

OLD  
MEETING  
HOUSE,  
MANSFIELD

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House,  
Mansfield**

# The Story of The Old Meeting House, Mansfield

J. HARROP WHITE



The Old Meeting House before 1870

*First printed 1959*

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

Calamy = *An Account of the Ministers etc. who were Ejected or Silenced after the Restoration in 1660.* 2nd Edn., vol. ii, 1713.  
Edmund Calamy.

Calamy Revised = A. G. Matthews: *Calamy Revised*, 1934.

Freedom after Ejection = Alex. Gordon: *Freedom after Ejection*, 1919.

Older Nonconformity = Nicholson and Axon: *The Older Nonconformity in Kendal*.

P.R. = *Parish Register(s)*.

T.H.U.S. = *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

MANSFIELD occupies an honoured place in the annals of Dissent. In the most difficult period of tribulation following the successive acts of the Clarendon Code, the town, because it was non-corporate, had become from 1665 a haven from persecution for no fewer than eight ejected ministers. The discovery of a manuscript diary as recently as 1952 now makes it certain that Mansfield can claim to have been the centre for a nonconformist academy training students for the ministry under John Billingsley and, subsequently, under his son and successor in the academy, John Billingsley Junior. A continuous history of the congregation meeting as protestant dissenters can be traced from 1665.

To John Harrop White's other activities on behalf of the cause to which he devoted a lifetime's service there must be added the history of the Old Meeting House, to which he gave considerable labour. He died before the manuscript was complete. I was entrusted with the task of preparing it for publication, and I have taken the opportunity to bring the story down to 1951, the year in which Mr. Harrop White died, and in which the congregation celebrated the 250th Anniversary of the deed which conveyed the land on which the chapel was erected. Since modern research into the origins of dissent has provided a considerable amount of new information not contained in the sources Mr. Harrop White was using, the opportunity has also been taken to supplement the original account with the most recent findings. This contribution has been kindly supplied by the Rev. C. Gordon Bolam, M.A., B.D., minister of the High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham. The whole process has entailed some re-arrangement of material and considerable additions to the last six chapters. Any account of recent

years must lack the distancing perspective of time, but I have tried to present a just account and to offer the book in a form not unworthy of the man who conceived it.

ARTHUR W. VALLANCE

1958

IN MEMORIAM:  
JOHN HARROP WHITE

JOHN HARROP WHITE was born at the Swan Hotel, Mansfield, on the 20th June 1856, his father, Robert White, being the well-known and highly respected landlord of that historic coaching inn. He was educated at Grove House School, Mansfield, and then at Old Trafford School, Manchester. He practised as a solicitor in Mansfield, and in 1888 married Agnes Mary, daughter of George Vallance, builder and contractor.

He served as a member of the Mansfield Commissioners, and then as a member of the Town Council from 1882 to 1894, becoming Deputy Town Clerk in 1894, and Town Clerk in 1900. He was a member of the Nottinghamshire County Council from 1889 to 1895. On resigning the Town Clerkship in 1923 he was elected Mayor for one year, at the end of which he was made Honorary Freeman of Mansfield. He was Clerk to Warsop Urban District Council from 1884 to 1935; a member of the Nottinghamshire Education Committee; Chairman of the Governors of the County Technical College, Mansfield; Governor of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School; and Chairman of the Governors of the Brunts School. He served on the board of the Mansfield and District Hospital from its foundation until the coming of the National Health Service, and was President from 1922 to 1923 and from 1947 to 1948.

His services to the Unitarian cause included the Presidency of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, 1931–2, the Presidency of the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association, 1901–4, 1916–19, and 1924–5; and the Presidency of the Unitarian College, Manchester, 1938–40.

Always a generous benefactor of the Old Meeting

House, he gave unremitting personal service to its affairs, and was ready to conduct a service in holiday periods or in emergency, continuing to do so right into his ninety-fifth year in which he died.

By his will, apart from the memorial described at the end of this book, he left to the Chapel the sum of £1,000 to be invested, and the income to be applied firstly to placing flowers in the window given by himself and his wife in 1928, on the 4th of January and the 3rd of April each year, and in the window they gave in 1913 on the 1st of April and the 27th of September each year, and in keeping in order and planting with flowers the grave outside the former window; and secondly to pay £1 per annum to the Old Meeting House Sunday School, and the balance to the funds of the Chapel. He also left £1,000 to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, £500 to the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association, and £100 to the Unitarian College, Manchester. His other bequests included £1,000 to the Brunts School, Mansfield, for an annual scholarship to a place of higher education, and bequests to the United Nations Association, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the National Trust for the Preservation of Places of Historic Interest.

## CHAPTER I

## THE FOUNDATION TO 1689

No one who has been in the Old Meeting House at Mansfield can have failed to notice the stone reredos behind the Communion Table, but comparatively few may have read the inscription upon the brass plate below it. It was composed by the Rev. A. W. Worthington, based on the phraseology of John Whitlock's *A Brief Account*, 1807, p. 26, and runs as follows:

In Memory of the Conscientious Sacrifices and Christian Labours of the Rev. Robert Porter, Vicar of Pentrich; the Rev. John Whitlock, M.A., Vicar of St. Mary's, Nottingham; the Rev. William Reynolds, M.A., Lecturer at the same Church; the Rev. John Billingsley, M.A., Vicar of Chesterfield; the Rev. Joseph Trueman, B.D., Rector of Cromwell; the Rev. Robert Smalley, Vicar of Greasley; and others who resigned their livings when the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662. Driven from their homes by the Oxford Act in 1666, they found in Mansfield a little Zoar, a shelter and sanctuary, and united in hearty love and concord, they worshipped together till the Act of Toleration was passed in 1688 when all who survived the day of persecution returned to their ministry save the Rev. Robert Porter, who remained in charge of this congregation till his death, January 22nd 1690. The Meeting House erected A.D. 1702 for the exercise of religious worship was restored 1870. LAUS DEO.

Here in a few words is related the origin of the Old Meeting Congregation; and, at the same time, there are commemorated by name a few of that great company of ministers who all over the country made their stand for conscience' sake in 1662 and laid the foundations of modern nonconformity. If we are to understand the significance of the inscription and the part that Mansfield

played in the lives of Robert Porter and his colleagues, we need to sketch briefly the background against which their protest and action have to be seen.

The ministers who found such happy fellowship and spiritual encouragement at Mansfield were all in the tradition of Puritanism and, with probably one exception, were Presbyterian in judgement. Puritanism began in the reign of Elizabeth I as a movement within the Church of England to reform the ceremonies of the Church, to raise the standard of preaching, and to set forth a holier pattern of Christian life. It is usual to distinguish two tendencies within Puritanism: one represented by the Presbyterian advocates who, as the name implies, wished to constitute the Church on the Scriptural basis, as they interpreted the matter, of government by elders (or presbyters) acting through properly organised church courts. The other tendency was expressed in the writings of the Separatists (whose principles were later re-affirmed under Independency, and from 1641 by those of the "Congregational way"<sup>1</sup>). The Presbyterians desired to alter the Church from within, and were not willing to leave her fold; whereas the Separatists believed they had the authority of the New Testament on their side to set up congregations of confessed Christians owning allegiance to Christ, in whose name they foregathered. This could be achieved only by bringing into existence new churches outside the jurisdiction of the Established Church.

From a study of the records of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham there is ample evidence forthcoming to demonstrate that in many parts of the county there was a genuine desire for moderate reform during the latter years of Elizabeth. We read of priests being presented before the archdeacon for refusing to wear the surplice, not using the sign of the cross in baptism, and discouraging the use of the ring in marriage. But it was not until round about 1606 that there appeared any organised

<sup>1</sup> G. F. Nuttall: *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640-1660* (1957) pp. 1 ff.

effort to take more radical steps by forming separated congregations in the county.

This more extreme aspect of Puritanism was manifested in two congregations which have ever since been remembered wherever the story of religious liberty has been recounted: Gainsborough and Scrooby. John Smith, B.A.,<sup>1</sup> preacher to the City of Lincoln from 1603, was probably already a Puritan at heart at the time of his ordination (1584/5), though it was only in 1606 that he broke with the Church of England by gathering a congregation at Gainsborough. He drew supporters from Retford, Worksop, Skegby, Mattersey, Sturton-le-Steeple, and North Wheatley. The members of this new congregation entered into a covenant which was later adopted by Henry Jacob<sup>2</sup> in setting up what has been called "the first Independent or Congregational Church in England", in 1616, when those participating made open confession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and afterwards, joining hands, they covenanted "to walk together in all God's ways and ordinances".<sup>3</sup> The importance attaching to this enterprise was the clear emphasis laid on the independence or autonomy of each "free congregation". Associated with John Smith at Gainsborough was Thomas Helwys of Broxtowe Hall, near Nottingham, a lively centre for Puritan gatherings in the period. From these two men stems the tradition of the English Baptists.

No less colourful is the sequel to the founding of the congregation at Scrooby in the manor house of William Brewster. To this group came subsequently John Robinson<sup>4</sup> as their pastor. The pressure of intolerance at home became so oppressive to their spirits that many families from this area sought a freer religious atmosphere in Holland before at length embarking on the grand

<sup>1</sup> For Smith and Helwys see Walter H. Burgess: *John Smith the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England*, (1911), also *D.N.B.*

<sup>2</sup> *D.N.B.*

<sup>3</sup> Jacob's *Church Covenant*, 1616.  
<sup>4</sup> W. H. Burgess: *John Robinson* (1920), and *D.N.B.*

venture which, in 1620, took them forth to the New World as the Pilgrim Fathers.

It would be strange if these happenings occasioned no ripple of interest in other parts of the county, but it is more than probable that the withdrawal of the more radical spirits from Puritan ranks explains why we read of no further concerted opposition, not even against the reforms imposed on the Church by Archbishop Laud. Protests, indeed, continued to be made, but, as in the period before 1606, they were made individually by parish priests such as Lemuel Tuke<sup>1</sup> of Sutton-in-Ashfield and, occasionally, by parishioners themselves refusing to comply with the new requirement to receive Holy Communion kneeling at the altar rail.

Evidence of lay Puritanism in Mansfield is found in the will of Gregory Sylvester, who in 1624 bequeathed 10s. a year to Richard Rothwell, chaplain to the first Earl of Devonshire, as a lecturer. The significance of this is made clear when it is realised how preaching from the time of Elizabeth I was strictly controlled. At first the restriction was undoubtedly intended to exercise doctrinal discipline over semi-literate clergy who were speaking to people who had been introduced only recently to the Book of Common Prayer, and whose Protestant ideas were not always free from error. A bishop's licence was necessary before a clergyman could preach, and Archbishop Tobie Matthew during the twenty years of his episcopate at York (1606–27) granted only 245 preaching licences in the whole of the Northern Province.<sup>2</sup> If a vicar had no licence he was required once a quarter to secure the preaching services of a minister who had; on other Sundays he would read one of the twenty-one authorised homilies. Since Puritans laid stress on the preaching of the Word and on exposition, one of the ways which they could circumvent the difficulty of a vicar

<sup>1</sup> Ejected probably 1662. He was holding conventicles at Sutton-in-Ashfield in 1663. See *Calamy Revised*, p. 497.

<sup>2</sup> F. H. West: *Rude Forefathers*, 1950, p. 19.

without a preaching licence, or a vicar too ill-educated to read, was to secure the appointment of a lecturer whose special concern was preaching. Rothwell appears to have discharged this duty in Mansfield.<sup>1</sup> His burial is recorded in the parish register as taking place on the 27th March, 1627.

Presbyterianism as an effective force for reformation within the Established Church might well have dwindled gradually into insignificance after the death of Elizabeth I, had not the policies of James I and Charles I given the movement new stimulus to seek religious change through political action. If the Church as it was stood in the way of reform, then the whole system must go: so ran the argument in Parliament after 1641. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Presbyterianism was in the ascendant, though it was not until 1643 that the weight of opinion swept aside moderation, and Parliament abolished episcopacy. As a condition of Scottish help in that year (and this assistance was most needful if the parliamentary forces were to succeed), the Scots required the introduction into England of a full Presbyterian church order. The Westminster Assembly was convened to deliberate and make recommendations, and two years later, in 1645, the new order was promulgated. It fell short of Scottish hopes and was hampered by Independent opposition. It was never received with real enthusiasm all over the country, and much of the scheme remained on paper only. The General Assembly which was provided for in the ordinance was never created.

Of interest to our history is the setting-up of two Presbyterian classes in the proximity of Mansfield. The Wirksworth Classis in Derbyshire existed from 1650 to 1660, and the Nottingham Classis from 1656 to 1660. Many of the ministers who foregathered in Mansfield after 1665 had been personally concerned in the working of one

<sup>1</sup> Brian Brittan was Vicar of Mansfield 1592–1628. The epithet "The drunken vicar of Mansfield" was applied to him. Rothwell came to Mansfield in 1621. Cf. his *Life* by Stanley Gower.

or other of these practical attempts to make Presbyterianism operative. But one swallow does not make the summer. The Independents had been over-ruled by the numerically stronger Presbyterians in the early days of the conflict, but as the war continued, the balance of power shifted to the army, which was strongly imbued with Independent and Separatist ideals. Congregationalists disliked in particular the dependence of the new Presbyterian church system on Parliament, which retained the final authority. Nor must it be forgotten that probably the majority of ministers who were ordained for the priesthood by bishops before the triumph of Presbyterianism were mainly concerned to discharge their pastoral office sincerely, without paying too great attention to whatever scheme was imposed by authority. They accepted the new order, and went on with their work and found no great obstacle in accepting a restoration of episcopacy in 1660, on the return of Charles II. From the very inception of Presbyterian church order it became a story of diminishing support from laymen (who were essential to fill the office of lay elders) and lack of enthusiasm from all save the few earnest and convinced Presbyterian ministers. But the important feature to observe is the emergence of a real division within the Puritan ranks: Presbyterians were not republican in sentiment, and eventually were foremost amongst those who invited Charles II to return to England; Independents were supporters of the Commonwealth and politically more radical. The strongest lay support for Presbyterianism came from better-off tradesmen and the lawyers, and the lesser gentry and yeomen. In Mansfield substantial property-owners and tradesmen, such as the Sylvesters and Brunts, were parliamentarians, but certainly not revolutionaries; they were interested in good government and economic stability.

Though the King returned in 1660 with a promise of a religious settlement, which buoyed up the expectations of leading Presbyterians that an Established Church would

come into being comprehensive enough to accommodate all but the extreme elements of Puritanism, the tide of reaction was so violent that by 1662 it was obvious that the aim was total elimination from the Church of England of Puritans with tender scruples. For the first time in English history Parliament decreed that the only ordination to be accepted as valid was that performed by bishops; furthermore, the standard of Christian churchmanship was defined in the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. This was the purport of the Act of Uniformity. Robert Porter and his colleagues left their incumbencies because they were unable to repudiate their Presbyterian ideals, as required by the Act, and also to give "unfeigned assent and consent" to everything in the Book of Common Prayer. Let an Anglican make the just comment: "No conscientious Puritan could subscribe (the declaration) without degrading himself in his own eyes and in the eyes of his neighbours."<sup>1</sup>

Between 1660 and 1662 thirty-four ministers were ejected from their livings in the county of Nottingham, eleven of whom afterwards conformed. It is to be noted that every one of the ejected ministers, whose protest is the beginning of the story of dissent in Mansfield, was an adolescent when the Civil War broke out, and all received their academic training while Presbyterianism was being debated and imposed on the country. They had imbibed its noblest ideals and were prepared to suffer for their principles.

The Act of 1662 failed to achieve its purpose and was followed by more vindictive legislation to secure the suppression of nonconformity. The Conventicle Act of 1664 forbade any gathering of five or more for religious worship other than at parish church services. A year later came the Five-Mile Act which made it illegal, on pain of heavy penalties, for any ejected minister or schoolteacher to preach within a five-mile radius of his former

<sup>1</sup> H. Hensley Henson: *Puritanism in England*, 1912, p. 240.

church or of a corporate borough. It was in these circumstances that Mansfield became important, for it was not a corporate borough; and under the friendly eye of John Firth, its vicar, the ministers seeking a haven there were little likely to meet with interference. John Whitlock and William Reynolds did not join the group at Mansfield until 1668, but Whitlock left a vignette of how they conducted themselves in those unsettled days:

We enjoyed much quietness, and met with no disturbance from the people of the place, they being very peaceable, yea, respectful . . . and we had very good respect from Mr. Firth the minister of the place.

There through the good hand of God upon us, we enjoyed many good opportunities, and comfortable communion with several of our brethren, that being driven from the neighbourhood of their People (as well as we) had settled there. God made this place a Zoar, a shelter and Sanctuary to them and us: . . . With . . . our brethren, we had very refreshing converse, and had opportunities to keep for a good part of the time, a weekly lecture.<sup>1</sup>

The courageous band sallied forth as circumstances allowed, often at dead of night, to preach to the faithful members of their former charges.

John Firth,<sup>2</sup> whom Whitlock so warmly praises was a Yorkshireman by birth, and graduated B.A. and B.D. at Cambridge University. He came to Mansfield in 1654 by the approval of the Parliamentary Commissioners to fill a vacancy which seemingly had lasted for quite four years or longer. John Price,<sup>3</sup> the former vicar, was still in Mansfield in 1646, but thereafter disappears from the records. The Parliamentary Survey of 1650 reported there was no minister. Firth made a strong impression on the people of the town, and they petitioned Oliver Cromwell to secure his settlement. His views were

<sup>1</sup> John Whitlock: *A Brief Account of the Life of William Reynolds*, 1807, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Lists of the Clergy of Central Nottinghamshire*, ed. K.S.S. Train. Thoroton Society Record Series, vol. xv, Part II, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

moderate, so that he found no difficulty in taking his deacon's and priest's orders in May 1660, and in remaining on friendly terms with his erstwhile Presbyterian colleagues.

When the Conventicle Act expired in 1667 it was obvious that nonconformity was expanding and not contracting. The archbishops desired to collect information of vital importance concerning the whereabouts and strength of nonconformists in order to reinforce their arguments for the introduction of a second Conventicle Act. This was achieved in 1670. Hence in 1669 all parish priests were requested to answer four questions:

1. How many conventicles, unlawful assemblies, or Church meetings are held in the various parishes in the county?
2. What number of persons usually frequent these meetings, and what sort and condition of people are they?
3. From whom and upon what grounds they look for indemnity?
4. At whose houses they usually meet, and who are their speakers?

Firth's replies were set forth in a letter he addressed to the Archdeacon, dated the 12th August, 1669.

To the first query I answer, common fame says there are three sorts of Conventions or Church meetings held in this town of Mansfield, who all have their stated days and times for assembling, and they are reported to be these—first, the Papists; secondly, the Quakers (neither of which do appear at the public assembly, i.e. the Church service); and thirdly, the Presbyterians, who do frequent the public assembly here.

To the second, the number of persons at the Papists' meetings are reported to be about thirteen. At the Quakers' meetings about twenty ordinarily, and at some extraordinary times threescore. And at the Presbyterians' meetings, in the week-days, not twenty; but on the Lord's day, forty or fifty. The quality of the Papists is mean, both men and women, most of them inhabitants of this town. The quality of the

Quakers mean, most of them women, and inhabitants of other parishes. The quality of the Presbyterians is better and more wealthy, some inhabiting in this parish and some in others.

To the third, my acquaintance with them is not so considerable as to enable me to give any positive answer hereunto.

To the fourth, the Papists are said to meet at the house of Samuel Clay or at the house of Henry Dawes, and their speakers to be sometimes Mr. Turner and sometimes Mr. Clay. The Quakers are said to meet at the house of Timothy Garland for the most part, and it is said they are all speakers. The Presbyterians are said to meet either at the house of Mr. John Whitlock, or Mr. William Reynolds, or of Mr. Robert Porter, or of Mr. John Billingsley, or of Mr. Robert Smalley, and it is said that these, or some of these, are their speakers.<sup>1</sup>

Firth's replies confirm the sketch Whitlock preserved of the times. It is again clear that the Presbyterians were more comfortably circumstanced than either Quakers or Roman Catholics. There is a suspicion of dissimulation in Firth's reply, which offered to the authorities the sort of response they might expect, but disguises the closer intimacy he must have had with Porter and his friends. If they attended the parish services it is difficult to understand how he professes so much ignorance of them. Later, as we shall point out, he seems to have been actively engaged in tutoring at Billingsley's Mansfield academy.

At this period, 1669, the Presbyterians could have no meeting house, and met on some system of rotation in the several homes of the ejected ministers. During the week they had the opportunity of attending a weekly lecture, a feature of Puritanism which still influenced dissenters on into the eighteenth century. Since, as Presbyterians, they were not opposed to the notion of an Established Church, though they had protested on conscientious grounds against the binding authority of Prayer Book and Thirty-nine Articles, they were not unwilling to show how little they sympathised with separatism by attending public

services, and held their own worship only at times outside the celebration of mattins or evening prayer.

Whitlock in his *Brief Account* mentions first amongst his friends in Mansfield "that eminent servant of God, Mr. Robert Porter". The reredos inscription at the Old Meeting singles him out for pre-eminence, and it may be that he was unofficially regarded as the head of the community in the period before 1687-8 when he was the sole ejected minister remaining in the town. In 1689, when the Toleration Act was passed,<sup>1</sup> Porter remained in Mansfield to minister to the congregation which had been meeting since at least 1665. The evidence clearly shows how meetings were held in the various homes of the ejected ministers, though on what system cannot now be determined. But it must not be thought that several congregations were thus called into being: the nonconformists would regard themselves as constituting one church community. This community met after 1689 in Porter's house, where previously some of the meetings had taken place, and continued to do so until land was secured in 1701 for the erection of the Old Meeting House in 1702. Porter's house is now known as the Old Parsonage.

<sup>1</sup> The date is incorrectly given on the reredos as 1688.

<sup>1</sup> Lyon Turner: *Original Records*, vol. iii, p. 1 and vol. i, pp. 154, 155, and W. Horner Grove: *History of Mansfield*, 1894, p. 336.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE EIGHT EJECTED MINISTERS IN MANSFIELD

THE reredos inscription mentions six ejected ministers by name, one of whom, as we have seen, Robert Porter, became the first minister of the Old Meeting House. Two other names should be added to the six: John Cromwell (in whose house a later minister of the Old Meeting House, Samuel Catlow, conducted a well-known school from 1788 to 1819), and Matthew Sylvester, whose surname links him with a family having many Puritan connections. Calamy states that the master of the Grammar School, a Mr. Hutchinson,<sup>1</sup> was deprived of his position in 1662, but no research has brought to light any information concerning his origins or his further fortunes.

Robert Porter<sup>2</sup> was the son of William Porter of Nottingham, a musician. He was born in 1624, and when fifteen entered St. John's College, Cambridge, from which he graduated B.A. in 1643. By 1650 he was already resident vicar of Pentrich, Derbyshire, where he lived even after his ejection, for, as Calamy records:

he kept as long as he could within the Parish, to help his People in Private, when he might not do it Publickly. Sometimes he preach'd in his own House; sometimes he went by Night, or by One or Two of the Clock in the morning, to an obscure House about a Mile off, till the coming out of the *Oxford Act*, when he retir'd to Mansfield. . . . From thence he would often visit his former Charge and Flock. . . . And many a dark Night hath he been engag'd in Travelling in dirty and dangerous Ways, on their account. . . . At Mansfield he attended on the Publick Worship and kept his Meetings before or after the Publick service, that he might not inter-

fere . . . such love did he conciliate there, thro' the Blamelessness and Pleasantness of his Conversation . . . as that when others were clap'd into Prison, upon that which was call'd the Lord *Russel's Plot*, a considerable Person . . . went to the Lord-Lieutenant, and offer'd to be bound Body for Body for him, for his good Behaviour, that he might peaceably stay at Home. The offer was accepted; and *Mr. Porter* continu'd in his own House without Suspicion or Disturbance.<sup>1</sup>

Porter was scholarly and "few men better understood their Bible than he".<sup>2</sup> His farewell sermon to his people at Pentrich was printed in the collection of similar sermons by other ejected ministers in the district and published as *England's Remembrancer*.<sup>3</sup> He wrote a biography of John Hieron (1608–1682), ejected from Breadsall, Derbyshire, to which he appended biographical sketches of his contemporaries. Gifted and studious, he was highly esteemed for his practical counsel and consulted by his brethren on difficult issues; indeed, wrote Calamy, he was regarded as "the greatest Oracle of Blessing in those Parts".<sup>4</sup> More of Porter's writings might have reached print, but according to John Whitlock his handwriting was too difficult to decipher. Robert Porter lived just long enough to see the dawn of better times for nonconformists. He died on the 22nd January, 1689/90. He was survived by his wife, Katherine, and by several children named in his will as Samuel, Enoch, Anna, Ruhannah, Susannah, and Faith.

Before turning to the next phase in the life of the congregation which Porter and his friends had fostered into an organised church, let our attention linger on those friends of his who found in Mansfield a "little Zoar".

John Whitlock and William Reynolds, inseparable friends from college days until death claimed Reynolds, were, like Porter and all the ejected ministers foregathered at Mansfield, graduates of Cambridge University.

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Printed 1663. Porter's sermon is No. 16, on the text Zeph. iii, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Calamy, p. 182.

Whitlock<sup>1</sup> was the third son of Richard Whitlock, a London merchant, and a second cousin to Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605–1676),<sup>2</sup> a prominent figure in Commonwealth affairs. He was born on the 13th January, 1624/5, and entered Emmanuel College in 1642. He took his B.A. in 1646 and his M.A. in 1649.

William Reynolds<sup>3</sup> was born at Bures St. Mary, Suffolk, on the 28th October, 1625, the son of William Reynolds, a cloth-worker of London with business connections in Russia, to which country the younger William had to go to look after family interests in 1644, which seemed likely at the time to jeopardise his own career as a minister. However, two years later events moved more propitiously in his favour, and he joined his friend John Whitlock in preaching to a congregation at Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire. Both Whitlock and Reynolds had come under the influence of the Cambridge Platonists, the former having for his tutor Benjamin Whichcote, and the latter Ralph Cudworth. Moderate Presbyterians in relation to Calvinism, they were decidedly not republican in principle, for both declined to take the Engagement<sup>4</sup> of 1649, even though their refusal cost them

<sup>1</sup> D.N.B. *Calamy Revised*, p. 527; also *High Pavement Chapel Chronicle (Nottingham): A Very Ancient Family*, 1954–1956.

<sup>2</sup> D.N.B. Author of *Memorials of English Affairs etc.*, 1682, et alia.

<sup>3</sup> D.N.B. *Calamy Revised*, p. 409.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Whitlock: *A Brief Account etc.*, p. 12. "Some may not know . . . what the engagement was. It was in these words: 'I do declare and promise I will be true and faithful to the 'Commonwealth of England, as it is now established, without a King or House of Lords.'"

"Could we have been satisfied, that no more had been meant, by being true and faithful, than to live quietly and peaceably, and not by any unlawful ways, to disturb and make any alteration in that government, this we could have declared, and actually did perform: But we conceived by those words was intended and signified, an approbation of, and endeavouring to promote that government, and this we were not satisfied to declare: this alteration of the government being made by an Army, and a small part of the House of Commons, the rest being forcibly excluded."

their emoluments. They engaged in two extensive preaching tours, first to East Anglia and then to Cornwall. Receiving an unexpected invitation to settle together in Nottingham at St. Mary's Church as vicar and lecturer respectively, they indicated that they were prepared to accept only on the condition that a full Presbyterian order was set up in the parish. This was in 1651. Five years later they were instrumental in establishing the Nottingham classes.<sup>1</sup> Both young ministers had journeyed together to London in 1651 to receive Presbyterian ordination at St. Andrew Undershaft Church.

When they were driven forth from St. Mary's in 1662, Whitlock and Reynolds were given hospitality by Sir John Musters at Colwick Hall, where they remained until they were compelled to move farther away by the Five-Mile Act in 1665. A temporary residence was found at Shirebrook, Derbyshire, but the awkwardness of travelling from thence to Nottingham was considerable; so in 1668 they came to Mansfield. Had they not taken the risk of registering their votes at Newark in 1684, thus breaking the law by coming within a corporate borough, they would have escaped the imprisonment which befell them that year. They were imprisoned in Nottingham until July 1685, when the Government's fear that dissenting ministers might give their support to Monmouth's Rebellion caused the authorities to move Whitlock and Reynolds to Hull. There came an order requiring the return of all Nottingham prisoners, and, back again in Nottingham, the two friends completed a term of six months before their final release. Quite obviously apprehensive of what the future might hold, they nevertheless took the initiative in 1687 by coming back to live in Nottingham.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately their courage was rewarded. James II was moving quickly to his fall, with which a change was possible. In the attempt to unite all sections

<sup>1</sup> Transcribed in *Bury Classis*, Chetham Society, 1898, pt. 2, Ed. W. A. Shaw.

<sup>2</sup> *A Brief Account*, pp. 28–29.

of the country against James, toleration was granted to all nonconformists, except Roman Catholics and Unitarians, in 1689.

John Whitlock married on the 25th March, 1651, Mary, the daughter of Dr. Anthony Tuckney,<sup>1</sup> a convinced Calvinist, Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and later Regius Professor of Divinity in the University. They had one son and a daughter. John Whitlock junior was born in Nottingham in 1661.<sup>2</sup> He was assistant minister to the three ejected ministers who founded the High Pavement Congregation in 1689, eventually becoming senior minister. He died in 1723.

Reynolds married Susanna, the daughter of Richard Mellor of Derby, an alderman and supporter of the Parliament cause, on the 10th May, 1652. They had one daughter, Sarah, who married on the 21st October, 1683, Samuel Coates of Warmington, Northamptonshire, who succeeded Robert Porter in the ministry at Mansfield in 1690.

Another of the intimate circle of Mansfield ministers was John Billingsley,<sup>3</sup> born at Chatham, Kent, on the 14th September, 1625, the son of Thomas Billingsley. He proceeded from Exeter College, Oxford, to St. John's, Cambridge, in 1642, graduating B.A. in 1648, M.A. at Oxford in 1649, and incorporated at Cambridge in 1652. He was made a Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in 1648, and the following year received Presbyterian ordination at St. Andrew Undershaft, London. Before coming to Chesterfield as vicar on the 18th March, 1643/4, he had been vicar of Faringdon, Berkshire, in 1650, and vicar of Addingham, Cumberland, during which pastorate he was a member of the Cumberland and Westmorland Association.

In 1652 Billingsley married Mary, the daughter of Immanuel Bourne, rector of Ashover, Derbyshire, 1622-

<sup>1</sup> *Calamy Revised*, p. 496, and *D.N.B.*

<sup>2</sup> St. Mary's Baptismal Register, Nottingham.

<sup>3</sup> *D.N.B.* *Calamy Revised*, p. 53.

1656. Shortly after Billingsley's settlement in Chesterfield he took part with his father-in-law and Robert Moore of Brampton in a dispute with James Nayler the Quaker. Bourne printed an account of the event in 1656 under the title *A Defence of the Scripture*. John Billingsley was outspoken in his views and he "Prayed publickly for the King [Charles II] when it was hazardous to do it".<sup>1</sup>

He was presented at the Quarter Sessions, on the 16th July, 1661, for neglecting to read the Book of Common Prayer, and the following year the Bishop of Lichfield wrote to Sheldon, then Bishop of London,

At Chesterfield, the minister Billingsley I convented before me in a Consistory. I convicted him by sufficient witness that in a farewell sermon Aug 23, he said, that the prelatical Ministers, at least some, were put out for murder, drunkenness, whoredom etc.—but such as himself, for being too holy and too careful of Religion.<sup>2</sup>

Hacket said he disproved this contention and rebuked the offender so that "in fine many tears came down from him and he hath given me a very humble confession of his fault under his hand".<sup>3</sup>

The passing of the Five-Mile Act necessitated his removal from Chesterfield, and he took up residence in Mansfield, still visiting a group of faithful nonconformists at Chesterfield by making the journey once a fortnight. When Indulgence was granted in 1672, Billingsley was licensed in respect of his house at Mansfield,<sup>4</sup> and took out a general licence as a preacher, which probably explains why there is no specific mention of one for Chesterfield.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Calamy Revised*, p. 54. Why Billingsley was so penitent it is hard to discover. There was evidence to prove his contention in particular, though he was mistaken if making a general condemnation.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54

<sup>4 & 5</sup> G. Lyon Turner: *Original Records*, vol. ii, p. 716.

John Billingsley died on the 30th May, 1683, and in the inventory for probate there is the entry "forty-seven folios, one hundred and twenty and two Quartos, two hundred and seventeen lesser (? —the word is indecipherable) copies,"<sup>1</sup> —a fair-sized library for the times. He was in all probability the founder of the little-known Mansfield Academy, which was continued after his death by his son and namesake. When this academy sprang into being we have no certain evidence to determine. As recently as the autumn of 1952 there came to light the manuscript diary of William Bilby (1664–1738),<sup>2</sup> who before proceeding to Cambridge University was a student at the academy from 1683 to 1684. From this original source much valuable information can be gleaned which enables a clearer portrayal of the academy under John Billingsley junior to be attempted.

The eldest son of John Billingsley senior, by his marriage with Mary Bourne, was born in 1657 and also called John. Both John Billingsley junior<sup>3</sup> and John Whitlock junior were probably educated under the tutorship of their fathers, and the academy may then have been in existence. Both sons went on to Cambridge, but, refusing the necessary Articles of Religion, were unable to graduate. What further education for the ministry John Whitlock junior received is not known; but John Billingsley junior<sup>4</sup> entered Frankland's academy in 1679, after perhaps a short period under John Reyner, M.A.,<sup>5</sup> who conducted an academy at Lincoln. On the 28th September, 1681, an ordination was held at Mansfield, briefly described by Oliver Heywood:

<sup>1</sup> Probate, 1683, Nottinghamshire Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> "Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Bilby," ed. C. G. Bolam, *Transactions U.H.S.*, Oct. 1953, pp. 123 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Freedom after Ejection*, p. 215, and D.N.B.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson and Axon: *The Older Nonconformity in Kendal*, p. 551, Gordon: *Freedom after Ejection*, p. 215, and D.N.B.

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Ashley Smith: *The Birth of Modern Education*, 1954, pp. 26–9.

at Mansfield an Ordination. Ordainers Mr. Porter, Mr. Whitlock, Mr. Reinolds, Mr. Billingsley, Mr. Oldfield, Mr. Cross, Mr. Prime. Ordained Mr. John Oldfield, Mr. John Billingsley, Mr. Samuel Cotes & Mr. Samuel Rose.<sup>1</sup>

The younger Billingsley seems to have officiated at Chesterfield either in substitution for his father or in alternation with him; by 1683, the year of his father's death, he was in charge of the academy at Mansfield, for in the early autumn the sponsors of William Bilby's studentship secured an interview with him for admittance in the December of that year. In the absence of Bilby's manuscript diary, the one piece of direct evidence bearing on this academy is the note Oliver Heywood recorded<sup>2</sup> concerning his sending Jonathan Sonyer to Billingsley at Mansfield. Sonyer had hoped to study under Frankland, and seems to have entered his academy just on the threshold of renewed persecution which compelled Frankland to suspend his work for a time. At this juncture Heywood directed Sonyer to Mansfield. His coming was contemporaneous with Bilby's own residence at Mansfield. Bilby could have been of invaluable help had he enumerated the students then in residence with him: unfortunately he contents himself with a reference to their being there, without naming them. In other respects Bilby's diary is more detailed, and from its pages it is possible to glean some notion of the reading course

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Reinolds = William Reynolds. Mr. Oldfield = John Oldfield (1627?–1692?) ejected from Carsington, Derby, founder of the congregation at Alfreton.

Mr. Cross = William Cross (d. 1697) ejected from Beeston, Notts. Licensed Presbyterian at house of Thomas Porter of Bingham, 1672, minister at Loughborough.

Mr. Prime = Edward Prime (1632–1702) ejected from Sheffield. John Oldfield, son of John above, afterwards conformed.

Samuel Cotes = Samuel Coates, minister at Mansfield 1690–1704. Cf. ch. 3, p. 39.

Samuel Rose = son of Thomas Rose, ejected from Blidworth, Notts.

<sup>2</sup> *Diarie*, vol. iii, p. 130.

prescribed and of the tutors who assisted Billingsley in his teaching work. Bilby relates

I soon made progress in Classick Authrs, logick, metaphysicke, Moral & Natl Philosophy; had ye benefit of Mr Francklin's Table & Converse wth othrs yt were Candidates for ye ministry. wch studys were pleast accompanied wth great helps to devotion, & dillgt study of ye Heb: tongue.<sup>1</sup>

The diary owed its existence to Billingsley's advice, for he, it is recorded,

exhorted me to make a Diary containing ye most notable occurrances of my life & various workings of ye Divine Spt on my Soul, to wch advice I readily complyed. It consisted of 3 parts

1. Sptl experiences
2. Book & studyes
3. Useful Sermns.<sup>2</sup>

From Bilby's very careful listing of the books he read it can be determined that, in comparison with the curricula followed in other similar institutions, the tuition was based on broad lines, and tended to moderate Calvinism and a departure from the Aristotelian logic as presented at the two ancient Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The youthful student at Mansfield "penned down ye choycest sermons of Mr. Whitlock, Reynolds, Barret, James, Syddans, Portr", and made reference to his tutors "Mr. Firth, Mr. Sylvester etc." Perhaps the "etc." included John Whitlock and William Reynolds. Firth is probably to be identified as the vicar of Mansfield, and if so he is unique among conformists as an active participant in a dissenting academy. "Mr. Sylvester" refers to Matthew Sylvester, of whom further particulars are given in the following pages.<sup>3</sup> John Barrett<sup>4</sup> was

<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> Cf. account in *Trans. U.H.S.*, Oct. 1953.

<sup>3</sup> See the Sylvester genealogy at the end of this book.

<sup>4</sup> *Calamy Revised*, p. 30.

the ejected minister of St. Peter's, Nottingham, and was, with Whitlock and Reynolds, one of the founding ministers of the High Pavement congregation in that town in 1689. "Syddans" was Robert Seddon,<sup>1</sup> ejected from Kirk Langley, Derbyshire, who eventually became minister of Bank street Chapel, Bolton, 1692, giving in 1695/6 the land on which the present chapel stands.<sup>2</sup>

For some reason which cannot be discovered either from William Bilby's diary or from what is known of John Billingsley junior, the Mansfield Academy was closed towards the end of 1684. Bilby entered Queens' College, Cambridge, on the 28th January, 1685/6, after having been home in Nottingham, as he records, for about a year. From Heywood's reference to Sonyer it is learnt that he had to leave Mansfield owing to Billingsley's abandonment of teaching. Sonyer spent a year under Mr. Dawson as a junior teacher before re-entering Frankland's academy when it was possible to reopen it in 1686.<sup>3</sup> Billingsley may have felt that other academies were more successful in attracting students, or he may have felt no special urge to continue teaching. There is no evidence to suggest that he ever attempted to do so in his later ministries at Hull (1694-1704) and Poor Jewry Lane, Crutched Friars, London (1704-1722). Alexander Gordon stated<sup>4</sup> that Billingsley suffered from indifferent health all his life, and this may explain his cessation from teaching. A minister in those difficult times was involved often enough in much travelling. (Bilby relates how he heard his former tutor preaching at a service held in the night watches in Nottingham, because of the dangerous times.) Billingsley must have found the burden heavy. He was preaching at Chesterfield probably before his father's death, and for at least seven years prior to settling in Hull he was minister at Selston, Nottinghamshire, "and at places neere adjoyning".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Calamy Revised*, p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> *Freedom after Ejection*, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> H. McLachlan: *English Education under the Test Acts*, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Freedom, etc.*, p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Had the stipend there increased by even £10 the managers of the fund were of the opinion that Billingsley might have been persuaded to reside at Selston.<sup>1</sup> This did not come about.

John Billingsley junior married Dorcas, the daughter of Katherine Jordan, who was the sister of John Whitlock senior, at Mansfield on the 23rd August, 1682.<sup>2</sup> He died in London on the 2nd May, 1722.

Bilby's mention of Matthew Sylvester adds a piece of information not to be gathered from the usual biographical accounts of this ejected minister, who was known to have come to Mansfield to stay for a while with relatives after his ejection, but was not known to have been in the town as a resident during the years 1683–1684. He conducted the funeral of his old friend John Billingsley senior in 1683,<sup>3</sup> omitting a funeral sermon by the previous request of Billingsley, but the following Sunday he delivered "a suitable Consolatory Discourse".<sup>4</sup>

The first of the Sylvesters of whom there is any trace in Mansfield records was Peter Sylvester,<sup>5</sup> an ironmonger, who died in 1590. The family prospered and were stalwart Puritans. Peter Sylvester's second son, Julian (1545–1616), married for his first wife Ankaret Westby of a well-to-do family and Presbyterian in sentiment, and the eldest son of this union was Gregory Sylvester (1573–1625). Ankaret Sylvester died in 1576, and Julian remarried. One of the children of the second marriage was Henry (born 1584), who was in business in Oxford as a mercer and became mayor of that place in 1645.

Gregory Sylvester married Cassandra Pease in 1595, and a numerous family was born to them. Dorothy, the eldest child, married Humphrey Barlow, and thus introduced the family connection to the town of Sheffield.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Freedom, etc.*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> P. R. Mansfield.

<sup>3</sup> & <sup>4</sup> *Calamy Revised*, pp. 54 and 473; cf. also *D.N.B.*

<sup>5</sup> For further details see Joseph Hunter: *Gens Sylvestrina*, 1845.

<sup>6</sup> For further reference cf. J. E. Manning: *History of Upper Chapel, Sheffield*, and Joseph Hunter, *Gens Sylvestrina*.

In addition to other daughters, there were four sons: Gregory (1598–1675); Robert (baptised on the 26th April 1601); Thomas (baptised on the 21st January 1608); and Joshua (baptised on the 18th March 1616).

Gregory, the second to bear the name, followed in his father's trade. During the Commonwealth he held several appointments under ordinances of Parliament, and his activity on behalf of the Government in introducing excise into the county earned him the displeasure of Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson,<sup>1</sup> the wife of Colonel Hutchinson, Governor of Nottingham Castle, whose own sympathies made her critical of Presbyterianism. Gregory and his wife, Jane, both died in 1675, Jane being buried on the 5th July and Gregory on the 13th December. A daughter, Elizabeth (b. 1625), married in 1657 John Firby of London, who, in conjunction with his father-in-law, issued a copper token carrying on the obverse the name "Gregory Sylvester", and in the centre a shield with a bust wearing a crown, and on the reverse "Mansfield 1666", and in the centre "His halfpenny". Their third daughter, Ann, married Henry Truman, of the same family as Joseph Truman, to be mentioned later. One son was born to Gregory and Jane Sylvester—Gregory, the third in succession of the same Christian name. This Gregory died in 1714/15, being buried on the 25th January, and with him ended the male line of the elder succession in the family. He was one of the first trustees of the Old Meeting House.

Robert Sylvester was established in the town of Southwell on his own as a mercer. There he married twice, having by his first wife, Mary Lee, eleven children, of whom Matthew Sylvester was the seventh. Another son was named Joshua, whose widow, Christiana, after his death, married his cousin Gregory (the third) as his second wife in 1689.

Joshua, the fourth son of Gregory and Cassandra Sylvester, married in 1646 Judith Field, and their fifth

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Col. Hutchinson*, ed. C. H. Firth, 1885, vol. ii, p. 63.

child, named Field, after his mother's surname, was born at Mansfield on the 11th May, 1654. When the Upper Chapel was built in Sheffield in 1700, Field Sylvester not only laid the foundation stone, but also contributed very handsomely to the expense of erection.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew Sylvester, the son of Robert of Southwell, was educated at Southwell Grammar School, and entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1654, when he was seventeen. He graduated B.A. in 1658. In 1659 he became vicar of Great Gonerby in Lincolnshire, and was ejected therefrom in 1662. For a time he resided in Mansfield with Joseph Truman and other relatives. He later acted as chaplain first to Sir John Bright of Badsworth, Yorkshire, and secondly to John White of Cotgrave, Nottinghamshire, in whose household he was living in 1671. The following year he was licensed as a Presbyterian preacher in London, as of Coleman Street. For a period round about 1683–1684—the length of the stay cannot be exactly determined—he was once again in Mansfield, as is shown from Bilby's diary. Apart from this break, his sojourn continued in London until his death on the 25th January, 1707/8. From the Coleman Street congregation he went to be minister of the meeting in Rutland House, Charterhouse Yard, which moved in 1692 to a court off Knight-rider Street. From this congregation, Unity Church, Islington, traces its descent. Sylvester was friendly with Benjamin Whichcote and Archbishop Tillotson. In 1687 Richard Baxter became Sylvester's unpaid assistant. It was said that Baxter's eloquence as a preacher "supplied what was lacking to Sylvester, whose delivery was poor, though in prayer he had a remarkable gift".<sup>2</sup> Baxter appointed Sylvester his literary executor. The editing of Baxter's papers has earned Sylvester the severest of criticism for the chaotic lack of arrangement and discrimination, though it provides one of the valuable prime records of the period.

<sup>1</sup> J. E. Manning: *History of Upper Chapel*, pp. 48–9.

<sup>2</sup> Article by A. Gordon in *D.N.B.*

Edmund Calamy became Sylvester's assistant in 1694, and himself undertook the publication of the famous *Abridgement* (1702) of Baxter's Life, a work which grew into the *Continuation* (1727), and is important as the biographical record of the ejected ministers.

Robert Smalley,<sup>1</sup> another of the ministerial fraternity finding refuge in Mansfield, was born at Beeston, Nottinghamshire, and after graduating B.A. from Clare College, Cambridge, in 1650, he became vicar of Willoughby-on-the-Wolds in the same year. He was ordained thereto by the Wirksworth Classis on the 19th October, 1652. Two years afterwards, on the 24th May, 1654, he became vicar of Greasley, of which parish the two regicides Gilbert Millington and Charles White were members. In 1669 Smalley was reported to be preaching at Greasley as well as at his own house and in others at Mansfield.<sup>2</sup> Calamy records that he was "a winning preacher, and a very great success in his Ministry".<sup>3</sup> Anticipating his death, he called his colleagues in Mansfield to attend him, and himself participating in prayer, held his farewell with them. Later in the day he died, on the 7th September, 1670. The congregation which gathered round Smalley in 1662 met in a barn on the Greasley Castle estate on Moor Green, a title which has designated the congregation from that time to the present, though served at first by Presbyterian and Independent preachers, from the middle of the eighteenth century the dominant theology has been Calvinist, and the church has long been Congregational. The first building on the site of the old barn was replaced in 1901 by the present chapel.

Joseph Truman<sup>4</sup> was also a county-born man, being baptised at Gedling on the 2nd February, 1630/1, the son of Richard and Mary Truman. His father was a Puritan, as may be judged by his occasioning himself difficulties

<sup>1</sup> *Calamy Revised*, p. 446.

<sup>2</sup> *Original Records*, vol. ii, p. 719.

<sup>4</sup> *Calamy Revised*, p. 495, and *D.N.B.*

<sup>3</sup> Calamy, p. 525.

when he spoke disrespectfully of the Book of Sports. Joseph was educated by the minister at Gedling (Christopher Forman) and at the Nottingham Free School (now the High School) before going up to Clare College, Cambridge. He graduated B.A. in 1650, the same year as Robert Smalley, and proceeded M.A. in 1654. The Wirksworth Classis ordained Truman as an assistant to Richard Whitchurch, rector of St. Peter's, Nottingham, on the 27th September, 1653. On the 22nd June, 1654, he became vicar of Ruddington, Nottinghamshire, and from 1658 he was a member of the Nottingham Classis. When ejected from Cromwell he had been there as rector from the 16th January, 1655/6. With others he appeared at Newark Quarter Sessions on the 9th January, 1660/1, for not reading Common Prayer. "Often indicted, and once sued to an Outlawry, which was very chargeable to him. He begg'd Leave of the Justices to plead his own Cause: And he pleaded so well, that he got off, tho' the Justices were no great Friends to Nonconformists." Calamy also says of him: "An excellent Scholar, and wonderful clear-headed Man."<sup>1</sup> He was the author of several theological books which reveal him as a Calvinist. He was a friend of Matthew Sylvester and Richard Baxter; indeed, it was on a return journey from visiting Baxter that Truman, lodging for the night with William Stephens, the rector of Sutton, Bedfordshire, took ill, and died on the 19th July, 1671. He was buried in the chancel there on 21st July; and, later, Robert Porter spoke "affectionately" of him at a special service in Nottingham.

The eighth member of the band of ejected ministers living at Mansfield was John Cromwell,<sup>2</sup> who was probably the hardest done by and most harassed of them all. Sharing the same surname as the Lord Protector, though not in any way related, Cromwell was offered at one time

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, pp. 527-9. "He liv'd afterward at Mansfield; and that very much for the Benefit and Pleasure of Mr. Porter's conversation."

<sup>2</sup> Calamy Revised, p. 147.

a lucrative appointment as chaplain to Oliver's son Henry, but he preferred to be settled at Clayworth in Nottinghamshire, where he was admitted rector in 1655. John Cromwell had a considerable reputation in London for his preaching gifts. He was ordained "in Claworth Church by his Uncle Mr. Fisher of Sheffield,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Barnard of Worksop,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Frith<sup>3</sup> of Mansfield and Mr. Rock of Saunby".<sup>4</sup> Like his uncle, James Fisher, ejected from Sheffield in 1662, and founding minister of Upper Chapel there, Cromwell was Congregational in sentiment; the only member of the Mansfield group of ministers embracing such views. By 1672 the names Presbyterian and Congregational were used almost interchangeably; and we find that in that year Cromwell was licensed at Mansfield as a Presbyterian preacher. The clearer denominational differences to which later generations became accustomed do not really emerge until the eighteenth century. In general, it may be argued that Presbyterianism after 1662 carried perhaps a slightly more respectable tone, since it certainly indicated those who were antipathetic to the political radicalism indicated in the army regime under the Commonwealth. Under persecution doctrinal differences between these two major parties in dissent tended to be submerged and by 1690 it seemed for a time that it might have been possible to surmount them completely in the short-lived "Happy Union", the practical sequence of which persisted in the Common Fund to provide financial assistance in augmentation of inadequate ministerial stipends to dissenting ministers of both groups. This venture was soon disrupted and gradually the Common Fund came to be designated as Presbyterian. A separate Congregational Fund was started in 1694. Those congregations

<sup>1</sup> Calamy Revised, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Barnard = ? Walter Bernard, died Vicar of Worksop, 15th, September, 1662.

<sup>3</sup> John Firth, vicar of Mansfield.

<sup>4</sup> Josiah Rock, ejected from Saunby, 1662. Calamy: Continuation, p. 690. Calamy Revised, p. 414.

receiving help from one or other of these funds tended to be designated by the denominational label attaching to the source of assistance.

John Cromwell<sup>1</sup> was born at Barnby Moor, Nottinghamshire, the son of Robert Cromwell, and was baptised at Blyth, Notts., on the 20th September, 1631. His schooling was at Repton, after which he studied at Magdalene College, Cambridge, graduating B.A. in 1652 and M.A. in 1656, and was made a Fellow in 1654. The Lord Lieutenant of the County, the Duke of Newcastle, had Cromwell arrested in 1663/4, and for three years he lingered in Newark prison, an experience which completely undermined his health. One of the charges brought against him indicates how suspiciously the non-conformist ministers were regarded, for it was stated that he kept five or six "good geldings . . . three of them kept in the dark for night work".<sup>2</sup> The preachers' horses, in the eyes of authority, might be dangerous in co-ordinating more than humble groups met for worship—it might have spelt incipient rebellion. Cromwell lived at Mansfield after his release, and the burial entries of several of his children occur in the parish register. He went to Norwich after 1674, where his tribulations fell on him again, "for Nine Years together he was never without Trouble".<sup>3</sup> He died in 1684. He was twice married, first to Mary Clarke of Cutthorpe, and secondly to Barbara, the daughter of Thomas Westby of Ravenfield, Yorkshire, which linked him with the Puritan family united by marriage with the Sylvesters of Mansfield.

<sup>1 & 2</sup> Calamy Revised, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Calamy, p. 527.

### CHAPTER 3

## TOLERATION AND THE LAST YEARS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

IN 1689 toleration to all dissenters, except Roman Catholics and Unitarians, offered them the opportunity to worship in freedom and to possess their own religious meeting-places. At first the Mansfield nonconformists continued to worship in the house (now the Old Parsonage) of Robert Porter, who remained in the town and ministered there until his death. By 1689 all the surviving ejected ministers who had made Mansfield their home in 1665 and after had returned to their own congregations. Porter's house fulfilled the function of a meeting-place until the Old Meeting House was erected in 1702. Porter died in January 1689/90, and the congregation was pastorless at a critical juncture, but not for long.

The choice of a successor to Robert Porter fell on Samuel Coates, who was the son of Samuel Coates, rector of Colwick, Nottingham, until his death in 1659. It happened that another of the same family, also called Samuel, had been rector of West Bridgford, Nottingham, from 1648 to 1662, having in his turn a son of the same name. The consequent confusion of identity can be imagined; nor was it absent when the parish clerk of St. Mary's, Nottingham, recorded the birth of Samuel Coates, subsequently the second minister at Mansfield. The entry mentions the date, the 8th September, 1657, and describes him as the son of Samuel Coates of West Bridgford. But Elizabeth, the first wife of the rector of West Bridgford, was buried on the 27th or 29th January, 1654,<sup>1</sup> and Samuel Coates, the widower, did not re-marry

<sup>1</sup> St. Peter's, Nottingham, register 27th January; St. Mary's, Nottingham, register 29th January.

until the 6th November, 1659.<sup>1</sup> The entry in the parish register should correctly refer to Samuel as the son of the rector of Colwick, who on 12th June, 1655, had married Mary Flamstead of Nottingham. Mrs. Mary Coates survived her husband until 1691, and by her will<sup>2</sup> appointed Samuel, her son, as her executor, and mentioned a daughter, Mary.

Samuel, the son of Samuel and Mary Coates, was admitted sizar at Trinity College, Cambridge, on the 19th February, 1673/4. As was the case with other nonconformists, he declined to subscribe to the Articles of Religion, and was therefore unable to graduate. He may have been one of the students at the Mansfield Academy. Of that no evidence is extant, but we know that he was ordained with John Billingsley and two others at Mansfield on the 28th September, 1681.<sup>3</sup> For eight or nine years he acted as chaplain in the household of a family at Warmington, Northamptonshire. When he married Sarah, the daughter of William Reynolds, one of the Nottingham ejected ministers then living at Mansfield, on the 21st October, 1684, he was described as of Warmington. Two children were born to the couple: Samuel, baptised on the 25th February, 1690, and Sarah, born on the 10th August, 1696.

In spite of having wealthy laymen among its members, the congregation to which Samuel Coates came in 1690 was obviously not paying an adequate stipend. The report recorded in the Common Fund Minutes reads:

Mr. Saml. Coates Att Mansfield preaches there one Lds day in a m<sup>o</sup> 8s p<sup>r</sup> day, could 10 l a year be added y<sup>e</sup> meeting would be held up constantly fo want whereof hee is forced to preach in other places.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Susann, daughter of Thomas Vincent of Bamborough Grange, Yorks.

<sup>2</sup> Mansfield Probates, Nottinghamshire County Archives.

<sup>3</sup> See *supra*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Freedom after Ejection*, p. 89. The average standard stipend regarded as just adequate for this area was £30 p.a.

Perhaps the managers of the fund considered that certain members of the congregation might do more. They made no comment, but granted only the sum of £8 and on condition that the meeting be kept constant. The young minister seems to have succeeded in overcoming the difficulties, and it was in his ministry that the present chapel was built, though he lived only two years after its erection to minister in it. He died in 1704 and was buried at Mansfield on the 14th September.

## CHAPTER 4

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE records show that at a Court held on the 26th December, 1701, Robert Sylvester and Charity his wife surrendered to Robert Sylvester, Gregory Sylvester, Thomas Langford,<sup>1</sup> John Goodman, Robert Dodsley<sup>2</sup> and Samuel Sheppard

all that upper part of the Toft or Croft in Mansfield aforesaid near a certain street there called Stockwell Gate commonly called Burke Croft . . . upon trust that one structure or building might be thereupon or upon part thereof erected and built . . . to be used and employed for a place for the exercise of some Religious Worship or such other uses as the said Trustees . . . should think meet and convenient.

The Old Meeting House was certified for religious worship on 5th October, 1702 and is described in this manner :<sup>3</sup>

In a new erected building in a place called Brick Croft by Rich. Sylvester,<sup>4</sup> Gregory Sylvester, Thom. Langford, John Goodman, Robert Dodsley (dec) and Saml. Sheppard in or near a certain Street called Stockwell Gate.

The meeting house they built was a substantial structure of local stone, which shows externally little evidence of

<sup>1</sup> *Poll-Books of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire*, 1710, p. 143. Thornton Society.

<sup>2</sup> Father of Robert, author and bookseller. *D.N.B.* and Straus: *Robert Dodsley*.

<sup>3</sup> *Notts. County Records, Eighteenth Century*, ed. K. Tweedale Meaby, (1947) p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> Rich. = ? Robert. No Richard Sylvester can be traced in contemporary Mansfield records. Robert had a son called Richard, born at Southwell, in 1634 who died the same year. Robert is named in surrender of 1701.

the lapse of time. Four-square they built it, with its roof supported by two fine pillars of oak from Sherwood Forest. These pillars were slightly chipped into shape and subsequently covered with plaster. In the Victorian renovations the plaster coating was stripped off and the rude oak polished, and so they have remained ever since. The main windows were mullioned and transomed into four lights. The two entrances did not face Stockwell Gate, but were on the east side, in what is now the wall on the right of the present entrance. From the doors ran two aisles. Between the doors was a gallery for the choir and musicians, and under this, when a Sunday School came to be started, sat the scholars. The pulpit of dark oak with a sounding-board above, a clerk's desk and Communion table in front, was in the middle of the wall opposite the entrance. The pews were of the usual old-fashioned style. So it remained until the restoration carried out in 1870. Behind the Meeting House, and between it and Meeting House Lane, was a small burial-ground.

Unfortunately no early Chapel records, apart from the baptismal register commenced by Eliezer Heywood, other than the appointment of new trustees seem to have been kept until the second decade of the nineteenth century. Consequently information to describe the congregational events of the eighteenth century has to be derived from the biographies of the ministers who served the Old Meeting House during that time. A few facts can be gleaned from various other sources.

It was not many years before the trustees acquired further property for the Old Meeting House. This included the Parsonage and garden, and the road or way to the Meeting House. On the 7th May, 1708, Thomas Wheat surrendered the dwelling-house and garden in Stockwell Gate, late occupied by Thomas Fletcher, clerk, to the use of John Farnsworth in trust to fulfil the last will or other disposition of Robert Sylvester. This is endorsed "Release of Mortgage", and it would appear that

the property belonged to Robert Sylvester, but was mortgaged to Thomas Wheat.

On the same date Robert Sylvester, and Charity his wife and John Farnsworth his trustees, surrendered to Thomas Fletcher, clerk, Samuel Brunts,<sup>1</sup> gentleman, Thomas Langford and John Goodman, maltsters,<sup>2</sup> George Oldham, framework knitter, and Samuel Sheppard, maltster,<sup>2</sup> "all that messuage, tenement or dwelling-house in Stockwell Gate in Mansfield aforesaid . . . and one garden thereunto belonging . . ." It was recorded that if the said Robert Sylvester paid the sum of £120 to the said Trustees on or before the 27th April, 1710, that then the Surrender should be void. This was nominally a mortgage, but the intention was to give the house to trustees for the Meeting House. Each of the trustees probably found one sixth of the £120, for Samuel Brunts by his will left his £20 for the benefit of the congregation. No doubt the other trustees followed his example, so that the house ultimately became the property of the congre-

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Brunts was the founder of the great charity in Mansfield, which bears his name, and which included the foundation of the Brunts School, which has reached a high standard of achievement in the educational story of the county. Of Brunts (died September 1711, and buried at East Bridgford, Notts., 2nd October) it has been said: "of all the men of his time he it is to whom Mansfield owes the largest debt". A. S. Buxton: *Brunts Family*, p. 17.

Brunts appointed by his will the vicar of Mansfield, George Mompson, John Whitlock and Thomas Smith, of Nottingham, Thomas Langford, of Mansfield, and George Burdon, of Rufford, as his trustees. The close connection between conformist and nonconformist in Mansfield is here made obvious, for Whitlock and Langford were both Presbyterians invited to share in a responsible public trust with Anglicans.

Brunts, himself formally an Anglican, was one of the trustees of the Old Meeting House, as mentioned in the text.

<sup>2</sup> During the whole of the eighteenth century malting is mentioned as the principal trade of Mansfield. The malt was sent away in large quantities because of its fine qualities, due, it was said, to the coke from the local collieries, which was used to dry the malt, giving it a much sweeter taste than was usual. A. S. Buxton: *Mansfield in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 66-7.

gation. Samuel Brunts also left to the congregation "the further sum of twenty shillings a year for ever". This sum is still paid annually.

The approach to the Old Meeting House from Stockwell Gate is now a drive, rather narrow at the lower end where it passes the Old Parsonage, and this approach is mentioned in another Surrender made at the same Court, to the same trustees. It is referred to as

all that way commonly called The Hill, leading from . . . Stockwell Gate . . . unto the going forth at the door called the Meeting House Door there into the Croft then belonging to John Lockwood commonly called Barford Croft, which said way contained in some places about 2½ yards in breadth and in other places . . . about four yards in breadth.

There were now separate trusts for the Meeting House and the Parsonage and road to the Meeting House, but in 1708 both properties were made over to Thomas Dodsley, cooper, William Wilson, maltster, Joseph Langford, maltster, Francis Broadhurst,<sup>1</sup> tanner, John Farnsworth, and Robert Sylvester, mason. John Farnsworth is described in one of the documents as a "jersey-comber". Jersey or Jersey wool is the finest wool taken out of other sorts of wool by combing it with a Jersey comb.

Mentioned first among the original trustees of the Parsonage was Thomas Fletcher, the third minister of the Old Meeting House. He was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Fletcher of Wirksworth, and was baptised there on the 11th January, 1677/8. His early education was at the Grammar School in his native place under Samuel Ogden, ejected minister of Mackworth, Derbyshire. He trained for the ministry under Richard Frankland for a

<sup>1</sup> Francis Broadhurst m. Sarah Alvey, at Mansfield, 1st April, 1697. The family became leading supporters of the Old Meeting House, a connection continued till 1843 when William Brodhurst withdrew his subscription.

short period, and then under Timothy Jollie of Attercliffe.<sup>1</sup> On the 10th July, 1701, Fletcher married Elizabeth Wylde, sister of Gervase Wylde of Nottingham and Robert Wylde of Wisbech. They had a son named John (7th May, 1705–3rd June, 1773).<sup>2</sup> Fletcher came to Mansfield in 1704 and removed at Christmas 1713 to Hull to become pastor of the Independent congregation worshipping at Dagger Lane, where he remained until his death in 1733.

Thomas Fletcher was succeeded as minister by Isaac Thompson, who was invited from Whitby, Yorkshire, where he had been settled since 1704. On entering upon his Mansfield ministry he received a grant<sup>3</sup> of £4 a year from the London Fund, which was continued until 1739, probably the year of his death. Nothing is known of his training for the ministry, and few are the scraps of information about him. A licence for his marriage to Johanna Rotherham, of Derby, is dated the 19th October, 1714.<sup>4</sup> He attended a meeting of the Cheshire Classis as a visitor on the 4th September, 1722. Whilst at Mansfield he was preaching at Blidworth.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Older Nonconformity in Kendal*, p. 599. There is some confusion with a John Fletcher.

<sup>2</sup> Educated under Wadsworth of Sheffield, then under Ridgely or Eames in London; ordained 6th August, 1726, his father giving the charge. Settled at Bradfield, Norfolk, 1726–73. Hunter: *Gens Sylvestrina*, pp. 129 ff.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gordon: *Cheshire Classis*, p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> Blagg: *Notts Marriage Licences*, vol. ii, p. 117. The marriage was either at St. Mary's, Nottingham, or at Lenton: no entry found. Thompson's age thirty-four, Johanna's forty years.

<sup>5</sup> John Hardy's Return, 1717, printed in *Transactions of the Thoroton Soc.*, 1943, vol. xlviii, p. 16; Isaac Thompson and James Huthwaite of Alfreton are given as preachers at Blidworth. Five gentlemen were members, "the rest yeomen and farmers". Seven were voters for the county. Archbishop Herring's Returns, 1743, p. 26. Blidworth: "There is a Meeting House in ye Parish but as ye Endowment is small (about forty shillings a year) & ye Dissenters of ye Meaner Sort, they do not assemble above once in Six or eight Weeks & then in no great Numbers." By 1773 the congregation was extinct and not mentioned in Thompson's List: Cf. *Transactions of the Cong. Historical Society*, vol. v, p. 274.

Samuel Shaw, who followed Isaac Thompson, was officiating as early as 1738, as may be learnt from his private register of baptisms (written in an interleaved copy of *The Ladies' Diary or Woman's Almanac* for 1740) when he recorded:

July 14th 1738. Baptized Mr. Boler's child at his own house, called Francis. N.B. This was ye 1st child I ever baptized.

His earliest mention of the Meeting House occurs with the third entry:

Dec. 3rd 1738/9. I baptized Hugh Mycroft's child at the meeting. Her name was Sarah.

This register, continued by his successor, Eliezer Heywood is now in the possession of the Registrar-General. Eighty-nine baptisms are recorded.

Shaw was a descendant of two ejected ministers: Samuel Shaw, M.A. (1635–96), of Long Whatton, Leicestershire, and Ferdinando Poole of Thrumpton, Notts. Samuel Shaw the elder married a daughter of Ferdinando Poole, and their son, Ferdinando Shaw (1669–1745), became the minister of Friar Gate Chapel, Derby, in 1699, a position he held until his death. By his first marriage Ferdinando Shaw had one son, Samuel Shaw, the minister of the Old Meeting House. Samuel Shaw the younger probably received the latter part of his education under Thomas Hill when he opened his academy at Findern, Derbyshire. Since, however, there is no complete list of the students studying under Hill and his successor, Dr. Ebenezer Latham, the matter cannot be lifted beyond reasonable conjecture. On the 17th November, 1721, Samuel Shaw married Mary Alcock of Immingham, Lincolnshire. They had eleven children, most of them born in Derby, which suggests that Samuel Shaw was acting as an assistant to his father at Friar Gate, or otherwise employed in that town prior to his settlement in Mansfield. Their third daughter, Catherine (born on

the 25th March, 1725) married Francis Broadhurst<sup>1</sup> the son of one of the trustees to the deed of 1708; and their fifth daughter Jane (born on the 15th January, 1730) married on the 6th November, 1751, Eliezer Heywood, then minister of the Old Meeting House, Mansfield.

Samuel Shaw died suddenly of gout of the stomach on the 2nd November, 1748. His wife survived him many years, dying on the 15th December, 1783.

It has usually been assumed that Eliezer Heywood was Shaw's immediate successor, and no intervening pastorate is shown on the memorial panels in the chapel porch. He certainly was officiating either in a temporary capacity or as an assistant at Mansfield as early as 1742/3, when his first baptism was recorded. But before he was fully instituted to the pastorate there occurred the brief ministry of Benjamin Clegg. Two sources confirm the fact. James Clegg, M.D., minister at Chinley, Derbyshire, entered in his diary under date 2nd March, 1749:<sup>2</sup>

Son Benjamin tells me he is called to be minister at Mansfield, and has accepted the call.

The Presbyterian Fund made a grant on the 2nd October of that year in respect of Benjamin Clegg's ministry there.

Benjamin Clegg, born on the 19th April, 1724, received his education first under Ebenezer Latham of Findern, 1741-1744, and secondly under Dr. Caleb Rotherham of Kendal, 1744-1749. His stay at Mansfield was short, as, indeed, was his next ministry at Stockport, Cheshire, which he resigned in 1750. He was ordained at Derby on the 11th June, 1750. Subsequently he was minister at Cottingham, Yorkshire, where he died on the 26th August, 1775.<sup>3</sup> In theology he was an Arian.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Broadhurst, who lived at Gilcroft, was said to be the largest maltster in England. A. S. Buxton: *Mansfield in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 67. Broadhurst is the original style, later altered to Brodhurst.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kirke: *Extracts from Diary of James Clegg*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gordon: *Cheshire Classis*, p. 164.

Eliezer Heywood, who was minister at the Old Meeting House from 1750 until his death on the 13th April, 1783, like Samuel Shaw, could claim a distinguished nonconformist ancestry. His grandfather on his father's side was Oliver Heywood (1629/30-1704), and on his mother's, John Rotherham of Dronfield, a sturdy dissenter of substance. Eliezer the elder (1658-1730) was a student under Frankland, and for over twenty years private chaplain to Richard Taylor of Wallingwells, Nottinghamshire. When aged forty he married, on the 1st January, 1700, Helen, the daughter of John Rotherham above mentioned: she was then twenty-one years old. He settled at Dronfield, 1710, most probably because of the family interest of the Rotherhams, and continued as minister there until 1730, in which year he died. Of the several children born to Eliezer and Helen Heywood, only three reached maturity: Elizabeth (1703-60), who married Isaac Wylde, an apothecary, of Nottingham, mayor of that town in 1759; Hannah (1708-40), who died unmarried; and Eliezer (1710-83), the subject of this present note.

A glimpse of the condition of the congregation in Heywood's time is afforded by the entry preserved in Archbishop Drummond's *Visitation Returns* for 1764.<sup>1</sup> In Mansfield there were 600 families or thereabouts: eighty of these were attached to Presbyterianism, ten to the Society of Friends. The return then records:

We have one Presbyterian Meeting House, & one of Quakers, they assemble every Sabbath day. Mr. Heywood Eliezer (sic) is the Presbyterian Minister I have heard him say, that in an afternoon, he has sometimes 200 hearers but by far the greater part of these do not belong to this Parish.

In the year after his settlement as minister, Eliezer the younger married Jane Shaw, a daughter of the late minister, on the 6th November, 1751. They had seven children, the eldest of whom, Samuel (1755-1789) became an attorney-at-law in Nottingham and the compiler

<sup>1</sup> Abstracted from original *Returns*, Yorkshire Diocesan Registry.

of the Heywood Pedigree:<sup>1</sup> and the youngest, Isaac (1787–1841), after spending some time in the East Indies, returned to live in Mansfield, where he married a second time. It was to his son, also named Isaac (1812–1892), that J. Horsfall Turner dedicated the second volume of Oliver Heywood's *Diaries* in these words: "The last male descendant (probably) of the Venerable Oliver Heywood."<sup>2</sup>

Jane Heywood (1765–1828), another of Eliezer's children, married William Paulson, a surgeon in Mansfield, and a member of the Old Meeting House.

Eliezer Heywood died on the 22nd July, 1783, and was followed in the ministry at the Old Meeting House by Samuel Catlow, to whom attaches particular interest. So far as can be ascertained, Catlow was the first minister of the Chapel to use the word Unitarian to describe the religious persuasion of the congregation.

On the conclusion of his ministerial education under Thomas Robins at Daventry Academy, Samuel Catlow entered his first pastoral charge at Mansfield in 1783. Five years later, in 1788, he opened a Literary and Commercial Seminary, a boarding-school for boys between ten and thirteen, of which he described himself as "Superintendent". The school was in Westgate, in the house still known as Cromwell House, deriving its name from the ejected minister, John Cromwell, whose property it had been. What the house looked like at the beginning of the nineteenth century can be seen from the plate reproduced in Harrod's *History of Mansfield*.<sup>3</sup> Two vacations of one month each were granted at midsummer and Christmas. The fees were twenty-five guineas a year.

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Heywood's *Diaries*, vol. i, pp. 1–16.

<sup>2</sup> *Diaries*, vol. ii: Dedication.

<sup>3</sup> Facing page 29. A very full account of the seminary is also given on pp. 29–32, with extracts from Catlow's *Outlines of a Plan of Instruction* (1800). He also published: *Observations on a Court of Instruction for Young Persons in the Middle Classes of Life*; and *Protestant Catechism for the Use of Young Persons*.

Besides offering "the security of an adequate instruction for young persons designed for commercial life", Catlow made provision for "the future prosecution of literary and professional studies"; students "designed for the Pulpit were also taught Hebrew". The garden of the house left its mark on the district, as the present Union Street, which runs into Westgate close to Cromwell House, was formerly known as The Lawn.

The school and Catlow prospered. The proprietor said it had been patronised from its commencement by literary and commercial characters of the first respectability from a wide area, stretching into Yorkshire and as far as Warwickshire. Catlow laid out a large area of the land in front of his house in building lots, fronting a new street named after him. When St. John's Church was built the street was re-named St. John's Street.

In 1798 Catlow was able to resign his pastoral duties at the Old Meeting House and devote himself exclusively to educational projects. He remained in charge of the school until 1819, when he removed to Hampstead and had a short pastorate there, which terminated with his death in 1820. His resignation from the ministry did not sever his friendly association with his ministerial colleagues, for his name frequently occurs in the minutes of the Annual Meeting of Presbyterian Ministers from Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire, which was created in 1798 and held its second annual gathering at Mansfield.

Samuel Catlow had thirteen children, eight of whom he baptised himself. He began a new register,<sup>1</sup> a rough leather-bound volume eight inches by seven, into which he carefully copied the entries from the Almanac started by Eliezer Heywood.

As the author and compiler, Catlow persuaded the

<sup>1</sup> This register is lodged with the Registrar-General.

congregation in 1797 to adopt a service-book, the title-page of which is as follows:

### DEVOTIONAL OFFICES

Printed for the use  
of the  
Protestant Dissenters  
at  
Mansfield  
to which are added  
Two Services  
chiefly selected from  
The Book of Common Prayer

---

Manchester  
Printed at the Office of George Nicholson  
Anno. 1797

The book is bound in calf and measures 7 inches by 4½. It contains five orders of morning prayer and five of evening prayer, a number of occasional prayers and thanksgivings and forms of service for the Communion, Baptism and Funerals. The Preface states:

The UNITARIAN DISSENTERS of Mansfield having unanimously agreed in the propriety of using a Liturgy in the public services of religion, requested their Minister to compose, or compile, a set of Forms, adapted to their religious sentiments. When the work had made some progress, they discovered that a compilation had been made by a Society in the West of England, which, on examination, fully answered their views, both in the sentiments and language of the Services. Permission was procured from the compilers to print any number of the Liturgy for the use of the Mansfield Society; and they have accordingly printed (with little alteration except in the addition of the Psalms) a sufficient number for their own use. To Dissenters they need not apologize for the adoption of a Liturgy in preference to the plan in general use

amongst Nonconformists;—The right of private judgement, which is the ground of their common dissent, makes such an appeal unnecessary, and to other of their fellow christians they have only to state; that though they are ever ready to justify their separation from the established church, on the above broad basis, yet that they feel a sincere pleasure in adopting a mode of worship which lessens the distance between them and their brethren of the establishment, and which, at the same time, consists with their religious sentiments, and their views of the best interest of piety and virtue. Influenced by this feeling, they have made choice of a set of Services, from which all disputable points of Theology, and all expressions, which they conceive might be offensive to persons of different persuasions, have been carefully excluded; and it is their sincere wish, that a spirit of pure and manly benevolence may be cultivated by christians of all professions.

Mansfield.  
April, 1797.

Bound up with the author's copy is *A Collection of Hymns & Psalms for Public Worship*. This was printed at Mansfield by George Langley, Albion Offices, in 1814. A number of the hymns are by Doddridge and Mrs. Steele, and a few each by Addison, Pope, and Mrs Barbauld. Less than half a dozen are included in the hymn book at present in use at the Old Meeting House.

It is impossible to say exactly when the congregation became Unitarian in theology, but from the preface to *Devotional Offices* it is clear that the worshippers at the Old Meeting House regarded themselves as of this doctrinal persuasion by 1797. Probably the course of development had proceeded quietly throughout the century. None of the ministers at the Old Meeting House seems to have indulged in controversy on the issue, and there has survived no printed sermon or other evidence from which a definite conclusion can be stated. Clegg was known to have embraced Arianism, but his ministry was short, and it cannot be discovered whether he left for financial or theological reasons. John Platts (1683-1735), minister

at Ilkeston until he died in 1735, expressed the broad basis on which the rationally-inclined Presbyterians of the eighteenth century rested their arguments:

I can assure the World, that it would be the most *agreeable Sight to me*, to see the *Constitution and Foundation* of the *Church so enlarg'd and settled*, as that nothing more might be requir'd to make a Man, either a *Member* or *Minister* in her *Communion*, than *Christ has requir'd to make a Man a Member or Minister in his Church universal*; according as the best *human Prudence* can apply his *general Rules to particular Cases*.<sup>1</sup>

In neighbouring chapels this liberalising tendency gained ground, though in Nottingham the sharper edge of controversy intruded in 1737, when the exclusion of Joseph Rawson from Castlegate Congregational Church led to a pamphlet battle in which the scholarly Dr. John Taylor of Kirkstead joined. The secession of neo-Calvinists (Congregationalists) took place at Chesterfield in 1772,<sup>2</sup> and at Derby in 1778.<sup>3</sup> The dispute which split the dissenting congregation in the nearby town of Sutton-in-Ashfield during Jacob Brettell's ministry will presently be referred to, but its reverberations must have stimulated keen interest in Mansfield, though of this we have no concrete record. Probably Heywood was the last minister in the Arian tradition. Catlow, as a younger man, trained when the liberal theology was already influencing students at Daventry, was most likely able to acknowledge definite Unitarian views.

The choice of a successor to Catlow fell on Joseph Bull, a promising young student at Manchester Academy, then under the principalship of George Walker, F.R.S., who had but recently resigned his distinguished pastorate at High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham. On the 17th July,

1799, it was unanimously agreed to invite Bull, at a salary of £90 per annum. The invitation was signed by four trustees—John Blagg, William Siddon, John Paulson, and Willian Broadhurst—and by all the other members of the Society. Mr. Bull accepted the invitation on condition that he might complete his theological course.

The interregnum was filled by Thomas Broadbent of Sutton-in-Ashfield, who was minister of the Unitarian group which had seceded from the congregation there which claims an origin dating back to 1651, though of this there is no factual evidence. Though it represented a blend of Presbyterian and Independent attitudes, characteristic of many dissenting congregations in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire after toleration in 1689, the major emphasis had always been Congregational. During the ministry of Jacob Brettell (1762–1810) violent dissension broke out because of Brettell's embracing Unitarianism. At first Brettell claimed possession of the meeting house, and the Congregational party had to worship elsewhere, but on a High Court action Brettell was compelled to yield up the chapel building. By the encouragement and financial backing of Samuel Unwin, a prosperous mill-owner, a Unitarian meeting house was opened in 1791. Brettell ministered there until he moved to Gainsborough in 1796 to succeed Jeremiah Gill. Shortly afterwards the Unitarian congregation called Thomas Broadbent to be its minister. It was convenient to ask him to have oversight at Mansfield while the congregation there waited for its new minister. Broadbent himself left the district in 1800 to become minister at Park Lane, near Wigan, where he remained until he died, eleven years later. From this year onwards the Sutton-in-Ashfield Unitarian Chapel was united under the ministry of the Old Meeting House, Mansfield. This association continued at least as late as 1857, when it is mentioned for the last time in the North Midland Association's Minute Book. After that year no further reference occurs. It is during William Linwood's ministry (1842–1848) at

<sup>1</sup> *An Historical Account of the Several Attempts for a Further Reformation of the Established Church*, 1716, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> D. W. Robson: *History of Elder Yard Chapel, Chesterfield*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> R. Mansfield: Unpublished thesis for M.A. (Manchester).

the Old Meeting House that the most specific references to the congregation at Sutton appear; otherwise the history of this most interesting group is shrouded in obscurity.

Thomas Broadbent made no entries in the Old Meeting register.

## CHAPTER 5

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO 1849

JOSEPH BULL came to Mansfield on the 5th July, 1800 and took charge of his new pastorate on the following day. He seems to have officiated there, however, during the previous Christmas vacation, for his first entry in the baptismal register is dated the 2nd January, 1800. His last entry was on the 22nd March, 1811, shortly before his removal to Hinckley. It was in the first year of his ministry that the register of burials was commenced. On Christmas Day 1800 he entered these words:

Mr. James Benton, an acquaintance of the Rev. Dr. Priestley and formerly of Birmingham, died at Mansfield 20th Dec. 1800, being the first person that was interred there by me, Joseph Bull.

Altogether there are twenty-two entries by Bull, the last being dated 27th January, 1811. Amongst these there is one of particular interest:

Edward Marriott, d. 18th Feb. 1804 aged 75, and was buried 21 Feb. in the Chapel Yard by me Joseph Bull.

N.B. Mr. Peat, Joiner, on behalf of Jane Marriott, paid me one penny as an acknowledgement for leave to bring the Corps in at the Back Door of the Chapel Yard which I paid to Mr. Siddon—Jos. Bull, Minister.

Obviously there was no right of way for the dead through the back door of the chapel-yard.

Joseph Bull assumed the surname of his wife Ann Bristowe in the circumstances which he set out in the Register of the Great Meeting, Hinckley:

Mrs. Bristowe, my wife's mother, died at Hinckley 16th June 1812 and was buried at Caunton.<sup>1</sup> At her request I assumed the name of Bristowe.

<sup>1</sup> Near Newark.

As Joseph Bull Bristowe he was known to the end of his life.

The young minister who settled at Mansfield at the opening of a new century was an avowed Unitarian of the Priestley school. He was a native of Stourbridge, born there in 1774. He was a student at Manchester Academy, 1798–1800, with an exhibition from the Presbyterian Fund, and as a student took services at Dob Lane, Falsworth, 1799–1800. After eleven years at Mansfield, Bull removed to Hinckley, and, his health being affected, he then found a settlement at Ringwood, Hampshire, in 1817, where he remained until 1840. In that year he went to Sidmouth, and after a short ministry of two years, became pastor at Topsham, 1842–1848. His last ministry was at Shepton Mallet, Somersetshire, 1848–1854. He died there on the 16th March, 1854, aged eighty, according to the report in the *Christian Reformer*, “in the active discharge of his pastoral duties”. The obituary went on to say that he was much regarded by his people and

Though so far advanced in life he preached with great energy, and gave himself to the work of the flourishing Sunday Schools connected with the chapel to the last, and those to whom he ministered gratefully testify that he did whatever he could for their moral and spiritual welfare.

To the last “he kept up his interest in all that bore upon the progress and improvement of the world”.

Bull published several sermons; one, with the title “The Unity of God”, in which he denied the deity of Christ and existence of the devil, was preached at Mansfield on the 14th May, 1809, and at High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham, on the 2nd July of the same year. This sermon occasioned a scurrilous attack on him by a bitter theological opponent in a rhyming *Address* in which the reference occurred to this “Mad Bull”.

A more modest school than Catlow’s was conducted by Bull in the Parsonage, and one of the pupils later related that he taught both boys and girls as he sat in one of the

ground-floor rooms in such a position of vantage that he could look through the open doorway into the adjoining room. His pupils planted a row of poplar trees up to his front door, and they grew into splendid specimens, but have all since disappeared.

Joseph Bull Bristowe was thrice married: (1) to Ann, the daughter of Thomas Bristowe, of Worksop, Nottinghamshire, who died on the 11th April, 1825; (2) to Mary Ridout, of Ringwood, Hants., on the 3rd April, 1827, who died on the 17th July of the same year; and (3) to Love, the daughter of John Early, of Kingston House, Ringwood, by whom he had one daughter.

When William Harrod visited the Old Meeting House at the turn of the century, “in time of winter”, he described his impressions in his *History of Mansfield* (published 1801). The meeting house was a

neat and spacious building, and well attended; here I was received by Religion and Politeness happily blended. The form of prayer precomposed, and the sermon delivered with modesty, commanding attention. Here is an organ, and a comfortable warmth, diffused through the place, the want of which our churches (sc. parish churches) lament in tears trickling down their lofty pillars.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the “precomposed prayer” was a reference to Catlow’s Service Book.

The first book in the possession of the congregation that contains any records of its proceedings consists mainly of accounts and lists of subscribers, beginning in April 1811 and ending in 1858. Its first entry records the meeting of trustees and members to appoint a successor to Joseph Bull Bristowe. The invitation was to be sent to John Williams of Halifax, Yorkshire, and

It was also resolved that a copy of the above Resolution be immediately forwarded to Mr. Williams by the Trustees of the Society and that they do take all necessary steps for carrying the same into effect.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

After the granting of toleration in 1689 nonconformist property was vested in trustees who were accountable to law, and this legal condition developed eventually into a system where, in the absence of any particular arrangement, as, for instance, at Elder Yard Chapel, Chesterfield, where the majority of seat-holders had the right to appoint a new minister, the trustees became in practice the controlling body of the Chapel. The invitation to Williams indicates that this was the situation at Mansfield. Later in the century this power was exercised by the most influential trustees in an attempt to oust a minister unacceptable to them, though with some popular following amongst the ordinary members of the congregation.

Amongst the thirty-nine names appended to this invitation appeared those of several of the principal businessmen in the town and neighbourhood<sup>1</sup>: for instance, Henry Hollins, William Siddon, I. Heywood and William Brodhurst. Henry Hollins (1776–1848) had married Hannah Maria, the daughter of John Blagg of

<sup>1</sup> Signatories to the invitation, 5th April, 1811:

John Blagg	John Earp	John C. Sudbury
Willm Brodhurst	Thos. Hickson	Joseph Bonsall
Henry Hollins Junr.	Margt Evanson	William Bromley
Wm. Siddon	Bridget Evanson	Thos. Hogarth
Saml Siddon Junr.	Dorothy Evanson	Mary Clark
W. Paulson	Lucy Walls	John Harwood
Wm. Brodhurst Junr.	Mary Heywood	William Bishop Senr.
Wm. McLellan	Charlotte Heywood	William Bishop Junr.
I. Heywood	Mary Brodhurst	Sarah Bishop
Geo. Walkden	Joseph Theaker	Thos. Machin
Wm. Siddon Junr.	George Short	John Machin
G. Harrison	Henry White	Joseph Pearson
John Walker	Martha Scott	John Ashmore

Names of those not present but signing later:

Bingley, Ann	Moody, Thos.	Slack, Wm.
Clarke, Wm.	Pearson, Wm.	Slack, Benn.
Hind, John	Sansom, Jane	Richardson, Robt.
McLellan, Jane	Siddon, Mary	Walliss, Humpy.
Langford, Wm.	Slack, Ann	Woodhead, Wm.

Mansfield, and was the eldest son of Henry Hollins (c. 1740–1825), brazier of Long Row, Nottingham, who in 1784 had formed a partnership for establishing the hosiery industry at Pleasley with Thomas Oldknow, mercer, of Nottingham, John Paulson, mercer, William Siddon, mercer, and John Cowpe, all of Mansfield. The partnership prospered, and after several changes in title it is now represented in the well-known firm of William Hollins & Co. Ltd., whose trade-mark "Viyella" is world famous.<sup>1</sup> William Brodhurst was the leading Maltster in Mansfield. Added to the invitation to Mr. Williams were the names of fifteen persons who were not present but expressed a wish that Mr. Williams be invited. Resolutions were also passed at the meeting:

That no person be allowed to become a subscriber without the consent of three trustees;

That Mr. Wm. Brodhurst be requested to become Accomptant and Treasurer;

That the accounts be inspected annually by the trustees.

At a meeting held on the 23rd June, 1811, William Siddon junr. and William Brodhurst junr. were chosen for Chapel Wardens.

The number of subscribers at that time was about fifty. Mr. Williams' salary was £140 a year, and £10 a year rent was paid for the Parsonage, which was apparently let. The accounts seem to have been made up to the 25th March, and the first year after Mr. Williams' appointment there was a deficit of £30 13s. 7d. They had an easy way of meeting the deficiency, for it was resolved that it should be met by calling on the principal subscribers for an extra quarter's subscription.

John Williams was born at Shrewsbury on the 30th January, 1768, and after receiving his earlier education

<sup>1</sup> For the fuller story of this interesting manufacturing venture see further: Stanley Pigott: *Hollins: A Study of Industry, 1784–1949*. "Viyella" is a name derived from "Via Gellia" in Derbyshire, where the firm had a factory.

at Shrewsbury School, he proceeded to Carmarthen Presbyterian College, 1783-4, then to Hoxton, 1784, and finally to Daventry, 1786, then under the principalship of the Rev. Thomas Belsham. On leaving college Williams became minister at Uffculme, Devon, 1789-90, and so favourably impressed Mr. Richard Hall Clarke, one of the members, that he built a small Unitarian chapel on his own estate at Bridwell, where the young minister was in charge from 1790 to 1794. Here he used Lindsey's liturgy. It was on Belsham's recommendation that Williams removed to Norton, Yorks, in 1794. Whilst at Norton, Williams was invited to preach the annual sermon of the meeting of Presbyterian ministers of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and South Yorkshire (which had been constituted only since 1798) on the 7th August, 1799. Between May 1803 and June 1804 Williams recorded that he made 183 inoculations for cow-pox.<sup>1</sup>

In 1804 he removed to Northgate End Chapel, Halifax, where he ministered until 1811, the year of his settlement in Mansfield.

John Williams was a popular and able minister. His ministry was the second longest in the history of the Old Meeting House and was terminated only by his death in 1835. Like his two immediate predecessors, he conducted a school as an adjunct to his ministry. The school prospered, and Williams was able to build a large house which served as manse and school, later occupied by Douglas Patterson, whose son, Douglas J. Patterson, became the second mayor of Mansfield after the incorporation of the town in 1891.

In 1822 John Williams was one of those active in petitioning for the first Improvement Act under which Mansfield was governed, and his name appears on the petition with those of leading members of the community,

<sup>1</sup> Norton Chapel register, Somerset House, at end, "Register of Inoculation for the Cow Pox, A.D. 1803 by J. Williams", the 19th May, 1803 to the 29th June, 1804. Cf. *Transactions U.H.S.*, vol. i, part 2, pp. 136-40.

amongst the most prominent being members of the Old Meeting House.<sup>1</sup>

As an indication of the position that Williams occupied in the cultural life of the town, there may be cited his vice-presidency of the Society for the Discussion of Literary and Scientific Subjects, the president being the vicar of Mansfield, the Rev. T. L. Cursham, LL.D. The inaugural meeting was held in the Moot Hall on the 12th December, 1828, when the introductory address was delivered by Mr. Williams at the request of the Society.

Two years before his death Williams published the *Memoirs of the late Reverend Thomas Belsham*, a volume described by Alexander Gordon as

"a morass of seven hundred and ninety one pages, without chapters, or index, or table of contents . . . it is ill-arranged, defective, inaccurate, diffuse. Yet it has its place amongst my favourite books. Its value lies in this, that it permits a very close approach to the inner life of a man of deep religious experience".<sup>2</sup>

The Sunday School was reported as having forty scholars on its books in 1821.<sup>3</sup>

By his marriage to Bridget, a daughter of Ebenezer Aldred, minister of Great Hucklow, Derbyshire, Williams had ten children, all of whom were born at Mansfield. His eldest child, Emily, married Alfred Turner Blythe, twice minister at Elder Yard Chapel, Chesterfield, (1840-1847 and 1854-1857), and subsequently, on conforming to the Church of England, rector of Upper Langwith. Emily Blythe, however, remained faithful to the tradition into which she was born.

Another daughter, named Joanna, gained some esteem in her lifetime as an authoress. One of Williams' sons, John Ebenezer, was trained for the Unitarian ministry and held the pastorate at Belper from 1838 to 1844.

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Grove: *The History of Mansfield*, pp. 302 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Addresses, Biographical and Historical*, pp. 308-9.

<sup>3</sup> A. S. Buxton: *Mansfield in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 55.

After resigning from the ministry he launched into a new career and became assistant to Frederick Swanwick, who, in conjunction with George Stephenson, was then engaged in constructing the Midland Railway. John Ebenezer Williams died round about 1889, having previously, with his family, entered the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup>

John Williams died on 1st December, 1835, aged sixty-seven years. The funeral sermon was preached by the Rev. Henry Hunt Piper of Norton, Yorkshire.<sup>2</sup> The congregation subscribed £39 13s. to defray the expense of his funeral. A tablet was erected to his memory in the Old Meeting House and he is the only minister of the chapel to be commemorated in this manner. One who knew him described Williams as "tall and thin, clean shaven . . . quiet and dignified".

Events recorded during his ministry were a collection in 1812 for the Protestant Dissenting Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty; a collection of £10 in 1813 for the York Academy (this was really "Manchester New College, York", which is now Manchester College, Oxford); a collection of £14 in 1814 for the relief of German sufferers (a sidelight on the Napoleonic war) and in 1815 a collection of £17 5s. on behalf of the suffering Protestants of France.

Before the appointment of a successor the pulpit was supplied by the Rev. C. W. Robberds, a "Mr. Austin", and "Mr. Taylor and Mr. Perry". Eventually an invitation to the Rev. Charles William Robberds to become minister was sent by Mr. William Hollins,<sup>3</sup> Chapel-warden, dated the 22nd February, 1836. The stipend offered was £130 a year.

Mr. Robberds' acceptance was dated from Dorchester, the 24th February, from which it is evident that he was

<sup>1</sup> *The Old Chest* (Liverpool, 1897), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Reformer*, 1835, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> William Hollins of Pleasley Vale and son of Henry Hollins, original partner in Pleasley Cotton Mills.

conscious of his youth and lack of experience. His ministerial training had been completed at Manchester College, York, in 1834, where he had commenced studies in 1829. Charles William Robberds was born in Manchester on the 25th December, 1812, and was the elder son of John Gooch Robberds (1789-1854), minister of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, 1811-1854, and Mary, the daughter of William Turner (1781-1859), minister of Hanover Street Chapel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1782-1841.

Robberds remained a bachelor during his Mansfield ministry, and the parsonage was let for £15 a year. He commenced his pastoral duties in June 1836, and in the following year the first Sunday School room was built.

On the 5th May, 1836, the Old Meeting House was registered for the solemnisation of marriages. In the certificate it is called "The Unitarian Chapel". Until the passing of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act in 1836, all marriages had had to take place in parish churches. During this ministry the two registers of baptisms and one of burials were deposited with the Registrar-General. The minister wrote in the "precious little 'Shaw Register'", as it was called by George Eyre Evans,

This regular Chapel Register appears to have been lost to the congregation about the year 1800, the register I mean which extended from 1738 to 1783. I know nothing of the particulars but believe it came out of some quarrel with a former minister. 11th Feb. 1837. C.W.R.

For reasons unexplained by Robberds the manuscript book recording the *Meetings held by the Association of Dissenting Ministers in Northamptonshire from the Year of our Lord 1754*<sup>1</sup> had come into his possession, and he began his own record of Mansfield baptisms in this volume. When Alfred W. Worthington was minister he detached these pages and had them separately bound, as he explained in

<sup>1</sup> The MS. Minute Book of the Northamptonshire Association is at High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham.

a prefatory note he inserted in the Northamptonshire Minute Book:

This volume of MSS entries—terminating with the entry for Sept. 23rd 1784, had been employed by the Rev. C. W. Robberds for the Baptismal Register of the Old Meeting at Mansfield. He had copied into it the old registers transmitted to London, and he and succeeding ministers had continued the baptismal entries. I have separated the two parts, to be bound afresh: that the present volume in the old binding may be kept with the Minute Book of the North Midland Association of Presbyterian Ministers: and the baptismal Register be retained at Mansfield.

The date of this note was the 21st July, 1866.

A most important event during Mr. Robberds' ministry was the accession from the Baptist congregation in the town of George Vallance, John Birks and their minister himself, the Rev. Joseph Austin. It seems most likely that this was the Mr. Austin who had occupied the pulpit prior to the appointment of Mr. Robberds.<sup>1</sup> These new members and their descendants played a vital part in the subsequent history of the chapel. About this time also Robert White,<sup>2</sup> an influential townsman as landlord of the Swan Hotel, joined the congregation.

In 1838 Robberds and Benjamin Carpenter (sole minister at High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham, since 1831) collaborated in the production of *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Christian Worship*, based on the "leading principles", as they affirm in the Preface,

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Austin on coming to Mansfield bought a house in Queen Street and kept a school there during his ministry at the Baptist Chapel and after giving up his ministry. This house was sold eventually to become a mechanics' institute, and was used as a library, with an art school and other activities. It is now used for business purposes. Joseph Austin's third child, Eleanor, became the second wife of George Vallance, who married three times. Joseph Austin's fourth and youngest child, born in 1824, was John Austin, who not only worshipped at the Old Meeting House, but occasionally occupied the pulpit. At his death in 1909 he was the oldest member of the Chapel.

<sup>2</sup> Father of the author of this history.

in the first place, to make Watts, Doddridge, and others of our older Writers of high and established reputation, the basis; in the next place, to select from various Authors who, since their time and in our own day, have so greatly contributed to enlarge and enrich our devotional poetry; and thirdly, to include as many Hymns as the extent of the Collection permitted, on subjects relating to the Gospel and its Divine Author, and to the blessings, promises, duties, and hopes of Christianity.

From a letter in July 1842 from Mr. Robberds to Thomas Walkden, the Chapel-warden, it appears that meetings of the congregation had been held at which dissatisfaction had been expressed with his ministerial services, and he tendered his resignation. The tone of his letter is admirable, and displays a truly Christian spirit.<sup>1</sup> He preached for the last time on the last Sunday in September.

On leaving Mansfield, Robberds settled at Rivington, Lancashire, from 1842 to 1843 before moving to Sidmouth, Devon, where he ministered for ten years, 1843–1853. His last ministry was at Lord Street, Oldham, where he

<sup>1</sup> The occasion of dissatisfaction is only vaguely mentioned in his letter of resignation, though he considered some cause of criticism had arisen from his preaching: "I need not say that it is with very painful feelings I thus dissolve what has been—to myself at least—a happy connection of several years. I am grieved and surprised at finding myself called upon to take this step—grieved—because it must always be mortifying to find one's well-intentioned efforts unsuccessful—surprised, inasmuch as from the longer time than was agreed upon that has elapsed since first complaint reached my ears—I had hoped that I had set all previous dissatisfaction at rest. . . . I can truly say that the discourses which unfortunately have proved so unpalatable have cost me invariably many hours of painful thought—and been dictated by the sincerest desire to serve the cause of truth and righteousness."

In a letter dated 30th July, 1842, in reply to a suggestion from Walkden that he should continue preaching for six months, Robberds stated that he felt a "strong repugnance to remaining for six months with a congregation who have expressed themselves dissatisfied".

He considered he should vacate the pulpit as soon as the congregation began to hear candidates.

remained from 1853 to 1869, in which last year he resigned from the active ministry. In 1859 he married Catherine, the daughter of Thomas Crompton Holland, minister at Loughborough, Leicestershire, 1827-1857. Robberds died on the 13th November, 1893, and was buried at Bath. He had lived for many years in retirement at Cheltenham.

Mr. Robberds was succeeded in 1843 by the Rev. William Linwood, and his ministry was no doubt the most stormy in the history of the congregation. He was a man of pronounced and radical views, and is said to have supported the programme of the Chartists, though of his being a Chartist himself there is no evidence. He conducted services in the Unitarian Chapel at Sutton-in-Ashfield, in which town Chartism had many followers as well as at Mansfield, and at both places he attracted large congregations. The Chartists, it may be said, were the Socialist party of the 1830s and 1840s, and the "Charter" which stated their demands included those for universal suffrage and annual parliaments.

William Linwood was a man of considerable rhetorical gifts and was deeply influenced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Ellery Channing. His ability and energy were fired by a romantic touch which was fanned by an undisciplined imagination, so that he outran the sympathy of his supporters and was too much of an individualist to appreciate the slower changes of thought more congenial to the leading members of his congregation. At the time of his coming to Mansfield, the Old Meeting House had long held a leading position in the town. Though never perhaps numerous, the congregation included a large proportion of the leading families. The family of Brodhurst, for example, which had done much to maintain the industry and prosperity of Mansfield for many generations, were amongst the Chapel's most liberal and prominent supporters. The Paulsons were well known, and the Siddons, whose family came originally from Stoney Middleton, Derbyshire, were

associated with the Hollins family in building up the enterprise at Pleasley Vale Cotton-mills. To these older Presbyterian families were now attached the more recent converts from the Baptist fold: the Vallance and Birks families.

Though Linwood was to make a stir in the decade from 1840 to 1850, little is really known of this anguished man, whose ideals were romantic and lofty, but who found no religious group with which he could happily associate himself for long. After 1850 he is lost to the records of Unitarianism and Congregationalism. As a youth he had sat under Dr. Fletcher, minister of the Congregational Church at Stepney. From here he went to Glasgow University, where he matriculated in 1835, giving his father's name as Matthew, a merchant of London. It may be that Linwood intended to enter the Congregational ministry, but his name does not appear on the list of students at Glasgow Theological Hall (now the Scottish Congregational College, Edinburgh). His theological opinions were already fluid, and he withdrew from the University. What further training for the ministry he received is not known, but he became minister of the General Baptist Congregation at Ditchling, Sussex, where he published a sermon in 1840 dedicated to the "Rev. Thomas Aspland, of Hackney, as a small Testimony of Esteem and Gratitude of his much-favoured Servant, the Author".<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Aspland had been helpful in introducing him into Unitarian circles and in finding this pulpit for him.

After Ditchling, there followed a short pastorate at Brixton, where Linwood succeeded Thomas Wood on his resignation in 1841. In 1842 Linwood accepted the invitation to the Old Meeting House, Mansfield. Writing in 1850 he described in what frame of mind he had undertaken the work there:

<sup>1</sup> *Our Spiritual Knowledge of each other in a Future State: a Discourse delivered in the Unitarian Baptist Chapel, Ditchling, Sussex. Sunday Afternoon, July 12, 1840.* By William Linwood, Minister of the Place.

I went to Mansfield in the fullest and truest sense, the INDEPENDENT (Linwood's capitals) minister. . . . I was pledged to no creed: I recognised no creed, save that which each student of the scripture must frame for himself as a result of personal study and meditation . . . my object as a preacher . . . was rather to aid the cause of moral and social reform than to swell the ranks of a theological party. . . . I saw that the great body of the working classes were far removed from the reach of religious influences . . . (and) to bring the gospel home to the affections of much-tortured hearts of the sons and daughters of toil . . . to identify religion with politics, with trade, with literature . . . was my desire and hope when commencing my ministrations in Mansfield.<sup>1</sup>

The congregations began to grow under Linwood, and he wrote of would-be worshippers going away every Sunday unable to find a place in the meeting house, and of those who stayed behind being kept in pain by the pressure. Most probably the gallery was erected at this period to accommodate the larger numbers attending the services. In 1843 he requested the removal of the partition in the schoolroom so as to make it more useful for lectures and public meetings. On the 8th March, 1843, Mr. George Vallance undertook to take down the partition, divide the room with folding doors, and make good, for £5.

There appeared in 1843 a slim book of *Hymns and Anthems, for the use of the Congregation assembling in the Old Meeting House, Mansfield*,<sup>2</sup> from which it is obvious that Linwood had imbibed deeply from the romantic revival. The title-page carried a quotation from Byron:

My altars are the mountains and the oceans:  
Earth, air, stars—all that springs from the Great Whole;  
Who hath produced, and will receive, the soul.

Verses included in the collection were taken from Shakespeare, Coleridge, Byron, Robert Browning, Henry Kirk

<sup>1</sup> *Nottingham Mercury*, 15th March, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> Financed by a loan from Henry Hollins. This was to prove a source of dispute in 1847. The hymn book sold at a loss.

White, Ebenezer Elliott, Sir John Bowring, and J. C. Prince. The author's aim, as expressed in the preface to the congregation, was to promote

among you the spirit of that pure and unsectarian religion it has been my endeavour to commend to your sympathies; and which you have welcomed with a zeal . . . surpassing my most ardent expectations.

Also in 1843 Linwood published a commemorative address he had given at Mansfield on the death of William Ellery Channing, whom he claimed was "the property and ornament of no sect". This sermon was unfavourably reviewed in the *Christian Reformer* (1843, p. 124) by Robert Aspland in an unsigned article.

Linwood's zeal for social reforms led him into flamboyancy of phrase, as may be gathered from his sermon occasioned by the execution of William Saville at Nottingham on the 8th August, 1844.<sup>1</sup> The preacher was so strongly an advocate for the abolition of capital punishment that he overlooked the particular brutalities of the murders in his attempt to castigate the legal system which sanctioned the "Nottingham deed of blood", as he termed it. The sermon was first preached on Sunday, the 16th August, 1844, and repeated the following Sunday. It was later printed in London, and dedicated to "my congregations at Mansfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield, and all who in common with them unite to advance the sacred cause of justice and humanity". The charges he brought were sweeping:

Religion is ever mixed with our national brutality; a war or an execution, it is all the same; in the hands of the clergy they become consecrated things. What will they not consecrate? What indeed, save Liberty and Dissent!!! . . . I cannot, I will not be silent, when I see the spirit of my own loved faith thus violated, and mercy trampled down by execution mobs.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Field: *The Date Book of Remarkable and Memorable Events connected with Nottingham, 1750-1879*, pp. 464-5. The Lecture was published in two editions, 1844.

One suggestion he made was that as there were hospitals for the sick, so there should be "corrective colonies" for criminals.

During his ministry at Mansfield, Linwood became a writer for the *Nottingham Review*, a Whig weekly newspaper founded in 1808, and at the time of his departure was the editor-in-chief.

His restless spirit, which had brought him from an evangelical theology into Unitarianism, probably never gave him pause to inquire what was the ethos of Presbyterianism as it slowly developed without outward signs of tension at Mansfield through Arianism into Unitarianism. Clearly Linwood thought that the movement he had entered offered him the opportunity to realise his ideal of an unsectarian religion and full liberty of personal experiment in the field of theology. When his leading Chapel members hesitated and became critical, his own impatience precipitated him into an open breach. Others besides himself were critical of Unitarianism in its Priestleyan mould, and one might instance James Martineau and John James Tayler,<sup>1</sup> but Linwood seems to have followed his own lonely way. In 1846 he announced a series of lectures at the Old Meeting House "Designed to sustain and illustrate the following proposition, That the Ideas recognized by Orthodox Theology are eternally True".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Thom: *Letters of John James Tayler*, vol. ii, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> The lecture sequence was over a lengthy period with the following titles:

Dec. 20: The True Authority of the Bible.

„ 27: The Truths and Fallacies of what is called Unitarianism.

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Jan. 3: The Doctrine of the Trinity, the Mission of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

„ 10: The Doctrines of Atonement, Reconciliation, and Mediation.

„ 17: The Doctrine of Human Depravity.

„ 24: The Doctrine of Justification by Faith.

„ 31: The Doctrines of Regeneration and Sanctification.

Whilst there was a considerable increase in the number of subscribers paying small contributions of 1s. and 1s. 6d. a quarter, the larger subscriptions began to fall off. Linwood's stipend was irregularly paid, and there are several blank pages in the Chapel Book after Lady Day 1847. As early as 1843, which was the year of his appointment as minister, when some of the more substantial subscribers gave notice of their intention to withdraw their subscriptions,<sup>1</sup> a meeting of the congregation was held on the 20th of March, and resolutions were passed expressing regret at this action and stating that a number would increase their subscriptions, and thanked Mr. Linwood for his zealous, active and talented exertions in disseminating religious truth.

Among the thirty-eight members who signed promises to increase their subscriptions were several trustees. Opposition, however, continued, and increased among the leading members of the congregation. In March 1847 Mr. Henry Hollins, who had strongly criticised William Brodhurst's action in 1843, wrote to the Committee complaining of Mr. Linwood's attitude and pastoral services, and giving notice that he intended to reduce his subscription. Lengthy correspondence passed between him and the minister.

Henry Hollins indicated, as he wrote to the Committee of Management, that his opposition had "been brought to a point by the late events in the Town, shewing me

Feb. 7: The Existence of a Devil.

„ 14: The Distinction between Piety and Virtue.

„ 21: The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment.

„ 28: The Legitimate Province of Reason and Faith.

Mar. 7: Religion, permanent and universal—Theology, local and transient.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. William Brodhurst whose quarterly subscription of £7 10s. was the largest. William Brodhurst Junior also severed his connection, but he was then living at Newark, where he was the prime mover in attempting to start a Unitarian Church in the town.

very decidedly that your Minister is an intractable person, must be busy in a certain way, and that his habits are so far formed as not likely to change". He concedes the talent of Linwood in the pulpit and does not object to his doctrine, "but his manner is very far from agreeable to me in the Pulpit—my principal objection to him is, that *he is not the Pastor* to the congregation, and he says, that he never undertook that Office".

The public meeting in which Linwood had been a principal speaker had taken place at the instance of the parish churchwarden and two overseers of the poor and had been attended by many ratepayers and inhabitants. It was reported in the *Nottingham Review*, 12th March, 1847. But an earlier editorial comment in the *Review*, 26th February, had specifically mentioned that the turnpike road from the bridge at Pleasley to the cross in Westgate had been forced as a charge upon the Town Commissioners at the instance of a single individual and for the promotion of his interests. It may be guessed that the unnamed individual was none other than Henry Hollins of Pleasley. Though Linwood in the issue of 12th March, and later in his correspondence to Hollins, tried to defend the right of an editor to deal with public issues in a fair manner, the fact that as minister of the Old Meeting House he had associated himself with public criticism was damning, at least in Hollins' eyes.

Hollins took the step of threatening to reduce his quarterly subscription to £4. He also kept back out of moneys due to Linwood the debt incurred at the time of printing the hymn-book in 1843. He also withheld further financial support to the congregation at Sutton-in-Ashfield. Linwood's reply was conciliatory and claimed that he had taken part in the public meeting only at the last minute and under the impression that the Town Commissioners were in the wrong. (One source of irritation as Grove commented in his *History of Mansfield*, p. 306, was that the Commissioners were practically appointed for life and until 1874 conducted their business

privately.) Hollins counter-replied by accepting the explanation but still maintaining that Linwood was constitutionally unfitted for being a minister and "that this Congregation have acted unwisely in sanctioning your becoming the Editor of a Newspaper, considering, as I do, that your judgement is weak & overpowered by your exciteability & by far too much you act on the impulse of the moment". Continuing, he said he saw no reason to alter his previous decision. This was written on 18th April, 1847. Two days later 20th April, formal notice was served on Linwood:

We beg leave to inform you that after six months from this date or at Michaelmas next we will not be answerable for any particular amount of Salary to be paid to you even if a Congregational Meeting is then or previously held and a Majority is in your favour—and we request you will take this as a proper notice.

Henry Hollins	Trustee and Chapel Warden
Isaac Heywood	One of the Committee
J. Short	One of the Committee
William Hollins	
G. S. Chapman	One of the Committee
Thomas Minnitt	One of the Committee
James Franks	One of the Committee
Geo. Vallance	
John Birks	
Richd. Doughty	

Linwood replied, refusing to accept the notice, and relying on the terms of his engagement. In September 1847 a notice was put up that at a meeting of the trustees, Chapel-warden, and committee, it had been decided that on the 13th September the Chapel-warden would attend to take the signatures of pew-renters either in person or by proxy, approving or disapproving of Mr. Linwood. From the voting returns there was a majority in favour of the minister, although a number of former supporters

had become opponents. Linwood continued his correspondence with Hollins but no further action was taken until the 17th March, 1848, when the Trustees put up a notice that they intended to close the doors and shut up the Chapel on the Sunday following Michaelmas Day, 1848. To this Linwood replied that as they contemplated taking possession of the Old Meeting House *in defiance of the congregational majority*, he must decline to hand over the keys. It is evident from the correspondence which passed that there was very heated feeling between members of the congregation. Notice was also served on Sebastian Sales, the caretaker, who was also Town Crier, that unless he paid 1s. 3d. per week for the premises he occupied, he would be turned out at Lady Day.

In April the trustees took proceedings against Linwood to obtain possession of the Chapel and of the house occupied by Sebastian Sales, the caretaker, and an order was obtained. In July 1848 Linwood issued a writ against Henry Hollins, William Hollins, Isaac Heywood, Thomas Minitt, and William Brodhurst, the trustees at that date, to recover £90, the amount of salary due to him, but there is no information as to the result of this action.<sup>1</sup> Linwood at any rate ceased to be minister in August 1848, leaving the membership of the congregation much depleted, the subscriptions greatly reduced, and a considerable debt incurred.

With William Linwood's further attempts to spread his religious views we cannot now concern ourselves in detail. He did make one return visit to Mansfield, when he invited members of his former congregation to hear him in the large room of an inn in the town. Some went to the meeting and reported that they found no sign that he had departed from Unitarian opinions.

Misfortune and then silence fell upon him after Linwood removed south. At first he thought that William

<sup>1</sup> The solicitor's (George Walkden's) account is preserved in the Chapel box and details the stages in the dispute.

Johnson Fox<sup>1</sup> was working in a parallel direction, and at Finsbury Place and the National Hall, Holborn, he lectured for a while on Dickens and poetry, no doubt believing he was fulfilling one cherished aim in bringing culture to a wider public. His association with Fox, which appears to have been short, made him suspect amongst Unitarians who thought Linwood had adopted anti-supernatural views. Such could hardly have been farther from the truth, for he had left Mansfield more deeply convinced than ever by his reading of Coleridge that he should return to his former evangelical principles. He tried to gather a congregation in Stamford Street Chapel, London, but seems to have gone about the business in a very naïve manner and brought upon himself bitter criticism, which is to some extent rebutted in a letter from Dr. Joseph Hutton to the *Nottingham Mercury* (15th March, 1850). The venture collapsed.

He became proprietor and editor from January 1850 of a long-established Congregationalist journal known as *The Eclectic*, the principles of which are sufficient indication why Linwood thought he had discovered here a medium to expound his views, for the magazine stood for "Manhood Suffrage, Abolition of the Death Penalty, Sanctity of Peace, Reform of the System of Prison Discipline". The first issue under the new editor brought down the thunder of the *Christian Reformer*, and no less, from the orthodox side, that of the *British Banner*. Dr. Price,<sup>2</sup> from whom Linwood had made the purchase of *The Eclectic*, was forced into the position of re-purchasing the journal after the April issue. It is known that Linwood married,<sup>3</sup> after his return to London, Fanny, the daughter of a Mr. B. Newman, but of his domestic or public life after 1850 nothing has so far come to light.

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. W. J. Fox, M.P., Unitarian minister, was well known as a Radical reformer. Cf. *D.N.B.*

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Price, Congregationalist, proprietor and editor of *The Eclectic*, which he sold in 1849 on the grounds of ill health.

<sup>3</sup> 20th February, 1849.

His was a sad illustration of the comment made in the *Christian Reformer*: "Mr. Linwood's fate should be a warning to those among us who indulge the delusion that anti-sectarianism will allow them to pass unnoticed from the Unitarian into the Orthodox camp."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The interest Linwood occasioned in 1850 can be further studied by consulting the *Nottingham Mercury* for 8th March and 15th March, 1850; the *Christian Reformer*, 1850, pp. 253-255; and *The Inquirer*, 1850, pp. 141, 173, 191.

## CHAPTER 6

## A NEW START: 1849 TO 1900

WHEN Linwood was succeeded in March 1849 by the Rev. John George Teggin,<sup>1</sup> the subscriptions were only £7 or £8 a quarter. The total receipts for the nine months ended Christmas 1849 were under £60 and Teggin received a stipend of £60 a year. By a special effort £122 was raised. Among the contributors were William Hollins, Isaac Heywood, John Birks, George Vallance, Robert White, J. J. Handley, John Austin, and Owen Aves, all members of the congregation. Outside contributions came from friends at Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield, Chesterfield, London, Bridport, and other places. At that time many congregations ran "Fellowship Funds" intended for the help of congregations in difficulties, and contributions came from the Fellowship Funds of the congregations at Nottingham, Cross Street (Manchester), Upper Brook Street (Manchester), Liverpool, Birmingham (Old Meeting and New Meeting—the former now extinct and the latter now the Church of the Messiah), and also from the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. These Fellowship Funds sprang from the idea of Dr. John Thompson, a medical man from Kendal, and of Scottish descent, who later practised at Halifax and Leeds. There were at one time fifty congregations with Fellowship Funds, and this is an interesting example of their usefulness.<sup>2</sup>

J. G. Teggin was married with two daughters when he came to Mansfield from Crewkerne, Somerset, where he

<sup>1</sup> He was usually known by the Christian names John George, but signed the Frenchay register as John Griffith Teggin. He was born at Chester in 1800 and educated at Chester Grammar School and Bridport.

<sup>2</sup> *T.U.H.S.*, 1946, pp. 149-52.

had been minister from 1840 to 1849, with previous ministries at Taunton, 1828–35, Frenchay, near Bristol, 1836–37, and Yeovil, 1837 (?)–1848, which he combined with his Crewkerne pastorate. He was a bold man to take charge of a disorganised congregation on a pittance of £60 a year. Apparently he lived in the Parsonage, as no receipts for rent appear during his ministry. In March 1854 a present of £20 was made to Mrs. Teggin, and no doubt she well deserved it. Letters from sisters of the author show that she supplemented her husband's income by keeping a school.

The Chapel accounts for the period from March 1854 to March 1856 are very sparse, occupying only two pages. In 1856 a sum of £47 16s. 6d. was raised towards the cost of repairing and painting the Chapel. In the 1850s the Chapel benefited by the Mary Woodhead Trust. By her will, dated August 1851, Mary Woodhead left a dwelling-house in Stockwell Gate in trust for the Chapel, and with reference to the replacement of trustees she wrote: "And inasmuch as I have greater faith in trustees who are Unitarians in religion I do direct that such such successors shall if possible be selected in preference from parties of that religious persuasion".

Mr. Teggin left Mansfield in 1856 for Gloucester, where he remained from 1856 to 1871, removing to his last pastorate at Sidmouth, which was from 1872 to 1876. He was succeeded by the Rev. William Newton, whose ministry was very short. He had been trained at Stepney College for the Baptist ministry, but had come to adopt Unitarian views.<sup>1</sup> His stipend was £100 a year, as he was paid £25 in March 1857 and similar amounts each of the following quarters. Some items in the accounts for this year are interesting. Payments were made to the singers as follows: for one year to Richard Clay £2, to Miss Bent £1, to Miss Murphy £1, and to William Clay for half a year £1. Newton remained for one year before

<sup>1</sup> Richard Welford: *The Church and Congregation of the Divine Unity, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1904.*

moving to the Great Meeting, Hinckley, Leicestershire, in 1858. In 1860 he became minister of the Church of the Divine Unity, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, but resigned in 1862. He then took Anglican orders and emigrated to Canada.

Newton's successor was the Rev. Alfred William Worthington, B.A., who settled in Mansfield in 1858 and continued until January 1880. His ministry was one of the longest and most successful in the history of the Old Meeting House. He was educated at Manchester New College and a graduate of London University. Before entering the ministry he studied at Berlin University. For a time Worthington was assistant in Henry Green's school at Knutsford. He had a short ministry in his native place, Stourbridge, from 1852 to 1855, followed by another brief ministry at Bridgwater, 1856–1858, before he settled at Mansfield.

Proud of his Puritan ancestry, a convinced Unitarian, and a firm believer in social service, he exerted a marked influence not only upon his congregation, but also upon the town at large. He lost no opportunity of bringing up the younger members of his flock in the principles he held, and this was made evident in the services many of them rendered in after-life. Mr. Worthington took an active part in the re-establishment of the Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School with the erection of new premises. He became a governor, and even after he had removed to Stourbridge, such value was set by his services that he was retained on the board. He was instrumental in the opening of a "British School" in the Old Meeting School Room, and in the founding of a School of Art, and for both of these he acted as Honorary Secretary. For some years he was a member of the Improvement Commissioners, the body responsible for local government. So it is not to be wondered at that when he retired a local paper stated, "He has taken a keen and active interest in public affairs, and there was no movement for the sanitary or educational improvement of the town

which did not receive his energetic assistance and support".

Naturally it was to his own congregation that his chief services were rendered. His sermons were greatly appreciated and there was a marked increase in the congregation. Living as he did in the Parsonage in the Chapel yard, he regularly opened Sunday School in the morning and acted as afternoon Superintendent. He also conducted a class for the younger members. Nor did he neglect the social side, arranging Shakespeare readings and lawn-tennis parties, while the Harvest Festival and Congregational Tea became events of local importance.

On the 18th May, 1859, the Rules and Tables of the *Old Meeting Brotherly Society* were certified for the object of raising funds for the mutual benefit of the members, in sickness, old age, and on death; and also for the payment of sums at stated times to members.

The most important incident of Mr. Worthington's ministry was the restoration of the Old Meeting House in 1870. Up till then it had remained as it had been first erected and furnished. Although the main walls and roof were retained, the internal arrangements were entirely altered. The two doors on the east side were built up; a porch, including a vestry, was erected on the south side; the oak pillars which support the roof, and which had been coated and painted, were scraped and polished; the ceiling was renewed and panelled; the floor was relaid, pitch-pine seats were provided, the original pulpit was removed from the centre of the west wall to the northwest corner, and an organ was installed on the other side. Between the pulpit and the organ was placed the Communion Table against the north wall. It was surrounded by rails, and behind it was erected the stone reredos, the inscription beneath which is quoted at the beginning of this book. This reredos was Mr. Worthington's personal gift.

The building was now heated by a hot-water installation, and was adorned by numerous gifts, and by the

needlework of the ladies of the congregation. The total cost was about £1,400, the whole of which was raised by the congregation. The architect was Mr. Knight of Nottingham. An account of the improvements, with an illustration, appeared in *The Christian Freeman*, and one of the reopening services in *The Unitarian Herald* for the 11th April, 1871. The reopening sermon was preached by the Rev. William Gaskell, M.A., minister of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, and 150 sat down to the luncheon which followed.

The same year the congregation benefited by the will of Elizabeth Scott, who left her estate to the value of £38 12s. 6d., which was spent on improvements to the approaches of the Chapel.

To the denomination at large Mr. Worthington gave most valuable help. He was Honorary Secretary of the National Conference, and also of the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association. He was a trustee of many of our chapels, and instances of his activity are continually coming to light. He studied the history of the Old Meeting House, and the sermon he preached on the 12th June, 1870, the Sunday before the building was closed for restoration, entitled "Holy Memories", was printed, and is a helpful personal record. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace for the County of Worcestershire on his retirement to Stourbridge.

A landmark in 1877 was the Annual Tea Party held in the Town Hall on the 22nd October, when, on behalf of the congregation and Sunday School, Miss Emma Vallance presented a silver salver to Mr. John Edwin Birks on his resignation from the superintendency of the Sunday School, with which he had been connected for forty years.

Worthington's ministry came to an end in January 1880, and a soirée was held at the Town Hall to bid farewell to him, his wife, and Miss Worthington. Mr. Andrew Thompson presided, and the following presentations were made: a silver salver and teapot to Mr. and

Mrs. Worthington by Mr. Isaac Heywood; an album of photographs of members of the congregation to Mr. Worthington in the name of the Sunday School, and two volumes of poems to Miss Worthington.

Worthington first married on the 19th March, 1861, Mary Laetitia, second daughter of Robert Scott of Stourbridge. Her mother, Sarah Scott, the last of the family, had married Robert Wellbeloved, the youngest son of the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved of York. Robert assumed the name of Scott,<sup>1</sup> and his daughter, Mrs. A. W. Worthington, was a cousin of Charles Henry Wellbeloved, who succeeded Worthington as minister at the Old Meeting House in 1880. The Worthingtons' first daughter, Mary Ancilla, was born at the Parsonage on the 27th January, 1862, and later married Frank Preston of London. Their first child, Lillian Scott, entered the Unitarian ministry in 1932 and retired in 1946. A second daughter, Anna Laetitia, was born on 23rd February, 1863, and died the same year on the 22nd May. The first Mrs. Worthington died on the 31st May, 1863, and is commemorated by a tablet in the Old Meeting House. Worthington later married Mary, the daughter of Walter Worthington of Manchester, who was his first cousin. She died on the 21st September, 1896. On the 21st September, 1899, Worthington married as his third wife, Marian, only daughter of William Cochrane, minister of Cradley, Worcestershire, 1850-85.

Alfred William Worthington died at Stourbridge, on the 24th June 1907.

Several short ministries followed this long one. The chapel accounts at this time show that in 1872 the total subscriptions from fifty-eight subscribers amounted to £119 2s. (including £30 from Mrs. Hollins), and the total other receipts from trusts, etc., amounted to £157 1s. 11d. The stipend was £150 and the expenditure £203 11s. 4d.

The Rev. Charles Henry Wellbeloved was minister from 1880 to 1883, with a stipend of £200. He was a

<sup>1</sup> Other members of the family changed the name to Welby.

grandson of Charles Wellbeloved of York and was born on the 23rd October, 1835, at Leeds. He did not train for the ministry until later in life, when he received instruction from the Professors of the Non-Subscribing Association, Belfast, 1871-1873. The earlier part of his life found him engaged as an engineer. His first ministry was at Evesham, 1873-1875, from whence he moved to York, staying there from 1876 to 1880. He came to the Old Meeting House in 1880 and resigned in 1883 to settle at Portland Street Chapel, Southport, Lancashire, where he remained until his death on the 29th August, 1903. He married on the 29th August, 1865, Ellen Montgomery, third daughter of William Orr of Ballymoney, and they had five children who survived infancy. Mr. and Mrs. Wellbeloved were most popular, and it was a cause of great regret that the ministry was so short. It was distinguished, however, by a further alteration to the building which was started by the promise of a handsome donation by Mr. William Hollins.

The plans were prepared by Mr. R. Frank Vallance, a member of the congregation, and they comprised the extension of the building on the north side by a chancel erected over the small graveyard, with an organ chamber at the eastern end of the extension. This chancel gave space for the Communion Table and choir stalls. There were two large windows each side of the Communion Table and reredos, matching the windows in the body of the Chapel, and a circular window above the reredos. The pulpit was removed to the other side of the building, where it now stands. This work was carried out by Mr. Charles Vallance, also a member of the congregation, and the total cost was £588 3s. 6d. which seems very modest to-day for such work.

Of the opening services on the 16th March, 1882, a long account appeared in the *Unitarian Herald*. The preacher was the Rev. John Page Hopps, who took the text: "Honour and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." On this occasion *Ten*

*Services of Public Prayer* and Dr. Martineau's new *Hymns of Praise and Prayer* were used for the first time.

The service was followed by tea at the Town Hall, at which 250 sat down, the chair being taken by Mr. Michael Hunter, Mayor of Sheffield. Other speakers were the Rev. A. W. Worthington, the Rev. R. A. Armstrong, and the Rev. C. H. Osler. Among the vocalists were Miss Clay and Messrs. Ashton and A. C. Vallance.

John Frederick Smith,<sup>1</sup> whose ministry at Mansfield extended from 1884 to 1888, had originally trained for the Baptist ministry, studying at Regent's Park College and Göttingen. In his first pastorate at Hull he experienced a change of theology and desired to enter the Unitarian ministry. For a year, 1869–1870, he ably occupied the pulpit of St. Mark's Church, Edinburgh, whilst the minister, the Rev. William Hamilton Drummond, was away on the Continent under a Hibbert Fellowship. There followed ten years at Elder Yard Chapel, Chesterfield, 1870–1880, before Smith came to the Old Meeting House. After leaving Mansfield he was minister at Clifton, Bristol, 1888–1895. He was a studious and able man. He published *Studies in Religion under German Masters*, and translated Ewald's *Prophets of the Old Testament*. He was also a leader-writer for the *Manchester Guardian*. Several of his five children subsequently occupied important educational appointments, one, Henry Bompas Smith, becoming Director of Education at Manchester University. Smith died on the 22nd November, 1898, at Royston, where he had lived since retiring from Clifton.

During Smith's ministry Mr. William Hollins gave a house on West Hill as a residence for the minister. The trustees were William Hollins, Isaac Heywood, John Edwin Birks, John Austin, William Austin Vallance, William Walter, Humphrey Hollins, John Harrop White, Job Hodgkinson, John Hemstock, and Owen Aves. Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Born at Great Granston, 28th October, 1839.

Smith occupied this house, and the Old Parsonage in the Chapel yard was let for a number of years. In 1884 the need for further Sunday School and institutional accommodation became evident. An offer of assistance was made by Mr. Hollins, with his usual generosity, and funds were raised by means of a bazaar held in March 1884, and by other efforts. A most commodious room was built, and the old room was divided into two classrooms at a cost of £556. In November 1885 the new premises were opened by Miss Roberts, sister of Mrs. Hollins, who deputised for Mrs. Hollins, who was indisposed. The Rev. A. W. Worthington came back to take the chair; statements were made by Mr. J. E. Birks (then Treasurer), and Mr. J. Harrop White (Hon. Secretary), and addresses were given by the Reverends C. Coward, J. Frederick Smith, James Harwood (of High Pavement, Nottingham), and John Birks (of Friar Gate, Derby).

Edgar Innes Fripp, B.A.,<sup>1</sup> who succeeded Smith in 1888, came to his first charge after a year's assistant ministry to the Rev. Thomas Sadler at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead. He had been a student at Manchester New College, 1878–1886, and graduated at London University in 1883. He held a Hibbert Scholarship at Jena, 1886–1887, and published a study of *Genesis* in 1892. He was young, cultivated, and enthusiastic, and soon gained the confidence and regard of his congregation. This affection was cemented when he brought to Mansfield as his wife Edith Caroline, the daughter of Professor Henry Morley, their marriage taking place on the 16th April, 1889. Their first child, Paul Innes, was born at Mansfield, and Thomas Morley and Edith Mary were born later at Belfast.

As soon as he came, Mr. Fripp started the monthly *Calendar* (spelt with a "K" until 1903), which, with slight intervals, has continued to be published ever since, and forms a valuable history of the congregation from

<sup>1</sup> Born in London, 1861; educated at Milton Abbas Grammar School.

1888. Bound copies are kept in the Chapel safe. At first the "*Kalendor*" was sold for an annual subscription of 6d., which was increased in 1892 to 1s. when the format became that of a parish magazine, with an inset *The Christian Freeman*, for which *The Seed Sower* was substituted in 1898. The *Calendar*, however, never paid its way, except apparently in 1902. In its first year there were 115 subscribers and thirty-five copies were given away on the average each month. At Mr. Fripp's suggestion a book of additional hymns to *Hymns of Praise and Prayer* was printed and adopted. The *Calendar* makes the first mention of the Social Union in October 1889, but it was not a new institution, and it has continued ever since in one form or another, though slight breaks in continuity were caused by the two world wars.<sup>1</sup> The *Calendar* at first contained the greater part of a sermon or other message from the minister, with comparatively little space for announcements of Chapel and School activities.

At this period sittings in Chapel were let at 1s. 6d. per quarter, and it was a very common thing for payments to be in arrears, as is shown by appeals in the *Calendar* for prompter payment. There was no weekly collection at services, but quarterly collections were taken for the poor. Communion Services were also held quarterly.

In 1889 the premises in Stockwell Gate, the property of the Woodhead Trust, were improved and divided into two shops by the trustees, at an expense of £500. In the same year Mrs. Martha Hemstock bequeathed £200 to the trustees of the Old Meeting House.

The following year, through the munificence of Mr. William Hollins (son of Henry Hollins), the Meeting

<sup>1</sup> In 1954 after some sixty years the Literary and Social Union ceased to exist in its own right. It had been for some time unsuccessful, partly because the local Public Library started free public lectures with speakers of nation-wide repute, and partly because of the coming of television and other entertainments. The Union was amalgamated with the Adult Club, and thereafter functioned as the "Social Club", but on very much the same lines as before, holding meetings during the winter fortnightly instead of monthly.

House was further beautified. The whole building was re-plastered. An oak dado was inserted, and the doors were surrounded on the inner wall by a beautiful enrichment in oak, with panelling to the height of the doors between them.<sup>1</sup> Encaustic tiles were placed in the walls behind the Communion Table, and the windows were glazed with tinted glass graduating softly downwards from pale red to light sky blue. Two stained-glass windows were put in on either side of the Communion Table. The architect was Mr. T. Locke Worthington of London (who designed Richmond Free Church, Surrey), a nephew of the Rev. A. W. Worthington. Mr. Charles Vallance was the contractor. An illustration of the enrichment inside the doors appeared in *The Architect*.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately Mr. Hollins died on the 4th February, 1890, before the work was completed. Subsequently a brass eagle lectern was given by the congregation as a memorial to him, and a tablet was placed in the chapel by his family.

For five Sundays while the alterations were being made Sunday services were held in the Town Hall, where special sermons dealing with "the broad plain facts of religion" were preached by the minister. Music was provided by a string quintet and a reinforced choir. These services were advertised by the distribution of 6,000 tracts and 5,000 handbills throughout the town by an active band of workers. One hundred posters were also displayed. The Assembly Room was crowded each evening. The building was reopened in the afternoon of the 7th March, 1890, when the sermon was preached by the Rev. C. H. Wellbeloved.

In 1890 the first collection in aid of the funds of

<sup>1</sup> The contract stipulated oak for the panelling, but Charles Vallance wanted the oak to be as old as the Chapel itself, so he bought oak beams from the disused Skerry Hill windmill and used them to make the panelling. A painting of the mill before its destruction was made by A. S. Buxton, and hangs in the Chapel vestry.

<sup>2</sup> 2nd August, 1890, p. 96.

Mansfield hospital was made, the foundation stone having been laid the previous November.

To the great regret of the congregation, Mr. Fripp left Mansfield to settle at the Second Presbyterian Church, Belfast, in February 1891, where he remained until 1900, in which year he returned to Mansfield. It was during his ministry in Belfast that the present buildings of All Souls' Church, Elmwood Avenue, were erected. Mr. Fripp loved the style and customs of the Church of England, and when All Souls' was built on the Anglican model he introduced a service-book modelled on the Book of Common Prayer, and on his return to the Old Meeting House in 1900 a similar service-book was adopted which is still in use, in conjunction with *Orders of Worship*.

In September 1891 the Rev. Owen James Jones began his ministry. He was an alumnus of the Unitarian Home Missionary College, Manchester, and was minister at Whitchurch, 1885–1887, and at Cardiff, 1888–1891. He had several children, two of whom were born at Mansfield. Mr. Jones was a man of broad religious outlook and strong artistic interests. A copy which he painted in water-colour of the stained-glass window behind the present prayer-desk and presented to the late Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Birks on their marriage is in the possession of Miss E. A. Birks. He encouraged the musical side of the services, which met with a good response, and were intended to provide something for the religious and artistic uplift of people not easily persuaded to attend ordinary services. Choir practices now became weekly instead of occasional. Mr. Jones also encouraged the development of youth work, which included a rambling club and football club, and the Band of Hope which had been started in October 1890. Later a wood-carving and drawing class was started under Mr. Jones's direction. A systematic arrangement was made for providing flowers for the Communion Table.

It was on Good Friday 1894 that the first distribution of buns under the Mallatratt bequest took place. Mrs.

Mary Mallatratt had bequeathed £100 to the trustees of the Old Meeting House to be invested, and the income to be applied in providing buns to be distributed to poor children annually on Good Friday, and a further sum of £100 to be invested and the income applied to providing books for the Sunday School. Six hundred buns were distributed on the first occasion; next year 800, and in 1896 nearly 1,000. In 1897, 950 buns were distributed, but were not enough to meet the demand. By 1902 the number had risen to over 1,100, and by 1905 to 1,400. The distribution has continued ever since, tables being spread out of doors if weather permits.

In January 1892 a "Lady Visitors' Society" was formed to help the minister to keep in touch with all cases of sickness and need in the families associated with the Chapel and School.

There are two *Calendar* references to overseas work during Owen Jones's ministry. One is on Saturday, the 14th October, 1893, when a well-attended sub-district meeting of the North Midland Sunday School Association met at the Old Meeting House and Mr. Jones read a paper on "Work for Sunday Scholars in Foreign Missions", appealing for interest in "the remarkable religious movement in the Japanese Mission". The other is in August 1896, when an appeal was made to raise the balance of £110 still required to make up the sum of £1,000 a year for work in India in co-operation with the Brahmo-Samaj.

Owen Jones resigned in September 1896, and after leaving Mansfield took Anglican orders and died in 1919, Vicar of Grandborough, Buckinghamshire.

There followed an interregnum of eleven months during which there were several temporary pastorates of about a month's duration. Among the ministers taking charge were the Rev. W. W. Chynoweth Pope, the Rev. H. S. Mellone, M.A., D.Sc., who was later Principal of the Unitarian Home Missionary College, Manchester, and Secretary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association,

and the Rev. A. C. Henderson, M.A., B.D., from Melbourne, Australia.

In September 1897 the Rev. Harry Shaw Perris, M.A., (1870–1933) became minister for two years. He was a student at Owens College, Manchester, 1887–1892, graduating B.A. in 1891 and M.A. in 1894. He then studied at Manchester College, Oxford, 1892–1895. For a year he was Missionary Fellow at Mill Street Domestic Mission, Liverpool, 1895–1896. Mr. Perris was an earnest advocate of peace and was instrumental in organising a public meeting for this cause in 1899.

During his ministry Alderman John Edwin Birks was elected Mayor in 1897, the first Unitarian mayor of the borough since the incorporation of the town in 1891. In accordance with custom, the mayoral service was held at the Mayor's own place of worship on the 14th November. According to the local newspapers the service was "ornate, bright and musical", and the sermon by Mr. Perris as Mayor's Chaplain was full of up-to-date suggestions on the higher duties of governing bodies.

In 1898 the West Hill Parsonage was sold at the request of Mrs. William Hollins and the proceeds, amounting to £2,500, were invested to augment the minister's stipend. Mrs. Hollins built a new parsonage in Layton Avenue, but kept it in her own hands, after experiencing difficulties through having placed the former parsonage in trust. In 1912, however, her son, Mr. William Hollins, conveyed the property to trustees for the minister to occupy the house rent free, subject to the payment of rates and taxes and interior repairs, and paying £1 per annum to the churchwardens of the parish church for Rowland Dand's Charity, and 10s. per annum to the churchwardens of the parish church of Mansfield Woodhouse for Price's Charity. If the minister failed to perform these conditions or did not desire to occupy the house, the trustees were to let it, and pay the nett residue to the minister. The new parsonage was first occupied (by the Rev. Edgar Fripp) in April 1901.

On the 22nd May, 1898, a memorial service was held for the Rt. Hon. William Ewart Gladstone, a statesman who was held in very high esteem by most nonconformists of the nineteenth century, in spite of his being a pronounced High Churchman.

During that summer members of the congregation took part in establishing University Extension lectures in Mansfield, and among the lecturers chosen was the Rev. Philip H. Wicksteed, M.A.

In September 1899 Mr. William Austin Vallance resigned his position as superintendent of the Sunday School, and in recognition of his services to the School for over forty-four years, with twenty-two as superintendent, the teachers and friends presented him with a silver coffee-pot.

Mr. Perris closed his ministry in December 1899 and became minister of Little Portland Street Chapel, London, but subsequently left the ministry to take up full-time work in Peace movements, and became Secretary of the Anglo-American Peace Society. He died in 1933.

In June 1900 he married Mary Elizabeth Vallance, youngest daughter of William Austin Vallance. Of their four daughters, one, Hannah Mary, married the Rev. Francis Terry, M.A., a Unitarian minister, and another, Margaret Lynette, married Max. D. Binns, the son of a later minister of the Old Meeting House.

It is clear that Mr. Perris left Mansfield with a sense of disappointment. In August 1898 there was a reference in the *Calendar* to the falling-off in attendance at evening worship, "and especially to the miserably small attendance on Sunday evening last". And in his last *Calendar*, December 1899, there are the sentences:

It is certain that the internal relationships and management of the chapel have, for some years back, left much to be desired, and have not done credit to the cause. Is it not time for all this to cease? If we be Christians in fact, as well as name, let all wilfulness, faction, division, and indifference come to an end with the dying year.

A more cheerful note for the close of the chapter is the Mary Ann Handley bequest (the 15th December 1900), by which £200 was placed in trust, and out of the income at Christmas each year the trustees pay 5s. each to four of the oldest poor members of the congregation, £1 to the Treasurer of the Sunday School, and the balance to the Chapel funds.

## CHAPTER 7

## THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

FROM January to May 1900 the congregation was in the temporary charge of the Rev. William Birks, F.R.A.S. Early in the year another impressive memorial service was held. This was to the memory of Dr. James Martineau, who had left an unmistakable mark on the development of Unitarian thought in the Victorian period. He had produced two hymn-books, and two out of the ten orders of service then in use at the Old Meeting House, and his theological and philosophical writings bore fruit far outside the Unitarian movement. A year later, on the 22nd January, 1901, a memorial service was held for Queen Victoria.

In June 1900 the Rev. Edgar Innes Fripp returned to Mansfield, as previously mentioned for a second ministry, which continued until November 1905. In accordance with previous requests made by him, a new book of Common Prayer, adapted from that of the Church of England, was brought into use on Whit Sunday, and Mr. Fripp wore a white surplice instead of a black Geneva gown. He also introduced boys into the choir, and boys and men wore black cassocks and white surplices. The lady members of the choir never wore gowns or any kind of uniform. Violet cassocks were introduced for the boys and men in 1922.

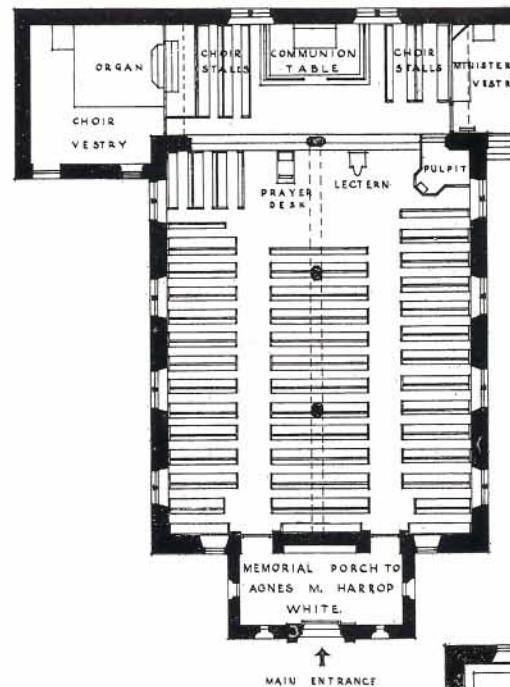
Mr. Fripp introduced a special musical service on the afternoon of the Harvest Festival, and on various occasions took a choir from the Old Meeting House to lead in worship at the Workhouse on Sunday afternoons.

At evening service on Sunday, the 6th September, 1903, the preacher was Judge Abbas Tyabji of Baroda, a Liberal Muslim, who spoke on Muhammad to a full Chapel and his hearers included the local Member of Parliament, Mr.

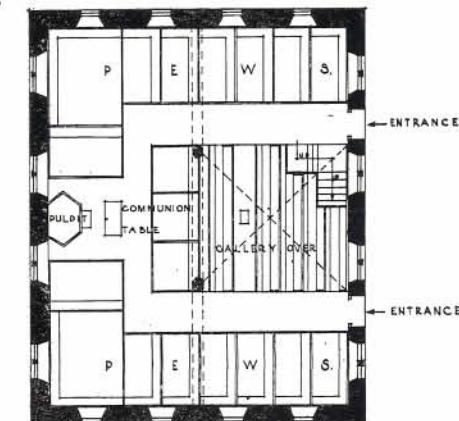
A. B. Markham, and his wife. This service aroused great interest and led to correspondence in *The Daily News*.

The outstanding event of Mr. Fripp's ministry was the celebration of the bicentenary of the erection of the Old Meeting House.<sup>1</sup> This took place on the 24th and 25th September, 1901, and was combined with the annual meeting of the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association. On the 24th there was a service in the Chapel, followed by lunch at the Swan Hotel, the annual meeting of the Association, and a Conversazione at the Victoria Hall, at which the Rev. J. Estlin Carpenter, M.A., spoke on behalf of the National Conference, and Mr. J. C. Warren, M.A., on behalf of the Association. On the 25th there was a service in which the Revs. A. W. Worthington and C. H. Wellbeloved took part. Then came a conference, garden party, and public meeting, at which the speakers were the Revs. Joseph Wood, R. A. Armstrong, and Frank J. Freeston, and Mr. J. Harrop White. On the 27th a tea and entertainment were given to the members of the Sunday School. The bicentenary proceedings were supported by the Mayor, Councillor H. Smith, and the Vicar, the Rev. H. S. Arkwright. Long accounts appeared in the local newspapers, one of which emphasised the services rendered by Unitarians to the cause of civil and religious liberty, and the truly Christian life of many members of the congregation. A series of special Sunday evening sermons was preached by Mr. Fripp to follow up this event, and handbills to advertise them were distributed through the town.

In 1904 a piece of land to the west of the Chapel containing 2,190 square yards of land came into the market and was bought for £47 15s. 6d. The minister had somewhat grandiose ideas for using this land, suggesting not only a new approach from Rooth Street, so that carriages and motor-cars could come up to the Chapel doors—as



Plan after extensions of  
1870, 1908 and 1942



SCALE OF FEET  
0 10 20 30 40 50 60

Plan before 1870 A.D.

<sup>1</sup> Reports in *Nottingham Daily Express*, 26th September, 1901; *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 25th September, 1901; *The Inquirer*, 28th September and 5th October, 1901.

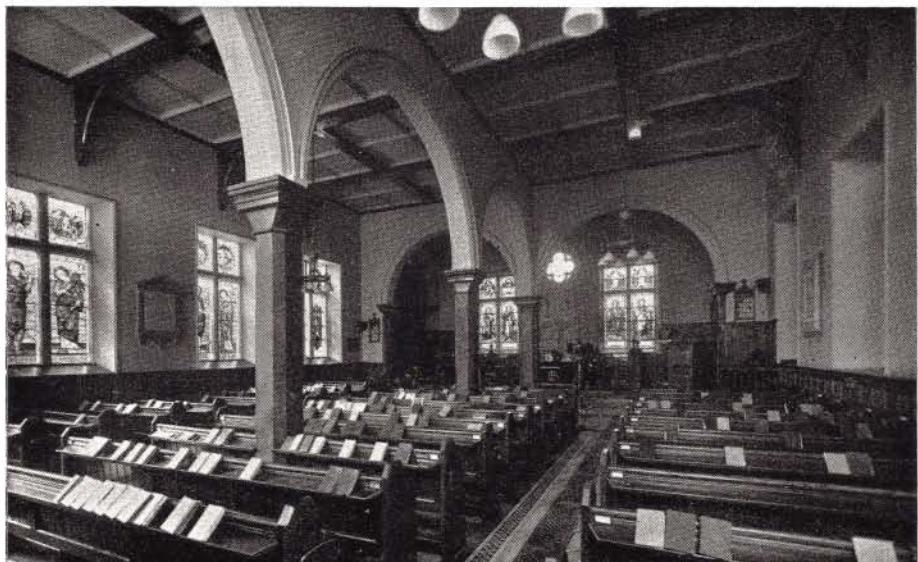
was eventually carried out—but “a gateway surmounted by a turret containing a bell, perhaps more than one bell”. To raise funds for the projected improvements, a Shakespearean Bazaar was held in 1905, and realised £460.

In 1905 the congregation took an interest in the Free Christian Church in Shirebrook, which sprang from a Society of Bible Christians who were excluded from fellowship with the Mansfield branch for denying the doctrine of the Trinity, the Virgin-birth, and eternal punishment. They had rented a hall in the village and numbered twenty-seven members. The first service in the hall was held on the 2nd April, with thirty-five present, including several friends from Mansfield, and Mr. J. Harrop White spoke a few words of encouragement as President of the North Midland Association. Members of the Old Meeting House subscribed towards providing furnishings for the hall. Mr. Harrop White conducted services there on certain Sundays. A small Sunday School was organised during the summer. In April and May 1906 four lectures were given in Shirebrook by Unitarian ministers, but the attendance was poor. After this there is no further reference to Shirebrook in the *Calendar*.

On the 1st October, 1905, the Harvest Festival was conducted by the Rev. Gertrud von Petzold, then minister of Narborough Road Free Christian Church, Leicester, and the first woman minister to preach at the Old Meeting House.

Mr. Fripp preached his farewell sermons on the 26th November, 1905, and several volumes of Celtic literature were presented to him, and a silver teapot to Mrs. Fripp at a soirée. Testimony to their services was rendered by Mr. Edge, the Chapel-warden, and by two who were not members of the congregation, Councillor I. H. Wallis, and Mr. W. F. Saunders, J.P., also by the Rev. J. Shaw Brown, the Congregational minister, who later joined the Unitarian ministry.

Edgar Fripp was minister successively at Clifton,  
G



Interior in 1951

Bristol, 1905–1908, then at the Great Meeting, Leicester, 1908–1917, and Altrincham, Cheshire, 1917–1921, before his final ministry once again at All Souls' Church, Belfast, 1921–1924. His life-long interest had been in literature, and after his retirement he devoted himself particularly to Shakespeare studies, publishing several books on aspects of the dramatist's work and his life in Stratford-on-Avon. In 1921 he was appointed a life-trustee of Shakespeare's birthplace. In 1930 he was honoured by Liverpool University, being awarded the William Noble Research Fellowship. He died on the 9th November, 1931, aged sixty-nine years.

The gift of two oak hymn-boards was made to the Chapel in June 1906, one by Mrs. J. Harrop White, and the other by the Sewing Meeting.

After an interval of eight months, during which services were conducted by visiting ministers and students from both Oxford and Manchester, the Rev. Frank Heming Vaughan, B.A., began his ministry on the 5th August, 1906. He began his education for the ministry in 1895 at the Home Missionary College, Manchester, and graduated B.A. in 1899 at Victoria University (now Manchester). He proceeded to Manchester College, Oxford, on the Tate Foundation to study theology from 1899 to 1902. His first pastorate was at Hull, 1902–1906.

His first wife was Alice Olga Toulmin, daughter of Arthur Toulmin Smith of Moscow, and they had four children, all except the eldest born at Mansfield.

Mr. Vaughan was an able preacher with a most sympathetic disposition, blessed with a cultivated and charming wife, and much of interest happened during his six years at Mansfield. There were considerable accessions to the congregation during this ministry. The *New Hymnal* was adopted and brought into use in January 1907. The service book was revised and completed in 1908. Ladies were for the first time elected to the Chapel Committee, a Boys' Life Brigade was formed, and a Men's Institute inaugurated. Confirmation services

were introduced, the first being held on the 18th November, 1908 with the Rev. Joseph Wood, President of the National Conference, to welcome the new young members. In 1909 the practice was adopted of having the Chapel open each week-day from 10 o'clock for prayer and meditation, and Thursday Evensong from 7.30 to 8 was introduced, and maintained until the end of Mr. Vaughan's ministry. Although it then lapsed for a time, the practice was reintroduced during the First World War in the form of Intercession Services. In January 1908 the *Calendar* ceased to be a quarto magazine and became a pocket-sized leaflet with a symbolic design on the front page. This was the work of Mr. A. S. Buxton, and symbolised the Christian Church under the figure of the Vine and its branches. The Old Meeting House, central for its own members, was symbolised by the monogram O.M.H. drawn in the shape of an imperial crown (the crown of life) set in a circle standing for eternity. This design remained in use until 1943, by which time the printer's block was very badly worn.

In 1907 it was decided to carry out a number of improvements, including many of those planned by Mr. Fripp in 1904. The lead was given by Mr. and Mrs. J. Harrop White, who promised £100 for the restoration of the organ, which was in very poor condition, provided that other improvements were undertaken. It was decided to construct a new organ-chamber on the land bought in 1904, on the west side of the chancel. The old organ-chamber was to become the minister's vestry, and the old vestry between the two porches was to become an entrance vestibule. The Chapel was to be re-decorated and electric light installed. Part of the scheme was the erection of a Church Parlour, or the utilisation of the old Parsonage for that purpose with the provision of cloak-rooms. The plans were prepared by Mr. R. Frank Vallance, F.R.I.B.A., and a contract was entered into with Mr. Charles Vallance for £675, which was increased by extra work to £1,024 8s. 4d. Subsequently it was

resolved to dispose of the organ, which was sold for £75, and to provide a new one at a cost of £350. All the items except the erection of the Church Parlour were carried out early in 1908, and the Chapel was reopened on the 28th June, 1908, when the minister officiated and there were large congregations. The music was led by a double string quartet. While the constructional work was proceeding, services were again held in the Town Hall Assembly Room. The new organ, built by Messrs. Cousins of Lincoln and equipped with hydraulic blowing apparatus, was first used on the 26th July.

During the year the Institute developed encouragingly. The Sunday Afternoon services sometimes reached an attendance of sixty, and the National Conference Guild Manual was used at these. Adult education was begun with Ruskin College Correspondence Classes, at which papers read by members were discussed. In Chapel Mr. Vaughan gave a series of sermons on "The Life of Jesus in the Light of Modern Research", at which increased attendances were recorded. This series was followed up by another on "Life after Death".

In August 1907 the Unitarian Van had held a most successful five days' mission in Mansfield after a successful week at Worksop and Shirebrook. The minister presided, and the missioner was the Rev. Alfred Hall of Norwich.<sup>1</sup> Tremendous interest was shown around the van in the market place, and it proved an admirable place for enlightening the public about the beliefs and practices of Unitarians. But the number of those who approved of Unitarian sentiments in the market place was vast compared with the very few who made their way to the Old Meeting House. In July 1908 another open-air mission was held in the market place, without the van, but again with Mr. Hall as missioner. Great crowds attended, and over a thousand were present on the Sunday

<sup>1</sup> Later Dr. Alfred Hall (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1908-1918, Sheffield, Upper Chapel, 1918-1939, Lincoln, 1939-1949, President of the General Assembly, 1932-1934).

night. A year later, when the van visited Ilkeston, Mr. Vaughan was the missioner.

In 1907 the International Conference, which was later to become the International Association for Religious Freedom, met at Boston, U.S.A., and Mr. and Mrs. J. Harrop White went to represent the congregation and English Unitarianism.

In 1908 the cottage fronting Stockwell Gate was bought for £295, and in February 1909 a Revised Constitution was adopted by the congregation. The Chapel Committee took over the responsibility for the upkeep of the School buildings, and was to assess the different societies using the rooms for an appropriate contribution. Representatives appointed by each of these societies were to be admitted to the Chapel Committee, which now consisted of four life members, ten members elected by the congregation, two by the Sunday School, two by the Institute, and one each from the Ladies' Sewing Society and the Band of Hope. The Envelope Offertory System was introduced.

1910 was marked by the golden wedding celebrations on the 24th April of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Birks. After a special service at the Old Meeting House, an Address from the congregation was presented to them, and on the following Wednesday they were "at home" to their friends in the Schoolroom.

The structural improvements made in 1908 had involved a total expenditure of over £2,685. Towards this the congregation raised £1,448 by donations and other efforts. To meet the balance a Fairy-tale Bazaar was held in 1910 and realized £480.

The bicentenary of the death of Samuel Brunts, founder of the Brunts' Charity, occurred in 1911. The Governors recognised his connection with the Old Meeting House by holding a service in the Chapel on the 1st October, as well as one in the parish church on the 29th September.

In the summer of 1911 an experiment was made in

holding a Sunday evening service in the open air in the Chapel grounds. Many members had suggested that it would be pleasant and inspiring to worship in such pleasant surroundings, and would perhaps attract visitors. The experiment, however, was not repeated. The minister wrote:

One experience of an Evening Service out of doors was sufficient to quell any enthusiasm for more. The beauty of our chapel interior and all the means of worship were perhaps never so apparent as when we gathered on the grass outside. The experiment, however, was well worth making. Among other things it shows that any missionary attempt to reach the "church-shy" must be conceived on more daringly unconventional lines. In the meantime we prefer stained glass and the peace and reverence of the Sanctuary.

At the Confirmation in June 1912 seventeen young people were received, and those who had been confirmed presented to the Chapel a solid silver Communion paten, which was dedicated on the 27th October.

On the 23rd October a unique United Nonconformist service was held at the Old Meeting House to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the ejection of the Two Thousand Ministers. All the Free Church ministers in the town took part, addresses being given by the Rev. W. J. McAdam (Congregational) and the Rev. F. Heming Vaughan.

During Mr. Vaughan's ministry losses by death included three members of one leading family in a single year, 1908. They were Mr. R. Frank Vallance, the architect, who died before the additions to the Chapel which he had designed were completed; Mrs. Charles Vallance, and her husband, Mr. Charles Vallance, the builder and contractor. Then on the 9th January, 1911, to the great grief of the congregation, Mrs. Vaughan died. After cremation, the casket containing her ashes was placed in the wall of the Meeting House, with a tablet placed in front, given by the congregation and unveiled on the 30th July. The Olga Vaughan Flower Guild was

formed to place flowers on the bracket by her memorial and continue the work she loved of helping to keep the Chapel bright with flowers.

In 1912 Mr. Vaughan accepted an invitation to Hyde Chapel, Gee Cross. At a farewell gathering on the 28th October a purse of £30 was presented to Mr. Vaughan and a book to each of his children. In the following year on the 25th September Mr. Vaughan married Miss Emily Agnes Vallance, the youngest daughter of the late Charles Vallance and a great grand-daughter of the Rev. John Austin. During his ministry at Hyde Chapel twin daughters were born to Mr. and Mrs. Vaughan.

On leaving Mansfield, Mr. Vaughan was co-pastor with the Rev. H. Enfield Dowson at Gee Cross from 1912 to 1918, and sole minister from 1918 to 1929, in which last year he moved to become minister of the Ancient Chapel of Toxteth, Liverpool. He remained there until his retirement from the active ministry in 1943. Eventually he returned to Mansfield to spend his days of retirement, dying there quite suddenly on the 10th February, 1957. Whilst at Gee Cross he had inaugurated a children's corner, and was the first minister in the denomination to celebrate (in 1920) a May Queen Festival. With Mr. Harold Spicer, organist of Manchester College, Oxford, he was a founder of the Society of Organists and Choirmasters of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. His devotion to William Blake studies brought him into contact with leading Blake scholars from all over the world, and at his death he was Secretary to the William Blake Bi-centenary Committee.

After seven months of supply preachers, the Rev. Charles Moore Wright, M.A., became minister on the 8th June, 1913, and remained until December 1917. Mr. Wright was the only son and second child of the Rev. J. J. Wright, minister of Chowbent Chapel, Atherton, Lancashire, and was born in 1879. He graduated at Lincoln College, Oxford, before commencing his theological studies at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1902. In 1905

he went as assistant to the Rev. Joseph Wood of the Old Meeting, Birmingham, where he remained for three years until settling at Sale, Cheshire, in 1908. From here he came to Mansfield in 1913, where evidence of his considerable gifts was manifest. He married Jessie Maud, daughter of William Cheshire of Birmingham, and one son, Charles Gordon, was born to them. Mr. Wright was a fine preacher, with great powers of effective illustration. He was also a delightful raconteur, and every public speech he made was lit up with some humorous story imimitably told. He and Mrs. Wright contributed happy dramatic sketches on many social occasions.

His ministry was overshadowed by the First World War. Ninety-five members of the congregation joined the forces, and twenty-two of them gave their lives. From the loss of these young men the congregation never fully recovered. Mr. Wright himself and Mr. Harry Baker, the organist, offered their services (the latter many times over), but were rejected as unfit. In war service at home the congregation played an active part. Members took part in organising a War Hospital Supply Depot, in relief arrangements for Belgian refugees, in visiting the families of service men, in entertaining soldiers, and so forth. Christmas gifts and greetings were sent yearly to the men connected with the Old Meeting House, and a Patriotic Fair was organised to provide funds for all these and other activities.

Many replies were received to the Christmas parcels sent to the soldiers and sailors, some of which were despatched to Salonika, Mesopotamia, and the Pacific Ocean. Many of the letters expressed a most earnest desire to rejoin the Sunday School, and to take part in services at the Old Meeting House. After the war was over, on the 27th May, 1919, a Welcome Home Party to the returned members of the Forces took place. About eighty sat down to tea, and 120 were present after tea. The Chapel-warden welcomed the guests and paid tribute to the twenty-two men who had lost their lives.

The Roll of Honour recording the names of those who lost their lives was designed and presented by Mr. A. S. Buxton, and was displayed at the services of thanksgiving held on the 17th November, 1918, for the cessation of hostilities, the names being read out while the congregation stood.

The Old Meeting War Memorial was not completed until 1924. This also was designed by Mr. A. S. Buxton, and was unveiled by the Mayor, Mr. J. Harrop White, and dedicated by the minister, the Rev. Ottwell Binns. It consisted of new entrance gates for the Stockwell Gate approach, with tablets recording the names of the fallen. The cost was £380. The old entrance gateway with its lamp was removed to the Rooth Street entrance.

In spite of war-time difficulties, or perhaps all the more because of the need, in 1914 a branch of the Unitarian Women's League was formed, and the following year a Boy Scout Troop was inaugurated. In this year an exchange of pulpits by the Free Church ministers of the town first took place.

The Chapel music throughout the war was in the capable hands of Mr. Harry Baker, who arranged special musical services and gave organ recitals after evening services. The choir flourished well under his guidance.

In 1915 a set of individual Communion cups was presented to the Chapel by Mr. and Mrs. J. Harrop White.

During the winter of 1916 the meetings of the Social Union were abandoned for a season, but a fortnightly Literature Class met instead. In August 1917 a Social Evening was given for soldiers stationed at the Clipstone Camp, and Mr. Harold Royce and his friends provided an entertainment.

In October 1917 the Helping Hand Society was formed to provide funds for the Chapel by means of organising entertainments, whist drives, etc. This proved a useful venture, and by the end of 1918 it had raised £60, and in 1922 it raised £116.

Mr. Wright's ministry ended in December 1917, and at

a farewell gathering a purse of £40 was handed to him and Mrs. Wright, and members of the other Free Churches joined the congregation in paying tribute to the inspiring comradeship and helpful friendship of Mr. and Mrs. Wright.

For ten years, 1918–1928, Mr. Wright ministered at the Ancient Chapel of Toxteth and it was his own estimate that his maturest work was done here in those years of success. Accepting an invitation to Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, he served there from 1929 to 1946, when his health began rapidly to deteriorate. He hoped to recuperate at Bath, where he settled as minister in 1946, but this was denied him, and he died on the 19th February, 1947. The Rev. Lawrence Redfern collected and published a few of Mr. Wright's stories for children, editorial comments, and other occasional pieces, in a volume *The Adventure of Religion* (1948).

For nine months the congregation was without a minister. An invitation had been issued and duly accepted, but various circumstances led to a cancellation of the arrangement. The Rev. Alfred Owen Broadley, however, who had been minister of the Bible Christian Church, Salford,<sup>1</sup> from 1905 to 1917, came to take temporary charge during April and May.

In October 1918 the Rev. Thomas Perkins Spedding began his all-too-brief period as minister. Mr. Spedding was born at Stockport in 1865 and joined at the Unitarian Home Missionary College, Manchester, in 1883, completing his studies in 1886, having attended lectures at Owens College. He went as minister to Rochdale, as minister of the Clover Street congregation from 1886, and was minister of the united congregations at Blackwater

<sup>1</sup> This congregation, founded in 1810 by an Anglican incumbent who seceded from his church to gather a church whose members should be both vegetarian and total abstainers, had an interesting history. It became increasingly liberal in theology and had become affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches before it came to an end in 1932, when many of its members joined the Pendleton Unitarian congregation.

Street from 1890 to 1907. From 1907 to 1918 he was the missionary agent for the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. Until 1914 he was Superintendent of the Unitarian Van Mission, and during the First World War he served as Unitarian Chaplain to the Home Camps. He was also Secretary to the Pioneer Preachers. Mr. and Mrs. Spedding were welcomed on the 14th October, 1918, with high hopes for a successful ministry.

In the same month as Mr. Spedding's welcome arrangements were made to provide refreshments for soldiers after evening service each Sunday, and on Good Friday 1919 the distribution of buns under the Mallatratt trust, suspended since bread rationing began, was resumed with 1,101 buns distributed. From this time the number tended to diminish, and in 1921 only 1,000 were distributed, but there was a further distribution made to people in the Workhouse and the Cottage Homes.

In March 1919 an exhibition of over 100 drawings and paintings of old Mansfield was held in the Old Meeting Schoolroom, which attracted much attention in the town, and many members of the congregation were interested in the Old Mansfield Society which was formed at this time.

In June 1919 the minister and two members of the congregation were invited to represent the Old Meeting House on the United Christian Council formed on the initiative of the Vicar of Mansfield.

Mr. Spedding died in tragic circumstances on the 28th June, 1919, aged fifty-four years. He had gone to see the organist to arrange the special services to mark the signing of the Treaty of Peace. At the organist's house he was taken ill, and died from heart failure. On the 6th July a memorial service was conducted by the Rev. Charles Peach, of Great Hucklow, and resolutions of sympathy were received from many bodies, including the Mansfield Free Churches, and letters of regret from the Vicar of Mansfield, the Vicar of St. John's, and others. The parish church magazine under the heading "The United

Christian Council " said: " We deeply regret the loss by the sudden death of the Rev. T. P. Spedding, whose guidance has been of considerable value to us." Indeed, the position he had gained after so short a residence in the town was remarkable.

Some time elapsed before a successor could be found. Another serious loss to the congregation was in November 1918, when Mrs. William Hollins of Berry Hill died.

## CHAPTER 8

### BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

A NEW period of prosperity began with the appointment of the Rev. Ottwell Binns as minister in July 1920. Mr. Binns was born at Rochdale in 1872 and came to Mansfield from Ainsworth, Lancashire, where he had been minister, 1908-1920, after a ministry of seven years at Scarborough, Yorkshire, 1901-1908. He entered the Unitarian ministry in 1901 after training at Western College, Plymouth, for the Congregational ministry, and having held a Congregational pastorate for four years. His family, three boys and a girl, were all born before Mr. and Mrs. Binns came to Mansfield.

Mr. Binns was an able writer, and published a succession of novels, sometimes under his own name and sometimes under the pseudonym of " Ben Bolt ". His sermons were arresting and vividly illustrated, and drew large congregations. His genial manner not only attracted the younger members, but also made him popular in the town. In all his work he was ably supported by his wife.

In July 1920 the Tercentenary of the sailing of the Pilgrim Fathers was celebrated by a joint excursion of the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association and the Sheffield Unitarian Union. The party left Retford station in a motor-coach and visited Scrooby, Austerfield, and Gainsborough, where a service was held and addresses given by the Rev. Alfred Hall, M.A., B.D., and Mr. J. C. Warren of Nottingham. The return journey to Retford was made by Sturton-le-Steeple.

In 1922 the Schools were decorated and electric light was installed in the Parsonage. The service books were reprinted incorporating the new edition of *Psalms and*

*Canticles.* While Mr. Binns was at Mansfield, all the institutions were very active and considerable sums were raised by Sales of Work. In April Mr. Binns gave a lecture on Unitarianism in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

As no regular Communion services had been held for some time because of the long periods when the congregation had been without a minister, in June 1922 the Committee resolved that quarterly Communion services should be resumed, being held alternately after morning and evening service. It is not clear whether this instruction was actually observed, as the next two references in the *Calendar* to the holding of Communion services occur only in November 1922 and January 1924, and both of these were apparently morning communions.

Mr. J. Harrop White, Chapel-warden, was elected Mayor of the Borough in 1923 and resigned his position as Town Clerk, which he had filled for twenty-three years, and his connection with the governing body of the town, which had extended over forty-two years. The Mayoral Service on the 11th November (also Remembrance Day) was most numerously attended, the congregation filling not only the Chapel, but also the Schoolroom. In the Chapel the sermon was preached by the Rev. Ottwell Binns as Mayor's Chaplain; and in the Schoolroom the preacher was the Rev. H. S. Perris, who had been Mayor's Chaplain in 1897.

On the 12th May, 1924, the congregation entertained the Mayor and Mayoress and presented to them an Address and a silver candelabra. Many other presentations were made, including those from the town officials, the Elementary School teachers, the staff and boys and girls of the Brunts School, and a gold wristlet watch to the Mayoress from the ladies with whom she had worked. The Freedom of the Borough was conferred on the Mayor on the 20th October. He was the second person to receive this honour, which had previously been held only by the Duke of Portland. In 1925 Charles James Vallance and John Harrop White were appointed

Borough Justices. On the 22nd October a Masonic service was held in the Old Meeting House, conducted by the Rev. Canon H. L. Marsh, M.A., Vicar of Mansfield, Provincial Grand Chaplain, and the address was given by the Rev. H. T. Hayman, M.A., the Deputy Provincial Grand Master, also an Anglican.

In 1925, as the office of Chapel-warden, which included the duties of Hon. Treasurer, was found increasingly onerous, an Assistant Warden was appointed. Even this was not found sufficient to ease the burdens of office, for in 1928 a separate office of Honorary Treasurer was created in addition to both.

Although efforts were made to induce Mr. Ottwell Binns to remain, he resigned in 1927. Great regret at his departure was expressed both by representatives of the congregation and of outside bodies at a farewell meeting on the 26th September. A tray and a solid silver tea-service were presented to Mr. and Mrs. Binns from the congregation, and a fountain pen to Mr. Binns by the Sunday School. After a ministry at Torquay, 1927-1932, he retired in 1932, and died two years later on the 27th November, 1934.

At a meeting of the congregation on the 13th December, 1937, a unanimous resolution was passed in favour of the amalgamation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the National Conference, to form the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

The Rev. Frederick Munford, B.A., entered on his ministry in January 1928. Like his predecessor, Mr. Munford had originally prepared himself for the Congregational ministry, having studied at New College, 1903-1910, graduating B.A., London, 1907. He served in the Congregational ministry for two years (1912-1914) before taking up his first Unitarian pastorate at Kilburn, London, where he remained from 1914 to 1916. In 1917 he settled at Heywood, Lancashire, leaving there in 1927 to come to the Old Meeting House. He and Mrs.

Munford had no children and found the parsonage in Layton Avenue too large, so it was let, and they bought a house in Watson Avenue. Mr. Munford served on the Hospital Board and in other capacities.

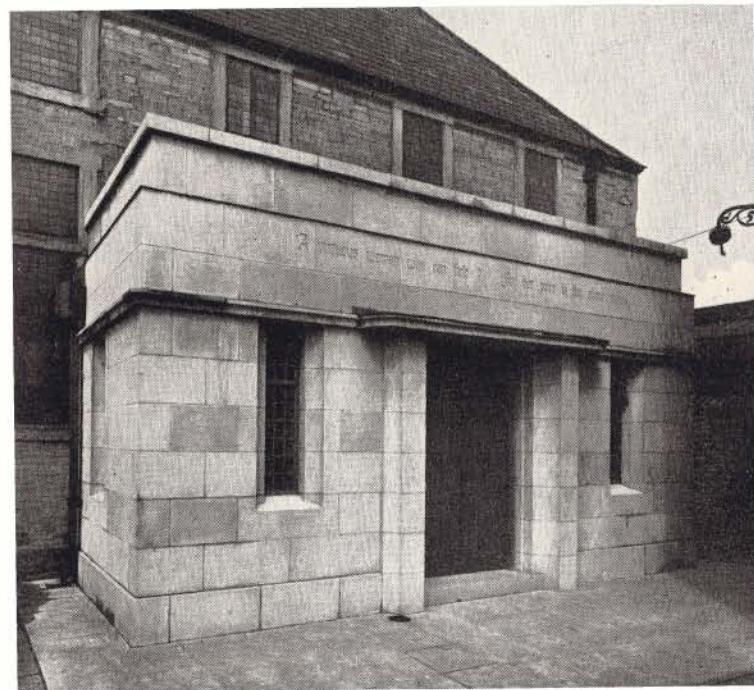
In 1928 the debt on the War Memorial, which remained unsubscribed in spite of several appeals, was paid by the Woodhead Trustees, and in December a Bazaar was held, the proceeds from which—over £260—were apportioned to various objects, including a piano, lantern, and repairs to the new parsonage. In 1930 the organ was rebuilt and an electric blower installed at a cost of £130. £120 was spent on redecorating the Chapel. The expenditure on the organ was paid by the Woodhead Trustees, and a Yuletide Fair was held to cover the cost of the Chapel decoration, realising £175. From 1930 to 1943 the *Calendar* was enlarged to the old quarto size, incorporating as inset the *Unitarian and Free Christian Monthly*.<sup>1</sup>

In 1931 John Harrop White was elected second President of the General Assembly, and in 1932 the congregation took second place among the churches of the Assembly with its contribution of £250 to the Church Fellowship Fund.<sup>2</sup> The exterior of the schools was overhauled in 1932 and the interior re-decorated. The members of the Institute decorated their room themselves.

In 1932 one of the visiting preachers was Miss Lillian S. Preston, a student for the ministry at the Unitarian College, Manchester, and she thus occupied the pulpit from which her grandfather, the Rev. A. W. Worthington, had so often preached. In 1934 a crowded congregation was recorded for the visit of the Rev. Dr. L. P. Jacks as preacher for the Annual Hospital Service, which is held

<sup>1</sup> The Editor from 1930 to 1958 was the Rev. Arthur W. Vallance, a grandson of George Vallance, see p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> This was a General Assembly Appeal for £10,000 for Unitarian development work, sponsored chiefly by the Rev. Alfred Hall, then of Sheffield, who succeeded J. Harrop White as President of the Assembly, holding the office for two years.



The Memorial Porch 1942

in one of the local Free Churches, and that year was held at the Old Meeting House.

An interesting bequest was that under the will of Mrs. Ada Marion Richardson (1934), who left all her household furniture and effects to her trustees to sell and pay the proceeds free of duty to the Old Meeting House for general purposes. This produced £232.

When the Corporation gave notice to demolish the cottage fronting Stockwell Gate as being unfit for human habitation, the cottage was pulled down and fifty-three square yards of frontage was sold to the Corporation for £100. A part of the land is still retained by the congregation, and an acknowledgement of one shilling a year is paid, the Corporation undertaking to replace the entrance Memorial Gateway when the additional land is used for street widening.

Mr. Munford resigned in 1936, and presentations of a wallet and cheques were made by the Chapel-warden, Mr. Harold Royce, and a box-calf handbag was presented to Mrs. Munford by Mrs. C. J. Vallance. Mr. Munford removed to Mountpottinger Church, Belfast, and resigned in 1947 to settle at Poole, Dorset. He retired in 1949 and continues to reside at Poole.

The Rev. Henry Stewart Carter, M.A., was inducted to the ministry on the 24th September, 1936, when a large congregation assembled. Mr. Carter was born in Liverpool, and graduated at St. John's College, Cambridge, before entering Manchester College, Oxford, in 1926, remaining there till 1929, when he became assistant minister to the Rev. Gordon Cooper at Mansford Street Mission, London. In 1930 Mr. Cooper retired and Mr. Carter succeeded him in his office, which he held until his removal to Mansfield.

At the induction service the charge to the minister was given by the Rev. Dr. Cyril Flower, and that to the congregation by the Rev. C. M. Wright, M.A. Mr. Carter discontinued the wearing of cassock and surplice by the minister, though the men and boys in the choir continued to wear surplices and violet cassocks.

In 1937 the Schoolroom was re-decorated, also the Institute. The congregation joined with the Society of Friends to hold a stall at a bazaar in aid of the Hospital Building Fund.

Mr. Carter's ministry was stimulating and vigorous. He took an active part in the life of the town, and was one of the pioneers of the Young People's League, founded in 1934, and was its first National President. He suggested introducing the service book, *Orders of Worship*, to replace the book in use since the beginning of the century, but this proposal was rejected, and not until May 1947 did the new book come into use, and then only to be used along with the old as an alternative order of worship.

On the 5th May, 1938, Mr. and Mrs. Harrop White celebrated their golden wedding, and entertained a number of their relatives and friends. Next day a large gathering was held in the Schoolroom, when an illuminated address with the signatures of the members of the congregation was presented, with a bouquet for Mrs. Harrop White. In that year Mr. Harrop White was elected President of the Unitarian College, Manchester, and re-elected the following year.

In 1938 a bazaar to raise funds for the Chapel realized £210. Mr. Carter made two innovations which proved most successful. One was a Christmas supper and party; the other the substitution of a "Minister's At-Home" in place of the Annual Congregational Tea, held on the day after the Harvest Festival, a function which in recent years had received poor support. In later years this became the "Harvest Social".

The Old Meeting House was redecorated in 1939. Mrs. Alfred Birks gave the oak panelling behind the Communion Table in memory of her late husband, also a new cloth for the table, and other coverings.

The twelve months beginning on the 20th March, 1939, were the most fateful in the history of the Old Meeting House, quite apart from the shadow cast by the outbreak of the Second World War in September. On the 20th

March Arthur Clayton Vallance, a former Chapel-warden and a member of the committee and choir, died suddenly at the Annual Congregational Meeting. On the 2nd May George Vallance Ashton (Assistant Warden and Committee Member) died on his way to his garden. On the 20th June, Charles James Vallance (Trustee, Treasurer, former Warden and Committee member) died on the omnibus which he had hastened to catch. On the 3rd February, 1940, Arthur Lindley Hare (Assistant Warden and Committee member) died after a short illness. On the 16th February, George Austin Vallance (a lifelong member) died, and on the 3rd April, Mrs. Agnes Mary Harrop White died after a few hours' illness.

## CHAPTER 9

## THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND AFTER

THE outbreak of war in September 1939 put a stop to many of the congregational activities, but as many as possible were carried on. A Canteen was opened in the Schoolroom, but before long the Old Parsonage and all the School premises, with the exception of the small Schoolroom, were taken over for official purposes.

On the 5th July, 1940, Mr. Stewart Carter was married in the Old Meeting House to Miss Norah Octavia Randall, a teacher of music at the Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School for Girls. Mrs. Carter's musical experience was subsequently of great value to the Chapel choir.

On the 27th November, 1940, a new porch was dedicated in memory of Agnes Mary Harrop White, the gift of Mr. Harrop White, who unlocked the door and handed over the keys to Mr. Harold Royce, representing the trustees. The act of dedication was performed in the church by the Rev. Stewart Carter, M.A., and an address commemorative of Mrs. Harrop White was given by her nephew and godson, the Rev. Arthur W. Vallance, then minister of Pendleton Unitarian Free Church. The porch replaced the one built in 1870, and was designed by Mr. B. C. Westwick and erected by Messrs. Charles Vallance and Son. It provided a much more commodious entrance, with attractive shelving and cupboards for the hymn- and prayer-books.

In 1942 an appeal for funds to re-condition the organ raised £158 5s. 1d. In April Mr. P. M. Oliver, C.B.E., B.A., paid a visit as President of the General Assembly and preached a forceful sermon. One day in the autumn, when the Chapel was empty, the weight that actuates the ancient Chapel clock fell through the casing and damaged

some of the pews. The damage was repaired by a member, Mr. Charles Everett.

As in the First World War, the Social Union meetings were interrupted, but a monthly congregational meeting was arranged to take its place at which lectures and discussions were held. During the winter months services were held at 3.30 instead of 6.30, to avoid the discomfort and danger of the black-out and air-raid "alerts". One casualty was the Shrove Tuesday tea, the great event of the year in the Sunday School. The last Good Friday morning service held by the congregation alone was in 1942; after that the Free Churches united to hold their Good Friday service, the first being held in the Old Meeting House in 1943, conducted by the minister, the preacher being the Rev. N. Faid of Leeming Street Methodist Church. This service was followed by Communion conducted by the Rev. H. S. Carter. In May 1943 the congregation took part in a "Christian Front Week" in which all churches co-operated, and the Rev. Dr. Alfred Hall of Lincoln was one of the speakers on Christian Education.

Apart from various special duties undertaken by minister and members during the war period, including service as Civil Defence wardens, Canteen helpers, etc., the minister arranged many special services, such as the Anglo-American service on Sunday evening, the 25th July, 1943, when a Male Voice Choir from the American Military Hospital came to sing, and the preacher was the chaplain to the U.S.A. Forces camp, the Rev. E. Carlsen, B.A., B.D. Mr. Carlsen occupied the Old Meeting House pulpit on many other occasions and was a good friend to the congregation. He was succeeded in 1944 by the Rev. Raymond Palmer, a Unitarian minister who was also welcomed at the Old Meeting House.

During 1944 Mr. Carter became Honorary Chaplain to the Mansfield General Hospital. He was also appointed Chairman to the Anglican and Free Church Ministers' Fraternal, and Chairman of the Churches and

Y.M.C.A. Canteen for members of the Forces. He was also appointed a teacher of Religious Instruction with the Sixth Forms at the Brunts School, whose Jubilee Service was held in the Old Meeting House at 10.45 on Sunday, the 30th July, 1944. This service was attended by members of the School staff and the Governing Body.

The same month the congregation adopted *Hymns of Worship* as hymn-book, and working parties were held to repair the dilapidated service-books for a further term of usefulness. The Chapel was improved by the fitting of new lights for the prayer-desk out of a fund subscribed in memory of Mrs. Boole.

On the 17th September, 1944, 400 were packed into the Chapel for the annual Hospital Service, when the preacher was the Rev. Raymond V. Holt, B. Litt., M.A., Principal of the Unitarian College, Manchester. The collection amounted to £206.

1945 was notable for the efforts made to raise a target of £450 for the General Assembly £100,000 Fund for church restoration and special needs. The target was comfortably exceeded, £655 7s. 2d. being raised. On the 10th June the first service entirely in the charge of the women of the congregation was held, being conducted by Miss E. A. Birks, Chapel Secretary, with Miss Winifred Birks, B.A., as preacher, and contributions from a trio of women's voices.

With the ending of hostilities in the summer, the congregation recovered the use of the Institute Room in September, and a Mixed Club was formed which opened at the end of the year.

In October the Rev. H. Stewart Carter was installed as first President of the newly formed Mansfield Free Church Federal Council. In November he tendered his resignation of the ministry, having accepted an invitation to the Memorial Church, Cambridge. At a farewell meeting the following January he was presented with a cheque for £100, and Miss E. A. Birks expressed the thanks of the congregation to Mrs. Carter in presenting her with a trinket-box.

For three months the Rev. F. Heming Vaughan, B.A., who had retired from the ministry to live in Mansfield, took charge of the pulpit. On Friday, the 10th May, 1946, the Rev. Kenneth Twinn, M.A., was inducted. At this service, for the first time at the Old Meeting House, the members of the congregation took a personal part in the induction service by declaring together their support of the new minister. For Mr. and Mrs. Twinn and their family, which consisted of two young daughters and Mrs. Twinn's father and mother, the congregation raised a fund to buy a Parsonage at No. 38, King Edward Avenue, High Oakham. £2,100 was required for the purchase and necessary repairs and decoration, and this amount was raised partly by gifts and partly by loans from members.

Mr. Twinn came to Mansfield from Knutsford and Allostock, Cheshire, where he had ministered from 1939 to 1946, after having acted as assistant missioner at the Liverpool Domestic Mission, Mill Street, from 1936 to 1939. He was a graduate of Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge (M.A. 1936), and had been Hibbert Scholar at Strasbourg from 1935 to 1936.

Like his predecessors, Mr. Twinn took part in local activities. He was a founder member of the Mansfield Branch of the United Nations Association, and later served as president. He was also a founder member of the Mansfield Marriage Guidance Council. Being an excellent linguist, he was specially interested in furthering the use of Esperanto as an auxiliary international language, and was president of the local Esperanto group. In March 1948 he conducted a special service in Esperanto as preacher at High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham. For several years he was the Free Church Chaplain to Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital, and in 1951 he became President-Elect of the Mansfield Free Church Federal Council. He served the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association as Hon. Secretary from 1947 to 1951.

On the 20th June, 1946, Mr. J. Harrop White celebrated his ninetieth birthday, and the following day a

soirée was held in the Schoolroom to mark the occasion. A birthday cake was made by Mrs. Pedley, and a quartet composed for the occasion by the new organist, Mr. H. Pearson, was sung by Mrs. Pedley, Miss Boole, Mr. F. Randall, and Mr. Groves. The same year Mr. Harrop White was elected Vice-Chairman of the Mansfield General Hospital, which led to his holding the Presidency the following year—the last in which the hospital was independently run before becoming part of the National Health Service.

A literature stall was opened in the Chapel porch in August 1946, and the congregation began to follow up a piece of work which they had started the previous year in collecting clothing for the liberal Christians of Holland, by doing the same thing for Unitarian churches in Hungary whose members had suffered cruelly under the German occupation. On Sunday, the 29th September, 1946, the Rev. Joseph Ferencz of Budapest, Secretary of the Consistory of the Unitarian Church in Hungary, who was visiting England to consult with the officers of the General Assembly, preached inspiring sermons in English, and pronounced the benediction in Hungarian. At a meeting on the following evening, the Rev. Kenneth Twinn welcomed Mr. Ferencz in his own language, and Mr. Ferencz gave a description of the conditions in his own country, expressing his gratitude for the help now being given by the Old Meeting House congregation.

At this time the incorporation of the "Old Meeting House Estates Company Limited" facilitated the arrangements for the management of the new parsonage and other properties.

The autumn saw the revival of the Social Union, and a Christmas Sale realised £237. An innovation during Mr. Twinn's ministry was the annual Fellowship Sunday in the spring, when, instead of holding morning and evening worship, an All-Present service was held in the afternoon, followed by a "pool tea", for which members brought and shared provisions. There was a very good attend-

ance at the first Fellowship Service on the 14th March, 1948, and about 100 remained for tea, among them being many members and friends who were not often present at ordinary services. During the cold winter of 1947, when fuel was severely rationed and in very short supply, services had to be held in the Old Parsonage for a period.

In May 1948 the North Midland Association arranged a "Mission to Ourselves" in which the Old Meeting Congregation took part. This was one of a series of such missions intended to strengthen the life of local congregations throughout the country as a preliminary step to later "Advance Movements" directed at those outside the Unitarian and Free Christian fold. A visitation of all who had been connected with the Chapel was included in the programme, and special meetings were arranged both in Mansfield and Nottingham. The meetings were preceded by a course of sermons by the minister on central themes in the Unitarian faith.

The first "Youth Sunday" service taken by young people of the Chapel was held on Sunday, the 6th March, 1949, when the service was conducted by Miss Jean Flowers, the lessons were read by Miss Edith Senior and Mr. Brian Whiting, and the message from the President of the General Assembly's Religious Education and Youth Department was read by Miss Dorothy Pedley. The address was given by Mr. Derek Smith, and part of it was published in the *Calendar* for April.<sup>1</sup> In the following October the practice was begun of serving tea and biscuits in the club-room, and this congregational gathering was followed by a meeting of the Youth Club.

On the 15th January, 1950, John Harrop White, now ninety-three years old, invited the congregation to join him in a special service of thanksgiving for all the blessings he had enjoyed in his long life through associations with the Old Meeting House.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Derek Smith subsequently entered the Unitarian College, Manchester, to prepare for the ministry, becoming Lay Pastor at Mossley, Lancashire in 1957, during his theological course.

In 1951 a Choral Union was formed for all interested in vocal music, to meet once a week, and this body immediately began preparations for the musical side of the celebrations for the 250th Anniversary of the Old Meeting House.

This 250th Anniversary forms a fitting closing point for this historical record. The celebrations were on Friday and Saturday, the 29th and 30th June, and as with the Bicentenary in 1901, they were combined with a meeting of the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association. On the Friday a service was conducted by the minister, and was attended by the Mayor and Town Clerk. The preacher was the Rev. Lawrence Redfern, M.A., B.D., ex-President of the General Assembly. The following day a public meeting was held, again attended by the Mayor and Town Clerk, the Vicar of Mansfield, and other ministers, and the speakers were the Rt. Hon. J. Chuter Ede, Home Secretary, the leading Unitarian in the House of Commons; Dr. Stanley J. Kennett, of Liverpool University; and Mr. Harold B. Moore, ex-President of the General Assembly. Tea and a conversazione followed at which messages of goodwill were given by many representatives of civic and religious organisations in the town. An interesting set of post-card photographs of the Old Meeting House was prepared for sale on the occasion. Bright weather and worthy orations marked both days, and there was a happy reunion of former ministers and members and friends of the Old Meeting House.

Mr. Twinn resigned the pastorate, concluding his ministry at Mansfield on the 31st December, 1951 to undertake the charge of Chowbent Chapel, Atherton, Lancashire. He was succeeded at Mansfield by the present minister, the Rev. Kenneth Sherratt, educated for the ministry at the Unitarian College, Manchester, 1939–1944. Mr. Sherratt's previous ministries were at Oldham, 1944–1948, and Blackley, Manchester, 1948–1953.

## CHAPTER 10

## THE SUNDAY SCHOOL AND INSTITUTIONS

ACCORDING to the late John Edwin Birks, who died on the 11th May, 1915, he remembered going to Sunday School<sup>1</sup> at a cottage in "The Lawn" (now known as Union Street) when two daughters of the Rev. John Williams were the only teachers. After that, he stated, the School was removed to a room on Chesterfield Road, which belonged to Mr. R. M. Watson. He could not say how far back that was, but he believed that he had a school-register book in which his name was entered as a scholar when he was seven years of age. As Mr. Birks was eighty-five when he died, that would have been about 1837.

The first Schoolroom in the Old Meeting House premises was erected, as already recorded, in 1837, during the ministry of the Rev. C. W. Robberds. The architect was Mr. James Nicholson of Southwell, and the tender of Mr. Thomas Earnshaw dated the 30th March, 1837, was £269, but deductions were made which brought the amount down to £200, and this was finally agreed upon. These were, however, extras to the sum of £9 10s. 4d. The architect's fee was £2 2s. The earliest account book relating to the school begins in 1839 and is in the safe. The larger Schoolroom was built in 1885, during the ministry of the Rev. J. F. Smith, and cloak-rooms were added and improvements made when the Rev. F. H. Vaughan was minister in 1907. At the same time the old parsonage was appropriated for church and school purposes, and as a residence for the caretaker.

In October 1900 it was decided to take the boys and girls into morning Chapel for the first part of the service,

<sup>1</sup> This was the Sunday School mentioned by A. S. Buxton, *supra* p. 63, as having forty scholars in 1821.

then held at 11 o'clock, after a School opening and session held at 10 (instead of 9.45 as previously). But this does not seem to have been carried out for long, as in 1905 there was a fresh decision to take the boys and girls into Chapel, the hour of which was altered to 10.45, and this practice has been adhered to ever since. The children and their teachers sat in the pews to the left of the west aisle, and for many years completely filled this part of the building. At one period the best singers were chosen to form a junior section of the choir and sat in the front seats which face inwards in the corner by the Olga Vaughan memorial.

Various kinds of youth activity, educational and recreative, have characterised the Old Meeting House Sunday School during the greater part of its existence. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, Shrove Tuesday was the great Sunday School occasion, when large numbers sat down to tea, and the attendance prizes were distributed and an entertainment was given.

The first Football Club was formed in 1890 and lasted for two seasons. It played on a ground in Ladybrook Lane. The team travelled considerable distances, playing other Unitarian teams, such as Sheffield (Upperthorpe), Ilkeston, and Nottingham High Pavement. Bagatelle seems to have been another recreation of the Football Club members when they met as a club on week-nights. This became a "Youths' Club" and met two evenings a week, Monday and Saturday. The next Football Club began in 1897, and in 1898 we read in the *Calendar* that "a ground has been taken out at the upper end of Stockwell Gate". This club apparently flourished until March 1901, after which there is no further note about football until the November 1904 issue of the *Calendar* when we read: "On Wednesday evening the 26th October the members of the Minister's Class and Football Club held a supper in the Schoolroom by invitation of the Minister" (Mr. Fripp). At this period the *Calendar* no longer printed a day-by-day calendar of week-day events,

and is therefore useless as a guide to the activities of the footballers. The next reference to football is September 1920, when a new Football Club was started, and this was dropped in 1928.

The Mothers' Meeting was in existence well before the monthly *Calendar* was started in 1889, but in September 1890 it was re-formed as a "Mothers' Society", and was to be confined to those mothers who attended Chapel services. The name "Mothers' Meeting", however, soon crept back. A Girls' Sewing Class was formed in December 1889 by Mrs. John Birks, and the Band of Hope, started by Mrs. Fripp in 1890, flourished for quarter of a century until it faded out in 1915 during the First World War. A revival, however, took place in 1919, but it seems to have died out in February 1928.

Cricket matches were held in 1900, and at other times occasional cricket teams seem to have been raised, but never with a regularly constituted Cricket Club. In 1921 a Sports Club was formed to make use of the ground by Rooth Street entrance, with both tennis and croquet.

The Naturalists' Society, started in 1892 along with a Cycling Club, became a Rambling Club before very long, and this continued until August 1901. It was revived as a "Field Club" in April 1903, when expeditions were arranged to places of historical or architectural interest within reach on foot or by train.

The Sunday School itself was managed by a quarterly meeting of teachers who met for tea and business, usually on a Wednesday. In 1893 there was a Sunday School Savings Bank, and at this period, and for many years afterwards, Whit Sunday was the great day for baptisms, when a special service was arranged in the afternoon for the purpose. In the 1880s and 1890s the religious organisations of the town used to combine to provide a "Robin Breakfast" at Christmas for poor children, also an Old People's Tea. Old Meeting House members played their part in these works of charity, and in 1889 it is recorded that "540 youngsters received a substantial

meal" at the Robin Breakfast at Field Mill, and 250 old people were given tea in the Wesleyan School (this would be Bridge Street).

Several of the ministers used to hold a Bible Class or religious instruction class in their homes during the week, either on Saturday mornings or at other times.

In May 1892 the Sunday School reported a deficit, partly due to providing 144 copies of the new *Sunday School Hymn Book*. Teachers had provided class books for teaching purposes at their own cost. In May 1893 acoustic improvements were carried out in the Sunday School by means of ornamental screens across the ceiling at each end, and better classroom accommodation was provided. In November 1893 the School held a concert to pay for decorating and furnishings, and in 1894 the British School rented the building on week-days for one year.

When the North Midland Sunday School Association met at Christ Church, Nottingham, on Easter Monday, 1896, the report showed that the Mansfield school had a considerable decrease in the number of scholars, though the average attendance per cent. had increased. The condition of the School was stated to be "far from satisfactory" and the order and discipline "leave much to be desired". These remarks were quoted in the *Calendar* for May, to be taken to heart by the teachers. The same month a tribute was paid to the sweet singing of the children at the Anniversary service held in April. The Anniversary always seems to have been a movable feast. In 1898 the services were held on the second Sunday in May; and later the festival was celebrated in June, July, or even August.

In May 1898 a Teachers' Library was formed. This was during the ministry of Mr. Perris. The following September, Miss Roberts of Berry Hill offered prizes for children who took the best notes of sermons during the year ended March 1898, and five prizes were awarded.

In November 1901 fifty new chairs and some forms

were bought for the school, and in January 1903 a scheme for district visiting of the parents of the Sunday School children was organised, with Miss Vallance as Secretary. In January 1906 *Hymns and Choral Songs* was adopted by the Sunday School, and thirteen competitors entered for a prize essay competition on "Why I am a Unitarian". In March 1907, before the Anniversary services, an attempt was made to secure the interest of all old scholars in the welfare of their Sunday School by asking them to contribute to a "Thousand Half-Crowns" fund in its aid. The response, however, was disappointing.

A Gymnasium Class for boys was begun in 1911. There was already a Boys' Life Brigade, learning first aid, and especially swimming and life-saving in the water. The first Boy Scout Troop connected with the Chapel was formed in 1915, but in May 1916 it amalgamated with the 1st Mansfield Robin Hood Scout Troop, and soon seems to have lost connection with the Chapel. Another Scout Troop was started in 1931, and a Wolf Cub Pack had already been started in 1929. This seems to have flourished better than the Scout Troop. A Pack Colour was given in June 1934 and dedicated in September, but the Cubs faded out in 1937. The Girl Guides had a longer existence. The Company was founded in 1927, and its colours were dedicated in August 1928; a Brownie Pack began in 1929, and a Ranger Company was formed in 1932. In August 1936 a Girls' Guild replaced the activities of the Guide Company, but the Brownie Pack did not disappear from the scene until May 1939. A Boys' Club began in November 1936.

In December 1920 the Sunday School decided to "adopt", if possible, four children through the Save The Children Fund scheme. They were to collect enough money to provide them with one good meal a day, and it was hoped that each boy and girl in the School would bring a penny each Sunday for this purpose. Two boys in Budapest were "adopted", both eight years old, Tivadar Varja and Jozsef Weisz. By June 1921 it was

reported that owing to the Coal Strike the contributions had inevitably fallen off, continuing a tendency already noticed in May.

In May 1934 the Young People's League was formed, and this became a very useful organisation in the young life of the Chapel, as the young people, whose ages at that time might vary from sixteen to thirty-five (later the age limits were altered to fifteen to thirty), made contacts with other League branches, and were of use to the Chapel in various ways. Two members of the Y.P.L. attended one of the camp weeks organised by the League at its camping centre at Kinver, Staffordshire, in 1936, and several members attended the annual meetings held in London, Manchester, or Great Hucklow. During the Second World War the Y.P.L. ceased to exist, and later a mixed Youth Club was started, affiliated to the local Youth Council. An adult Badminton Club was also revived after the war.

In 1948 a reading-desk was made for the Sunday School by Mr. Herbert Wright in memory of his sister Annie. Down the years the Old Meeting House Sunday School has left its mark on the life of the community, and has been the scene of much devoted service. In the present century it owed much to such faithful workers as Mr. Frank Randall, superintendent from 1927 to 1943, and Miss Frances Boole, pianist from 1923 to 1953.



The Old Meeting House in 1951

## STAINED GLASS AND MEMORIALS

IT is sometimes held to be a mistake to put modern stained-glass windows into an ancient building, and it is certainly true that the clear glass in diamond-leaded panes originally placed in some of the old country dissenting meeting houses is as attractive as any decorative embellishment, especially when the outlook is that of a garden. The Old Meeting House, however, has buildings and walls close around it on more than two sides, and the congregation can rightly be proud of its possessions of stained-glass windows. It is true that when the first windows were put in in the nineteenth century, the craft of glasswork was at a low ebb. The colours were often muddy and lifeless, and the tones used too deep to admit enough light; but during the twentieth century much progress was made, and this is clearly reflected in the quality and artistry of the Old Meeting House windows. By 1951 every one of the large mullioned windows in the chapel had been filled with a memorial in stained glass.

The first window to be given was that on the west side of the chancel, referred to on page 28, showing Jesus as the Sower and as the Good Shepherd, and below is the inscription:

The window above was the gift by bequest of the late George Mallatratt of Stockwell Gate, Mansfield, to record his affection of this Ancient House of God wherein he worshipped as a boy to the time of his death. B. 1 Sep. 1832, D. 26th Dec. 1888. "Lead Thou me on."

The window on the east side of the chancel shows St. Peter and St. Paul, respectively with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the martyr's sword. The inscription runs:

This window is the gift of John Birks of Lime Tree Place, Mansfield, for more than half a century a constant worshipper in this house, in thankfulness to God for the blessings of a long life and for the strength and comfort of a simple faith —March 1890. “My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.” Died September 15th 1892 aged 90 years.

On the west side the first window from the organ end is an exceptionally dull-toned window, chiefly in browns, depicting the Parable of the Talents. The inscription reads:

The gift by bequest of Mary, widow of George Mallatratt, B. 24 Sept. 1844, D. 26 July 1891. “Father, refuge of my soul.”

The window facing this on the east side was the first of two designed by Messrs. Gascoyne and Co. of Nottingham, and shows Faith bearing a lamp, Hope with an anchor, and Charity giving garments to ragged children. There is an inscribed plate:

To the Glory of God and in memory of Robert Frank Vallance, Born Dec. 8th, 1856, Died April 18th, 1908.

This window was given by his daughter, brother, and sisters. The donors were Constance Mary Vallance his daughter, who married Frank Whitehead, Esq. of Bradbourne, Derbyshire, Emma Vallance, Agnes Mary White, Lucy Kate Swire, Arthur Clayton Vallance and Maud Mary Vallance.

The next window to it, by the same firm of glass-makers, is similar in style, but in a somewhat lighter key, to admit as much light as possible, and shows Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, with her young son, and Mary with the baby Jesus in her lap, and Joseph standing beside her, with his carpenter’s bench in the background. The inscription is:

To the glory of God and in memory of George Vallance who died May 30th 1880, also of Mary Vallance his wife who died June 13th 1890.

This window was given by their two youngest children, Arthur Clayton Vallance and Maud Mary Vallance.

The next four windows to be installed were all by the firm of William Morris and Co., of London, from figure-drawings by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. On the west side, the first of these windows put in in 1913 illustrates the favourite text of Robert White: “What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” It shows Justice with a sword and pair of scales, Humility walking among thorns, and in the two small lights above the figure of Mercy among children. The inscription says:

To the Glory of God and to keep in remembrance Robert White, born 29th September 1807, died 1st April 1876. This window is given by his only surviving child.

The donor was John Harrop White.

In 1928 a companion window was put in on the south side of it, showing the figures of Truth and Sincerity, with the inscription:

In gratitude to God for all the help they have received from worship in this House of Prayer, this window is erected by Harrop and Agnes White, MCMXXVIII.

The window opposite it on the east side was given in 1929 by the children of the late William Austin Vallance, Mrs. E. H. Birks, Mrs. H. S. Perris, Miss Hannah Vallance and Mr. Russell Vallance. The inscription runs:

In thankfulness to God and in loving memory of William Austin Vallance who died October 23rd 1916, also of his wife Agnes Sophia who died March 15th 1914. This window is erected by their children.

The last pair of windows were dedicated on the 30th September, 1951, and were the work of Hugh Easton, of London. That on the west side was the gift of Mrs.

Katherine Royce, and the brothers and sisters of the late Harold Royce, in his memory, and depicts the evangelists St. Mark and St. Luke. The other was the gift of Miss Ethel A. Birks, for many years secretary of the congregation, in memory of her father and mother, Edwin H. Birks and Eleanor Agnes Birks, and depicts St. Matthew and St. John. The symbols of the four evangelists are shown in the respective windows.

There is no record of the origins of the handsome oak-framed wall-clock which now hangs on the west wall, but which originally would probably be placed in the centre of the east wall opposite the pulpit (which was moved from the west wall in 1870).

The brass eagle lectern bears the inscription:

This lectern was placed here by the congregation in memory of William Hollins of Pleasley Vale, B. 1815, d. 4th Feb. 1890.—A life-long member and generous friend of the O.M.H. Mansfield, 1890.

The font is octagonal, constructed in polished oak, with a pyramidal lid, standing 1 ft. 10 ins. high when the lid is in position. It is kept on the Communion Table. The inscription is:

In memory of Mary Laetitia, wife of Alfred W. Worthington, Minister of the Old Meeting House, Mansfield, Born March 8th A.D. 1834, Died May 31st 1853.

There is also an inscribed plate on the panelling behind the Communion Table saying:

In loving memory of Alfred Birks, this panelling was given by his wife Eunice, 18th Oct. 1939.

Finally, there are two memorial panels in unstained oak, placed on either side of the entrance porch which John Harrop White had given to the Old Meeting House in 1940. These are decorated with the square-and-compasses symbol of the Freemasons and the coat-of-

arms of the Borough of Mansfield. It was John Harrop White's wish that the Chapel should have a list of all its ministers from the foundation, and in his will provision was made for this to be done in the manner carried out. The inscription reads:

In memory of John Harrop White: Ministers of the Chapel.

The names of the ministers appearing on the panels are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Robert Porter	.	.	.	.	.	.	1666-1690
Samuel Coates	.	.	.	.	.	.	1690-1704
Thomas Fletcher	.	.	.	.	.	.	1705-1713
Isaac Thompson	.	.	.	.	.	.	?1716-?1738
Samuel Shaw	.	.	.	.	.	.	1738-1748
Eliezer Heywood	.	.	.	.	.	.	1750-1783
Samuel Catlow	.	.	.	.	.	.	1783-1798
Thomas Broadbent	.	.	.	.	.	.	1799-1800
Joseph Bull (Bristowe)	.	.	.	.	.	.	1800-1811
John Williams	.	.	.	.	.	.	1811-1835
Charles William Robberds	.	.	.	.	.	.	1836-1842
William Linwood	.	.	.	.	.	.	1842-1848
John George Teggin	.	.	.	.	.	.	1849-1857
William Newton	.	.	.	.	.	.	1857-1858
Alfred William Worthington, B.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1858-1879
Charles Henry Wellbeloved	.	.	.	.	.	.	1880-1883
John Frederick Smith	.	.	.	.	.	.	1884-1888
Edgar Innes Fripp, B.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1888-1891
Owen James Jones	.	.	.	.	.	.	1891-1896
Henry Shaw Perris	.	.	.	.	.	.	1897-1899
Edgar Innes Fripp, B.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1901-1906
Frank Heming Vaughan, B.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1906-1912
Charles Moore Wright, M.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1913-1917
Thomas Perkins Spedding	.	.	.	.	.	.	1918-1919
Ottwell Binns	.	.	.	.	.	.	1920-1927
Frederick Munford, B.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1927-1936
Henry Stewart Carter, M.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1936-1946
Kenneth Twinn, M.A.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1946-1952

<sup>1</sup> The list was taken from previous compilations which need correction in one or two minor facts: Isaac Thompson, 1715-1739; Samuel Shaw, 1739/40-1748; Benjamin Clegg, 1749-1750.

The memorial was dedicated on Sunday, the 12th April, 1953, at morning worship by the Rev. Kenneth Sherratt, the address being given by the Rev. Arthur Woolley Vallance.

#### LIST OF CHAPEL-WARDENS

The records date from the annual meeting in March 1892, and Mr. J. Harrop White may have held office previously.

John Harrop White . . . . .	1892-1896
John Birks . . . . .	1896-1899
William Godfrey . . . . .	1899-1902
Arthur Clayton Vallance . . . . .	1902-1904
William Mucklestone Edge . . . . .	1904-1906
John Birks . . . . .	1906-1911
Charles James Vallance . . . . .	1911-1914
W. J. Clarke . . . . .	1914-1918
John Harrop White . . . . .	1918-1921
Harold Royce . . . . .	1921-1925
John Harrop White . . . . .	1925-1931
Harold Royce . . . . .	1931-1936
Arthur L. Birks . . . . .	1936-1947
Thomas Foster . . . . .	1947-1951
Arthur Whiting . . . . .	1951-

## LIST OF TRUSTEES

1. *Trustees of the Chapel*, appointed 27th December, 1701.  
Robert Sylvester, Gregory Sylvester, Thomas Langford, John Goodman, Robert Dodsley, Samuel Sheppard.
2. *Trustees of the Parsonage and Road to the Chapel*, appointed 7th May, 1708.  
Rev. T. Fletcher, Samuel Brunts, Thomas Langford, John Goodman, George Oldham, Samuel Sheppard.
3. *Trustees of the whole Property*.  
Appointed November, 1713: Thomas Dodsley, William Wilson, Joseph Langford, Ffrancis Broadhurst, John Ffarnworth, Robert Sylvester.  
Appointed 26th December, 1740: Joseph Senior, Mathew Wilson, Ffrancis Broadhurst, Ffrancis Bolar.  
Appointed 11th May, 1756: Thomas Langford of Nottingham, Samuel Crompton of Derby, Thomas Chapman, William Paulson.  
Appointed 18th July, 1803: Samuel Siddon, John Blagg, John Paulson.  
Appointed 4th January, 1803: William Brodhurst, William Siddon, H. Hollins of Pleasley Works, Samuel Siddon, J. Paulson of Teversal.  
Appointed 7th October, 1823: William Paulson, William Brodhurst the younger of Newark-on-Trent, Francis Wakefield.  
Appointed 25th May, 1847: W. Hollins of Pleasley Works, Isaac Heywood, Thomas Minnitt.  
Appointed 1871: John Jesse Handley, John Edwin Birks, John Austin, William Austin Vallance.  
Appointed 1896: Horace James Mettham, Charles Vallance, John Harrop White.  
Appointed 1915: Charles James Vallance, John Birks, Harold Royce.  
Appointed 1938: Charles Forshaw Vallance, Arthur Lloyd Birks, Kathleen Birks.

## THE CHAPEL GRAVEYARD

Particulars were taken from gravestones in 1858 by the Rev. A. W. Worthington. He also recorded interments of some who had no gravestones erected, and these are marked below with an asterisk. The list of interments is as follows:

James Barton, formerly of Birmingham, died 20th Dec., 1800, aged 59. "He was the first person interred in the Chapel Yard."

- John Spalton, 6th Feb., 1801, aged 58.  
Gilbert Slack, 25th Feb., 1801, aged 63.  
William Wall, 7th Feb., 1802, aged 86.  
Edward Marriott, 18th Feb., 1804, aged 75.  
Anne Benton, 24th April, 1804, aged 15.  
John Benton, 7th June, 1804, aged 17.  
Ann Hopewell, 7th Sept., 1808, aged 77.  
Jennet, wife of Edward Marriott, 23rd Jan., 1811, aged 80.  
An infant son of J. and B. Williams, buried 23rd July, 1811.  
Rev. John Williams, 1st Dec., 1835, aged 67.  
\* George Short, 15th June, 1839, aged 67.  
Bridget, relict of Rev. John Williams, 25th March, 1840, aged 61.  
James Scott, 4th April, 1841, aged 68.  
Sarah Joanna, daughter of John and Bridget Williams, 19th May, 1841, aged 35.  
Emma, daughter of Daniel and Eliza Woodhouse, 17th Nov., 1844, aged 9.  
John McLellan, 23rd Dec., 1844, aged 74.  
Mary, wife of Matthew Jarvis, 9th Oct., 1847, aged 66.  
Eleanor, wife of George Vallance, 26th Jan., 1849, aged 33.  
Rev. Joseph Austin, 4th May, 1850, aged 65.  
Martha Emilie Vallance, 30th Dec., 1853, aged 18 months.  
Hannah, relict of John McLellan, 5th Feb., 1857, aged 74.  
\* George Sydney, son of George and Elizabeth Simpson, 4th Jan., 1855, aged 1 month.  
\* Harriet, wife of William Lowe, 1st Sept., 1855, aged 45.  
\* Louisa, daughter of William and Harriet Lowe, 16th Feb., 1852 in her 4th year.

Matthew Jarvis, 20th Sept. 1857, aged 74.

Harriet, widow of Rev. Joseph Austin, 3rd Nov., 1858, aged 70.

Martha, widow of James Scott, 3rd June, 1860, aged 84.

There are other notes: Jane Sales, cleaner of Chapel, ? widow of Sebastian Sales, Chapel Cleaner. William Bishop, sometime clerk to the Chapel, said to have been buried in the graveyard. And this: "Mr. Greenwood told me he thought he had seen an interment many years ago under his old pew, i.e. about one third of the way up the wall next to Mrs. Walkden's property." There is a note that John Paulson and Elizabeth his wife and Joseph Paulson were buried in the Chapel.

The graveyard was closed by order of the Secretary of State from 1st Dec., 1858, the rights in existing vaults being reserved, viz. Vallance, Austin and McLellan. As Martha Scott was interred in 1860 there must have been a right reserved here also.

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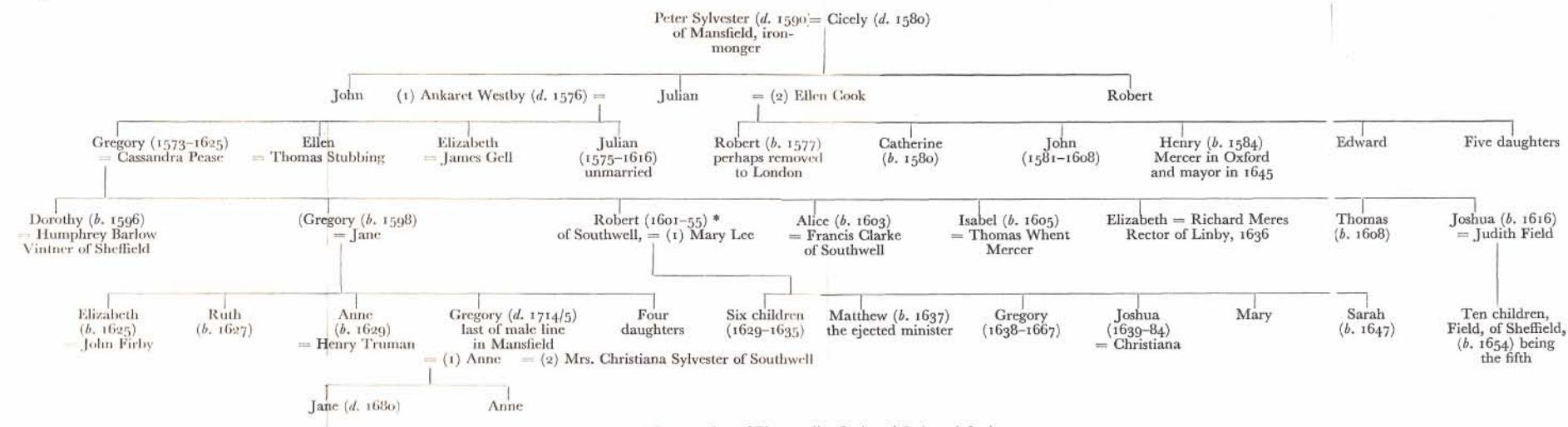
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*The Sylvesters of Mansfield*



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