner of their own, quite different from the other which had been presented anonymously to the seniors in the Company's first year. By this time requests for displays came pouring in from many quarters, as far apart as Cambridge and St. Albans, and the Hitchin Company blazed a widespread trail through the countryside. Their first camp which took place in Gorleston was followed by the formation of a company at the Wesleyan Church there. Soon Wymondley had its own company under Captain Miss Mabel Norris: then came Captain Miss Muriel Buckett and finally Captain Miss Irene Sharp who also took over the Graveley company. Such was her devotion to the task that even the double responsibility and the difficulty of travel did not damp her enthusiasm or exhaust her energies.

In 1933 Miss Russell, now a major, on retiring from the company handed over to Lieutenant Miss Hidgcock a company of nearly 90, outstanding in efficiency and public spirit. Year by year fresh opportunities for service arose and an excellent standard was achieved in the varied sections, first aid, home nursing, handicrafts, singing, dramatic performances and physical activities. Most welcome of all to the officers and to the Church were the many applications made by the "Jelbies" for Church membership, and for leave to train as officers in the Brigade, as soon as their age allowed. During the Second World War the Company, now 100 strong, concentrated their main financial efforts on the support of the local Red Cross branch, and gave much practical help in the town's frequent war efforts.

The end of the war made it possible to resume the annual displays at the Royal Albert Hall when teams picked from the whole country took part. In 1949 the First Hitchin Junior Company came top in the section for National Dancing, a success which crowned Miss Hidgcock's years of tireless service and enterprise. Though she then retired, she became Adjutant of the Company and still maintains a deep interest in its welfare.

Her place was filled by Miss Sharp, who had joined the Company as one of its youngest members in 1919, and who for thirty years had been second to none in her dedicated service and loyalty. In the *Pageant of Hitchin*, which the town produced in 1951, as its

contribution towards the Festival of Britain, the Company's smart appearance won a compliment from the Queen as she watched them play their part in the beautiful Priory grounds. The thirtieth anniversary was celebrated in the old manse garden and attended by large numbers, including twenty of the thirty foundation members. This meeting, and the chance it gave to renew old ties, was so much enjoyed that from it sprang the present Women's Contact Club, over which Miss Russell, the Company's much loved first Captain, still presides.

By this time older members of the Company were undertaking various tasks at the Lister Hospital. All joined with great enthusiasm in efforts to swell the Church's Restoration Fund, by raising £100 in ship ha'pennies and threepenny bits, and by helping in various sales of work and autumn fairs in aid of the *Home Work Fund* and the *B.M.S.* To their credit be it said that they showed themselves no less ready to play their part with a tea towel at the kitchen sink than with a supporting cast in the limelight of the stage. To celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the whole Brigade they presented to the town a seat which stands today outside the Public Library.

In 1963 Major Sharp, who had been made Deputy Commissioner for the Hertfordshire Division, a great honour for the Company and for herself, regretfully resigned for health reasons. Miss Tompkins succeeded her as Captain at a time when the Brigade was planning a complete overhaul of its methods. The G.L.B. was incorporated with the Girls' Guildry, under the title of the Girls' Brigade. A new look was given to the uniform, hats and all; a new Company Colour was presented; a new syllabus was drawn up relevant to the needs of the day, and attaching more importance to the practical details of home making and budgetting. Public displays are no longer given in the Town Hall. Instead parents are brought into closer touch with the officers and each other by means of Open Evenings which give an opportunity for them to inspect the exhibitions of work in a very wide range of subjects.

At the same time a national Guild of Friendship was formed of Old Brigaders and their friends, the Hitchin Branch being one of the biggest in the country. This Guild gives much practical and financial help, sometimes by organising market stalls, by giving yeoman service behind the scenes at special functions and occasionally by teaching a special Badge subject.

Whereas in the early days most members lived fairly near the Church, today because of housing schemes many come from a considerable distance, and a bus is needed for their transport. In many cases they have no Church background to help them at home, and today when so many interests compete for the attention of the young, great courage, faith and devotion are needed for the all-important task of training girls for life. In its Jubilee year a company of 100, backed by the unflagging interest of the Church, and inspired by keen officers, is indeed an eloquent tribute to its captain, and something for which to thank God.

*Based upon an article by Captain Miss H. M. Russell.*

## OFFICERS OF THE GIRLS' BRIGADE

*Captain Miss H. M. Russell*

### *Lieutenants*

Miss Nora Gatward

(Mrs. Whaley)

Miss Alice Noble

(Mrs. Bennett)

Miss Doris Collier

(Mrs. Woods)

Miss Milly Norris

(Mrs. Grant)

Miss Alice George

(Mrs. Barker)

Miss Nan Noble

Miss Ida Gatward

(Mrs. Russell)

Miss Mabel Norris

*Captain Miss E. Hidgcock*

Miss Elsie O'Dell

(Mrs. Bridges)

Miss Madge Moore

(Mrs. Oakley)

Miss Susan Saunders

Miss Margaret Waters

(Mrs. Oldham)

Miss Cora Peck

Miss Marjorie Harris

Miss Mabel Burton

(Mrs. Jennings)

Miss Joan Cannon

Miss Joyce Peck

(Mrs. Sewell)

*Captain Miss R. Sharp*

Miss Audrey Goodship

(Mrs. Sampson)

Miss Margaret Edwards

(Mrs. McKay)

Miss Celia Norris  
(Mrs. Payne)

*Captain Miss P. Tomkies*  
Mrs. Sampson  
Mrs. Payne

## SCOUTS AND CUBS

Mr. Percy Whaley, a descendant of the Foster family, recently demobilised from Mesopotamia, was appointed Scout Master (S.M.) assisted by Gilbert Collier and Percy Woods. At first activities were mainly concentrated on tracking, football and cricket, and were varied by occasional camps which usually took place on the Foster's farm at Wymondley. Very soon a pack of Cubs was formed with Wm. Carthew as Cub Master (C.M.), or "Akela". In 1922 a Rover patrol began, with seven of the senior scouts, who strove consistently to live up to their motto "Service" in both Church and town. Five of them were teachers in the Sunday School—and, a small printing press having been installed, all seven helped to produce Church notices and programmes. Every night for three years they slept under canvas from Easter to October in a field which Mr. Russell lent; and soon co-opting other young men from the Church they formed a successful football and cricket team. The community certainly benefitted from their services especially during Hitchin's Annual Hospital Week, when they posted notices all over the town, dealt with collecting boxes and moved furniture in readiness for various functions. So happy was their comradeship that for six years these Rovers worked, played and worshipped together without one serious disagreement. But, inevitably, since the time arrived when most of them found courting more attractive than camping, in 1928 when their average age was 24, they bestowed their tents upon the Scouts, and prepared to take up permanent residence with new partners. Though most of them left the town, one who stayed married a Brigader, their children joined the G.L.B. and choir, and became Sunday School teachers, and today their grandchildren are Scouts and Cubs.

The period between the wars was largely a "holding" one, though camps continued to be held. Once there was considerable excitement when older scouts were called upon to put their tracking training to practical use, by joining in the search for a missing woman. What a boost it was for Scout prestige when two of them actually found her, wandering near Offley! In 1923 S.M. Whaley, having married and left the town, was succeeded by A.S.M. P. Woods. Ten years later, the troop which had declined considerably in strength, was re-formed by John Russell, assisted by Stanley Mincher and Geoffrey Cooling. When the Second War began, the troop, in common with Scouts all over the country, helped to assemble and distribute gas masks, delivered government literature from house to house and often acted as auxiliary messengers. Soon Scouts and Cubs, evacuated from London in 1939 and Eastbourne in 1940, swelled the Hitchin ranks and for the next six years there was such constant movement in the troop that even the Scout Masters, once their willing mentors, are sometimes at a loss today to remember names and faces of all who passed through their hands. However, no excuse is needed here for recalling the men and women, too, who gladly gave their time and energy to this part of the Church's work among the young, for many of their erstwhile charges may recollect with a touch of pleasure a Skipper or Akela once dear to them.

There was bluff and hearty Captain Harris, forthright and fearless as a former Commissioner should be: Leslie Bridges, an able C.M. and John Russell, so sadly lost while serving with the R.A.F. and still so deeply missed. The war brought many helpers from afar. Martyn Lamb, seconded as pathologist from Southend to Chalkdell Hospital, had been an officer in the Boys' Brigade, but, since there was no B.B. company in Hitchin, he was converted to Scouting so successfully that he has now reached the lofty height of H.Q. Field Commissioner for the Midland Area. And yet the invitation to join the Scouts had seemed to him at first little better than a red rag to a bull! Doris Hardwicke became a much loved Akela, whose work was tragically cut short on her return to Eastbourne, when she was killed in an air raid, as she protected a terrified child from death. Arnold Neave, first as Scouter and then as Scout Master brought new enthusiasm and business efficiency to the troop, and having settled permanently in Hitchin, has

served it loyally for many years. His ways and means of overcoming rationing difficulties, always ingenious and quite legitimate of course, are still remembered with admiration by those who benefitted from them. Today Mr. Neave is President of the District Scout Council.

Eveline Trinder opened her arms and the pack to all comers, and the little lads loved her by the score, or even hundred. Later on, several Scouts did their best to keep things going, keen Patrol Leaders like Stanley Mincher, John and Hywel Davies and Norman Hyde, who is today the local Commissioner, though, as a lad, he was once sent home for bad behaviour in the ranks!

So the Group went on, National Service taking its constant toll. Gordon Browne, an old boy, became A.S.M. and later showed his good Scout training by winning the British Empire Medal for bravery. In 1948 the troop won the District Scout Dramatic Competition with the scene they presented from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. During the next year, when leaders were difficult to find, Ben Ward was recruited (perhaps captured would be a better word) from Walsworth Road. Though by the rules the winning team was debarred from taking part in the next year's competition, they gave with him as producer, an equally successful performance of *The Pie and the Tart*. Then, once more eligible to compete, the cast, many of whom must have regarded themselves as old stagers by this time, triumphed again with their performance of a rollicking farce *Children of the Revolution* which their Skipper not only produced, but also wrote for them.

The Cub Pack was guided and, occasionally, chided by a bevy of keen young ladies, Muriel Brown, Maureen Godfrey, Jean Atkinson, and Ann Rogers, who enabled it to fulfil its essential function of sending up well trained boys into the troop. Today C.M. Mrs. Highton, copes happily with a full and lively pack, among whom she has worked for several years.

During the post-war period many remember with gratitude the work of Horace Wright, efficient and reliable, who well deserves the honour of becoming D.C. for Welwyn—quiet and popular Jim Waters and Cyril Streetfield—and the kindly discipline of policeman's wife, Mrs. Joyce Craggs, as C.M.

Finally, mention must be made of Tony Freeman, whose parents with difficulty prodded him into joining the troop in 1948; on his own confession he hated it for the first few months, then something



suddenly “clicked” in his mind, and his previous dislike turned to enthusiasm so strong that for 20 years he has been one of the group’s outstanding successes, an organising genius and veritable dynamo, serving in every capacity up to G.S.M. Throughout the period he has battled courageously with the difficulties caused by the loss, either temporary or permanent, of potential leaders, loyal and efficient Scouts called away sometimes for their term of National Service, sometimes for college, University or professional training, and occasionally by business claims. His success in building up a strong team of leaders—Bill Smith, A.S.M. Barrie Powles, David Ellis, A.S.L. and David Jenkins as Leader of the Venture Scouts—may be judged from the record of 1966/1967. In this year the troop won three *Scout Cords*, the highest proficiency award open to Scouts under 15: one of the three, Richard Tilley, later became a Queen’s Scout and was selected to attend the 60th Anniversary World Jamboree in Idaho, U.S.A., after which he visited Hitchin Rotary Club’s twin town Troy in Alabama: Owen Williams represented Hitchin when Herts Scouts visited East Germany, Russia and Poland—and a troop of twelve Venture Scouts had the distinction of being the largest in the district.

“As one considers the long list of officers and the far longer list of boys who have passed through this small branch of Scouting attached to the Church, we feel we *must* have achieved something, even if, alas, not all we had hoped for. Who knows but that there is someone, somewhere who was influenced in even a little way for good by the time spent in our organisation, and who perhaps recalls with a smile his time with the Scouts or Cubs at Tilehouse Street Church and is still remembering to ‘do his duty to God’?”

*A “combined operations” article based on contributions from six officers of the troop.*

# Epilogue

New members of Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, Hitchin, are privileged to enter a great heritage of Church life which stretches back to the turbulent days of John Bunyan and, “come wind, come weather”, there has been a continuous company of “pilgrims” sharing its life.

To be the minister of such an historic church is indeed an honour which moves one to humility. Men like John Wilson, John Geard and others of more recent years have set a high standard to follow, for each of them has made his own distinctive contribution of ability and personality to the leadership of the faithful.

To gather together the story of three hundred years, largely from contemporary records, as the author has so ably done, is no mean task. This helps us to perceive significant trends in the life of the Church which run like golden threads through its story. These enable us to take stock of the position today so that we may go forward with fresh confidence and hope.

The beginnings of the Tilehouse Street Church are to be found in the ferment of the years that followed the Reformation when states and churches in Europe were struggling to find new ways of organising themselves. The human spirit had rebelled against the authority of Rome which had dominated the scene in matters of politics and religion for centuries.

In England many felt that the reforms which had been made in the Church had not gone far enough. The Church was now dominated by the state and although there had been several significant changes,

the new arrangements were unsatisfactory to many, who refused to conform to the various Acts of Uniformity and who desired at all costs to preserve freedom in matters of faith and worship.

Such desires led to many refusals to attend the Parish Church and the determination of these people to meet together for worship though this was strictly forbidden. The consequences of such determination are clearly seen in the first chapter of the book, for the Foster brothers had heavy fines piled up against them and both John Bunyan and John Wilson languished in Bedford and Hertford jails respectively for preaching to unauthorised conventicles. Eventually the freedom for which these men suffered was granted and today in our land this freedom is enjoyed. However, closely linked with the privilege of freedom of worship is also the freedom to speak, write and to hold and propagate political views. These freedoms were largely won for us by the sacrifices of the early dissenters, and we must never forget that "the condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the evidence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt"\* (J. P. Curran) and in the light of some of the movements of our time vigilance requires to be maintained even in our own land. The main battle is still having to be fought in many countries where limited freedom of worship is permitted but freedom to propagate the faith is forbidden.

Included in this demand for freedom of assembly for worship is also the demand to worship according to the dictates of conscience and not to conform to the requirements of a particular book. It is true that this was carried to the extreme, by early Baptists so much so, that even the scriptures were not read at their service of worship. It was not until one hundred years later that the church decided that a portion of the scriptures should be read as part of public worship on the Lord's Day.

Although to this day Baptist Churches claim that Christian worship should not be limited to a prescribed order, they do not always use the freedom which they claim in this respect. Indeed strong opposition is sometimes met when the usual pattern of worship is changed. However, progressive churches realise that the wealth of ancient and modern devotional material should be freely drawn upon to bring enrichment and variety to the services and also

\*From his speech on the Right of Election of Lord Mayor of Dublin July 10th 1790.

that from time to time experiments in various forms of worship using music, drama, visual aids and discussion should be tried.

Regularly to conform to a prescribed book of services, however beautifully written and composed they may be, is to stifle change and experiment as well as the opportunity to adapt the act of worship to fit the requirements of succeeding generations and the variety of people who attend churches.

This aspect of Free Church life may well prove to be an important contribution to the future expressions of Christian worship.

Although it may be thought by some that the non-conformist attitude is a negative one, there is strong evidence to suggest that Tilehouse Street Church members have been willing to unite with other Christians, not least with Anglicans, in a number of significant ways. Even John Wilson wrote a poem entitled "Lamentation for Church Divisions" in which he expressed his regret for the schisms in the Church of Jesus Christ and appealed for Christian unity. John Geard appears to have been held in high esteem by all "whether Churchmen or Dissenters". Anglicans and Free Churchmen in Hitchin have co-operated fully in the work of the Bible Society for many generations. The Rev. W. G. Harris declared "we are Christians before we are Baptists" and in his time a London University Student Mission was held in Hitchin in which all the Protestant churches in the town were involved. Tilehouse Street was one of the founder members and is one of the strongest supporters of the Hitchin Council of Churches which was formed in 1965. It is a mistake, therefore, to assume that it is only in the middle of the twentieth century that Free Churchmen and Anglicans have worked in close co-operation. The Tilehouse Street Church continues to share in the work of the Bible Society Auxiliary, the Christian Aid Appeal, the Road Steward Scheme and other co-operative ventures which are arranged, and rejoices in the links which are being forged with the local Roman Catholics. Ministers have gladly shared for several years in the united services which are held in connection with the Grammar and High Schools, the Annual Civic Service, Remembrance Day Service and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The present climate of relationships augurs well for the future. The Church Meeting at Tilehouse Street has made its position clear in its comments on the report of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland entitled "Baptists and Unity" by saying "We agree that the Ecumenical Movement has

helped towards a great improvement in Church relations, and we believe it would be a mistake for Baptists to weaken their links with either the British Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches. We agree that much should and must be done by local congregations of different denominations in getting to know each other better, and in undertaking together a unified plan of Christian witness, and that there are many activities in which we could join where no deep differences of conviction divide us."

Such words express high ideals, the attainment of which will make great demands of thought and grace in the years that lie ahead, but they are a projection of, and not a departure from, the spirit that has characterised the life of the Church for many years.

A "self-governing, self supporting and self propagating Church" is particularly prone to the danger of being an inward looking community, overconcerned with its own existence, its own fellowship and its own buildings. However, a reading of the foregoing pages will show that the horizons of Salem's interest stretch far beyond its own walls, not only in the town of Hitchin but to the ends of the earth.

Long before the Modern Missionary Movement took shape, the members were anxious to proclaim the gospel to peoples of other lands and have contributed generously in men and money to this cause. The exciting visit of Samson Occum, the Red Indian from North America, was the first visible sign of this concern.

After the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, and ever since, the church has generously supported the missionary cause and sent a number of its members into the Christian ministry and to the mission field. The church has always been challenged to bear its responsibility in this regard. Such a responsibility broadens the imagination and helps to stimulate a knowledge of and a loving concern for people in other lands as well as the people who live nearby. Today the Churches are being called to be "renewed for mission", for the needs today at home and overseas for the gospel are as great as they have ever been, and Tilehouse Street will be required to be involved in this aspect of its evangelical work in the future as in the past.

The Church is, however, required not only to proclaim the gospel by preaching and teaching but also to witness to the love of Christ by engaging in service to mankind. There is evidence to show that the members of Tilehouse Street Church have been and are

conscious of this responsibility. Many of its members have served in local government and have a share in groups and societies that have been of service to the people of the town. Samuel James was concerned for the proper education of the boys in the Grammar School and references in the Chronicle show the concern of the Church in times of national crisis. During both the World Wars vigorous efforts were made to supply comforts for the men and women serving in the Forces. During the First War a house, furniture, fuel, food and clothing were provided for a Belgian family of refugees. During the second world war, several prisoner of war camps were established near Hitchin, and, after hostilities ceased, it was some years before these prisoners were repatriated. By arrangement with the authorities a number of members of the Church opened their homes to these men, and many firm friendships resulted therefrom. Many of these ex prisoners of war, who are now successful business and professional men in their own countries, have visited their Hitchin friends bringing with them wives and families, and tremendous pleasure has been given to all concerned in this piece of service.

Scarcely had the prisoners of war been repatriated than a second and even larger problem loomed up, that of the refugees and displaced persons in the countries of Central Europe. Individuals in the Church rose to their need magnificently and were able to establish personal links with two or three families and to give considerable help to them in their time of need. A Forces Canteen was run by the Church in the schoolroom, and the war memorial of those who fell in the Second War was a new wing in the hospital at Sianfu, China. In more recent years members have proved to be generous in appeals for the needy and help is given to elderly folk in the town in a number of practical ways. The example of Christ as one who serves must never be forgotten by those who claim to follow Him and ways and means must always be found whereby the Church is seen to witness in this way.

So this Church stands on the threshold of its fourth century. In many ways the world is different from what it was when the Church came into being. In those far off days persecution awaited those who defied the law in matters of faith and worship. Today the Ecumenical Movement is in full swing and the future lies in united

action. All kinds of re-adjustments will be required in the next century to meet the challenges of the new age in which we live. The primary purpose of the Church still remains, which is to provide the opportunity for worship and to be the channel through which the gospel is proclaimed by word and deed, "come wind, come weather".

R. H. Tebbutt

## APPENDIX I

## SUMMARY OF FAITH

Summary drawn up in 1846 of the beliefs held by the Society of Protestant Dissenters of Tilehouse Street Baptist Church maintaining:

The doctrines of the one living and true God, three equal persons in the Godhead, Eternal and personal election, Original Sin, particular Redemption, free Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, Regeneration, Conversion and Sanctification, by the Spirit and Grace of God, the Moral law a rule of life and conduct for all believers, the final perseverance of the Saints, the resurrection of the body to Eternal life, the future Judgement, the eternal happiness of the righteous and everlasting misery of such as die impenitent, and practising baptism by immersion to such only as are of years of understanding upon their own confession of repentance toward God and faith and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and also by such other persons as shall hereafter be united to the said Society and attend the worship of God in the said Meeting House and for that purpose to permit to officiate in the said Meeting House (and to reside in any house which may be erected upon the said premises for that purpose) such person or persons of the denomination of Protestant Dissenters called "Particular Baptists", maintaining the Doctrines aforesaid as the major part of the members of the said Society, Female as well as Male, being Communicants therein, shall, at any Church Meeting duly assembled for that purpose by public Notice to be given in the said Meeting House during public worship on the Sunday preceding such Church meeting, from time to time elect as their Minister or Pastor therein during their will and pleasure, only Provided always that it is hereby expressly intended that the Church or Society assembling in the said Meeting House shall at all times be confined in the choice of a Minister or Pastor to persons maintaining the Doctrines aforesaid and practising baptism as hereintofore mentioned. Yet it shall and may be lawful for the Pastor or Members of the said Church or Society for the time being, if they as a Church at any time or from time to time shall so choose, to admit to Communion and Church membership any person or persons maintaining the Doctrines aforesaid and professing repentance towards God and



faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, although such person or persons may not have been baptized by immersion.”

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The above summary of beliefs held by the members of the Tilehouse Street Church in 1844 would, no doubt, have expressed the theological views of the vast majority of Particular Baptists at that time. In the next fifty years several factors led to the breakdown of Calvinism among the Particular Baptists and few, if any, today would express their theology in the terms outlined above.

*Is the comment of the minister today*

## APPENDIX II

Members of the Church and congregation who have worked either  
on the Home or Foreign Field

1.	1697	Ebenezer Wilson	Son of J. Wilson, minister in London
2.		Samuel Wilson	Grandson of J. Wilson, minister in London, died 1750.
3.	1705	Henry Shepherd	Lay preacher, authorized in 1700, became Baptist minister at Bridgewater.
4.		John Needham	Son of John Needham T.S.C. minister in 1710, became minister in Bristol.
5.		John Wadham	Minister in Bristol.
6.	1842	Philip Lane	Authorized lay preacher for several years, appointed to post in Shropshire by Scripture Readers' Union; later minister in Australia, died there 1876.
7.	1854	Jno Odell	Village preacher, recommended for training at Bradford Bt. T.C., became minister, died 1895.
8.		James Bisset*	Founder of Aged Pilgrims' Friends' Society, died 1859.
9.	1865	Amos English	Bt. minister in Modbury, Devon.
10.		James Nesbard	Trained at Regents Park T.C., minister of Gosport Bt. Church.
11.	1869	Alfred Osbourne	Minister of Stoke Green Bt. Church near Ipswich.
12.		Thos. Penn	Village preacher, minister of Hem-yock Bt. Church.
13.		Mary Williamson	Née Wheeler, first to go abroad as missionary in India, who joined Bt. Church in Calcutta.
14.	1871	Chas. Baker	Village preacher, recommended for training at Chilwell; minister at Louth.

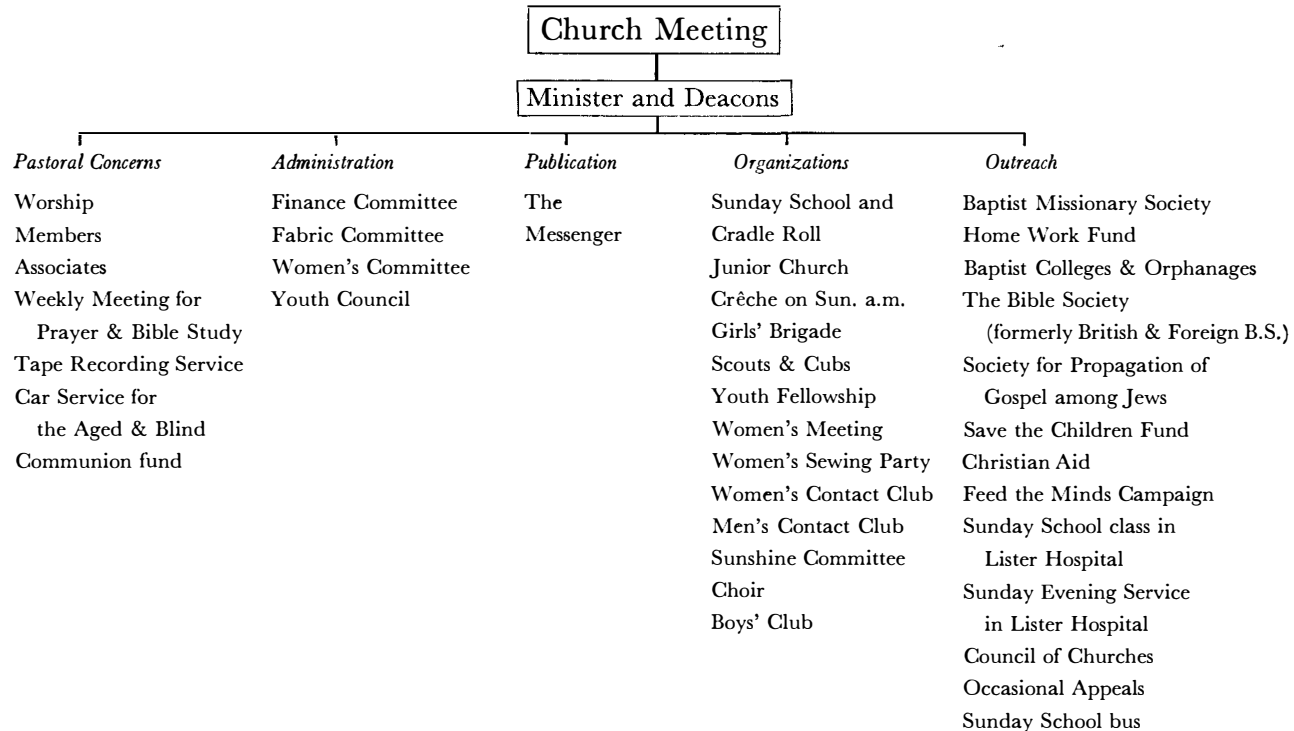
\*See page 45.

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| 15. 1874 | Daniel Wilshere                          | Village preacher 1867; minister in Cambridgeshire; B.M.S. missionary in the Bahamas; President of Auxiliary of British & Foreign Bible Society for 40 years. In 1879 Tilehouse Street Church sent out a gift of a Communion Service to him. In Second World War Ken. Howard, member of T.S.C. was stationed at Nassau and arranged for this Communion Service, then in bad repair, to be reconditioned. (See No. 22). |
| 16. 1877 | James Rennie*                            | Colporteur in N. Herts. for 50 years.   |
| 17.      | Fred. A. Baker                           | Always wanted to be a missionary, accepted post in Cairo as printer to the Nile Mission Press, worked among Mohammedans. Later became minister in Norfolk.  |
| 18.      | C. L. Wheeler                            | Village preacher—Leader of C.E., took an appointment with Y.M.C.A.  |
| 19. 1914 | Frank Thomas Bloice<br>Smith B.D. London | Trained at Rawdon Baptist College. Served as minister at North Parade, Halifax 1914–1919, Sutton in Charim 1919 – 1923, Newport 1923 – 1941; Sutton in Charim 1941 Died.  |
| 20.      | Archibald Smith                          | Brother of Frank, both were brought up in the Sunday School, was a Minister at Rotherham and elsewhere.   |
| 21.      | Wm. Upchurch                             | Son of Salem's deacon and elder, trained at Spurgeon's College. Went to China in 1935 and again in 1938 with his wife; withdrawn 1949. Went to Malaya. Now minister at Drayton Park Church, N. London.  |

\*See page 67.

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| 22. | Ken. Howard                 | Had oversight of Preston Chapel; served in R.A.F. 1949; trained at Spurgeon's College; appointed to Sutcliff Bt. Church at Olney, Beds., of which Wm. Carey had been a member and from which the last of the Serampore missionaries were sent out.   |
| 23. | Nancy Sampson               | Missionary in New Guinea; working for the Wycliff Bible Translation Society 1962-1967; returned in 1968 after furlough.  |
| 24. | Miss Smith                  | Of Wymondley, married Mr. Clarke of Hydeau Way Bt. Church. Both now with B.M.S. in Brazil.   |
| 25. | Geoffrey and Evelyn Cooling | Sunday School teacher in Hitchin and Preston—war service in R.A.F. in India and Ceylon, leader of Preston School 1954-59. Leader of Sunday Afternoon Y.P.F. 1959-67. Trained at Barry School of Evangelism—in 1949 went to Nigeria to take charge of Qua Iboe Mission Printing Press—on furlough in 1951 married and returned with wife until 1953. Now a deacon and Church Treasurer. |
| 26. | Mr. and Mrs. Ball           | Mr. Ball—Superintendent of Stondon Sunday School 1944-1958—Church Secretary. Then they became "House Parents" at Mt. Ararat Children's Mission in Lowestoft—and have just transferred to Banbury.  |
| 27. | Mervyn and Ann Saunders     | Missionaries with the Unevangelized Field Mission, Issia, Ivory Coast, West Africa.  |
| 28. | Alan and Margery McCarley   | Associate members from Wymondley, now in charge of the Evangelical Free Church Burghfield, Burghfield Common, Near Reading.  |

### How the work of the Church functions in 1968



## GENERAL FUND 1967

### Allocation of income and expenditure for each £

<i>Income</i>		s.	d.
Weekly offerings and covenants	£ {	18	3
Sundries		1	9

<i>Expenditure</i>		How the money is used		s.	d.
Ministerial	£ {			6	9
Pulpit supplies					4
Choir and organ				1	0
Caretaking				1	10
Heat and light				1	9
Printing					7
Insurances					5
Sunday School				1	2
Transfer to Building Account				3	6
Sundries					8
Manse					7
Outside Causes*				1	5

\* This does not include the B.M.S., H.W.F., Christian Aid or Save the Children Fund as these do not come out of the domestic pound.