

# **‘Liturgical and Congregational’: The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion Church in Basingstoke c1755 to c1969**

## **Introduction**

Perhaps because of its relatively unusual pedigree and status, there are a number of accounts of the history of the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion Church in Basingstoke. One of the earliest is to be found in the magisterial history of the town written by Francis Joseph Baigent and James Elwin Millard and published in 1889.<sup>1</sup> A few years later in 1895, the Church’s minister, the Revd Dr James Barnes wrote a short history for the Connexion’s magazine.<sup>2</sup> A much later account was written by Iris Gregory, a member of the Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, both Barnes and Gregory drew heavily on Baigent and Millard.

In this article, making use of these secondary sources, but more importantly primary source material from newspaper reports and surviving church records it is intended to construct a fuller and more rounded narrative of what was one of the most distinctive features of Basingstoke’s ecclesiastical landscape for over 200 years. Consideration is given to the origins of the Basingstoke Church; the characteristics of the Connexion; ministers who served the Church through its periods of success and times of trial; aspects of church life; and the demise of the Church in the 1960s.

## **Origins**

There is some uncertainty as to the exact year in which a Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion congregation was established in Basingstoke. In a work on the Countess published in 1839, the following account of the early days of the cause is given:

In 1755 a place of worship was opened by her Ladyship’s means at Basingstoke. After some years it was found too small and inconvenient for a rapidly increasing congregation under Rev. Thomas Thorne, one of her Ladyship’s ministers who had settled there. About the year 1799 a new chapel was erected capable of accommodating six hundred people, and opened for divine worship on 11th of July 1802.<sup>4</sup>

For his history, Baigent draws heavily on memoranda ‘kindly supplied ... by the Trustees of the Connexion through their Secretary.’ Some of the information from this source is reproduced below:

1755. A place of worship opened at Basingstoke by Lady Huntingdon’s means. The First place of worship was situated in Church Street.

1775 A Chapel erected: probably on the site of the present building in Wote Street. This site was purchased by John Mulford and Benjamin Loader, Esquires ...

1783 Mr Dickens, A Student of Lady Huntingdon’s College of Trevecca, first preached at Basingstoke on 24<sup>th</sup> April, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> June following commenced his

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Joseph Baigent and James Elwin Millard, *A history of the ancient town and manor of Basingstoke in the county of Southampton: with a brief account of the siege of Basing House, A.D. 1643– 645* (Basingstoke: C.J. Jacob, 1889), pp.549-50.

<sup>2</sup> James Barnes, ‘The History of Our Churches. VIII Basingstoke (Immanuel Church)’, *The Harbinger*, July 1895, pp.41-2.

<sup>3</sup> Iris Gregory, ‘The Immanuel Church. The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion’ (date not known).

<sup>4</sup> *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon, Vol 1*. (London: Painter, 1859), p.393.

stated ministry. Mr Dickens continued Minister at Basingstoke until the close of his life ...

1799. Rev Thomas Thorne, one of Lady Huntingdon's Ministers, was settled at Basingstoke. Under his ministration the congregation rapidly increased and steps were taken to afford enlarged accommodation. Mr Thorne continued at Basingstoke about ten years.

1802. opening of the new Chapel which (11th July) had been re-built by Mr John Mulford. A residence for the minister was also erected at his cost.

At the opening, Rev. T. Thorne read the prayers of the Established Church, and the Rev. William Cooper, afterwards Minister of her Ladyship's chapel in Dublin, preached from Genesis xxviii, 16-17.

There followed a list of ministers, starting with Mr Hurndall who came to Basingstoke in 1830.

### **Characteristics of the Connexion**

As the early history of the Basingstoke Church indicates, it was a legacy of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. Indeed, as far Basingstoke is concerned, it was, in many ways, the only immediate consequence since Methodism did not get established in the town until well into the nineteenth century.

With respect to its characteristics, the Connexion remains an interesting hybrid. Put simply, it shared with Methodism its Evangelical roots; it subscribed to the Anglican liturgy; and it adopted an Independent/Congregational approach to church governance. Interestingly, the original trust deed for the Basingstoke Church required the Book of Common Prayer to be used at its services<sup>5</sup> and although this requirement was eventually dropped the Church continued to promote itself on the basis of its 'liturgical services'. Moreover, a number of its ministers subsequently joined the Church of England while others served Congregational as well as Connexion churches.

A slightly more detailed explanation of the nature of the Connexion is provided by the author of a souvenir programme produced to celebrate the anniversary of the Basingstoke Church in 1952:

It is one of the quirks of history that the movement which has many likenesses to the Methodist church and which also had its birth in the Evangelical Revival and its co-founder, George Whitfield, in the forefront of the work should have drifted away from that body to a close relationship and affiliation to the Congregational churches of this country. It is due partly to the independent nature of the churches and also in some part to the fact that Cheshunt College is to all intents and purposes a Congregational College. Nevertheless The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion is a separate body and has its own unique part to play in the Church life of our land.<sup>6</sup>

In some ways the Basingstoke Church found it difficult to know how closely to identify itself with Congregationalism, as evidenced by its spasmodic membership of the Hampshire Congregational Union.

Although the Church in Basingstoke no longer exists, it is worth noting that the Connexion survives to the present day.<sup>7</sup> There are 21 Connexion churches, the closest to Basingstoke being Mortimer West End Chapel.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Baigent, p.550.

<sup>6</sup> 'Anniversary souvenir programme of the Immanuel Church, Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, Wote Street, Basingstoke 1952', HRO 50A07/E28

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cofhconnexion.org.uk/> (accessed 6 June 2018).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.thechapel.org.uk/> (accessed 6 June 2018).

## Ministers

In relatively independent churches, such as those of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, the personality, preaching style and theological stance of the minister played an important part in determining their fortunes. Relatively little is known about the Basingstoke Church's earliest ministers, Mr Dickens and Thomas Thorne, beyond the fact that they were products of Lady Huntingdon's college at Trevecca. From the information in Baigent, it would seem that Thomas Thorne served as the Church's minister until about 1810. While surviving registers of baptisms at the Church indicate that a number of other ministers played a part in its affairs during the early years.<sup>9</sup>

In Baigent and subsequent accounts, a comprehensive list of ministers begins in 1830 with the arrival of the Revd William Appleby Hurndall. He served for three years, with Basingstoke being his first charge. In 1833 he moved from Basingstoke to Devonport. In his official obituary, taken from the *Congregational Year Book*, it is recorded that, although frequently plagued by ill-health:

... in every successive sphere ... [he] won the affections of large circles of friends by his pure, gentle, refined and loving spirit ... His character was marked by a Christian consistency which was always above suspicion, and by a thoughtful, generous consideration for others ... As a minister he was intelligently and ardently attached to Evangelical truth, and found his greatest delight in preaching it with earnest simplicity ... In his pastoral work the poor and the afflicted had special cause for the hearty and grateful attachment which they invariably manifested towards him.<sup>10</sup>

It is assumed that all these qualities, at least in embryo, were evident during his time in Basingstoke.

Hurndall's successor was the Revd Richard Pingree who stayed for seven years from 1833 to 1839. Once again Basingstoke was the minister's first charge. As recorded in his obituary: 'He under-rated his own abilities; sensitive and nervous he shrank from large spheres of labour.' It was also mentioned that 'in character he was beautifully transparent without doubt a "Man of God"' and that in old age he 'was kind and wise in dealing with young ministers.'<sup>11</sup>

The next minister, the Revd Stephen Lepine from Enfield, was ordained in Basingstoke on 22 February 1839. The ordination prayer was offered by the Revd James Wills of London Street Independent (later Congregational) Church thereby symbolising the close links that had already been established between the two churches and were to continue throughout the life of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Church. During Lepine's ministry, in 1844, the Church was registered for 'the solemnization of marriages'. It is not known where Lepine subsequently ministered and whether or not he changed his denominational allegiance.<sup>12</sup>

Lepine was followed by the Revd William Bone, who was in post for 15 years from 1846 to 1860, one of the Church's longest serving ministers. In his capacity as minister, he completed the returns for the 1851 Religious Census which showed that there were 107 adults plus 68 children in attendance at the morning service; 71 scholars in the afternoon; and 332 attendees in the evening. In his history of the Church, Dr Barnes records that 'Mr Bone left the chapel in the unique position of not having a *single male member*!'<sup>13</sup> Bone subsequently joined the Church of England, being ordained deacon in 1860 and priest in 1861 by the

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<sup>9</sup> These include, in 1810, Thomas Louder and Samuel Franklin.

<sup>10</sup> *Congregational Year Book* (hereafter CYB) (1876), p.343.

<sup>11</sup> CYB (1886), p.202.

<sup>12</sup> As a result an obituary has not been found.

<sup>13</sup> Barnes, p.41.

Bishop of Carlisle. He was a curate in Cumberland and Kent and from 1877 vicar of Lemsford in the diocese of St Albans.<sup>14</sup>

The Revd John Simpson Trotter, who had charge of the church between 1861 and 1870, preached, in February 1862, what was described as a 'heart-stirring sermon' about the Hartley Pit disaster, which resulted in a 'liberal collection ... [for] the widows and orphans'.<sup>15</sup> This was followed up by a talk at the Mechanics Institute which enabled him to draw upon knowledge derived from his 'youthful days' which were spent 'in the vicinity of Hartley and other coal mines in the north of England'.<sup>16</sup> He was clearly ecumenically minded and an effective preacher because there are press reports of him preaching at the Primitive Methodist chapels in Wootton St Lawrence<sup>17</sup> and Silchester, where he delivered his sermon in the open air.<sup>18</sup> Trotter was also very committed to the missionary work of the Connexion, which was focused particularly on Sierra Leone. As Barnes records, during his time in Basingstoke Trotter visited 'the Mission on three separate occasions'.<sup>19</sup>

The Revd William Horace Hines took up the Basingstoke pastorate in 1870/71. This was relatively late in his ministerial career since he had previously 'laboured' at three churches, the last being in Kidderminster. Thus, by comparison with a number of his predecessors he was an experienced pastor and preacher. He remained at Basingstoke 'for ten years, and by a faithful and fervent ministry was greatly instrumental in furthering the interests of the kingdom'.<sup>20</sup> During his pastorate, in 1874, the chapel underwent 'considerable alteration and improvement'.<sup>21</sup> Three years later a new organ was installed, moreover 'funds were not wanting, as the new instrument ... [was] not only paid for, but ... [there was] a considerable balance in hand'.<sup>22</sup>

Following Hines, the Revd John Guntrip stayed for just three and half years from 1880 to 1883. The census of churchgoing of 1882 recorded 155 worshippers at the morning service and 136 at the evening. In a similar manner to William Bone, after leaving Basingstoke he joined the Church of England. He was ordained deacon in 1884 and priest in 1885 by the Bishop of Manchester and served as a curate in Lancashire and Leicestershire.<sup>23</sup>

Barnes contrasts the ministry of the next pastor the Revd Benjamin William Adams with that of his predecessors by suggesting that 'with the advent of a new minister the chapel ... [was] well filled for a few months, and then the attendances ... gradually lessened and lessened until the minister ... resigned from sheer discouragement.' Adams, however, who was later described as 'a gentleman of genial and cultured presence',<sup>24</sup> appears to have "bucked the trend" and 'maintained a fairly average congregation throughout' his ministry from 1884 to 1890.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he fostered the link with Sierra Leone, paying a four month visit in 1891.<sup>26</sup> He was another of Basingstoke's ministers who subsequently joined the Church of England, being ordained deacon in 1893 and priest in 1894 by the Bishop of Ely. A

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<sup>14</sup> *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (1877 and 1889). From 1860 to 1863, he was curate of St Paul, Holme-Cultron and between 1863 and 1877 Curate of St Peter, Tewin, in the Diocese of Rochester. There is no reference to his service as a Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion minister.

<sup>15</sup> The Hartley Pit Disaster occurred on the 16 January 1862 and resulted in the deaths of 204 coalminers.

<sup>16</sup> *Hampshire Advertiser*, 15 February 1862.

<sup>17</sup> *Reading Mercury*, 30 July 1864.

<sup>18</sup> *Reading Mercury*, 14 October 1865. An obituary has not been found for Trotter.

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, p.42.

<sup>20</sup> *CYB* (1898), p.193

<sup>21</sup> *Hampshire Advertiser*, 19 December 1874.

<sup>22</sup> *Hampshire Advertiser*, 28 July 1877.

<sup>23</sup> *Crockfords*, 1889 and 1905.

<sup>24</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 November 1931.

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, p.41.

<sup>26</sup> This he undertook with Mr Willis, 'the treasurer of the Society for the Spread of the Gospel at Home and Abroad ... who took a large number of photographs of scenes and incidents during the visit ... [which were] mounted as lantern slides ... [and] made available to any for the purpose of exhibition.' Barnes, p.42. See also footnote 32.

curacy at St Barnabas in Cambridge was followed by the living of St Michaels in Macclesfield.<sup>27</sup>

With Adam's departure, as Barnes records, there was a six month period when the pulpit was supplied 'followed by an unpopular ministry of eighteen months'. Although not mentioned by name, the 'unpopular' minister was the Revd John R Bennett. In 1891 having 'preached on several occasions' and possessing a 'fluent delivery', he was appointed minister. Prior to his appointment he had 'been engaged in spreading the good news of the gospel among the natives of Madagascar but ill health [had] compelled him to return to England.'<sup>28</sup> There are few references to his time in Basingstoke, but he would seem to have played his part in the various events organised by the Nonconformist churches collectively. For example, in February 1892 he was on the platform at a 'large and enthusiastic gathering consisting of members of the Congregational, Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist and Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion churches' who had met in the London Street Church to hear speakers from the Wesleyan Foreign Missionary Society and London Missionary Society.<sup>29</sup> However, a few months later a notice appeared in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* announcing the auction of 'a quantity of Household Furniture, comprising Dining and Bedroom suites, Kitchen utensils and various other effects' belonging to the Rev J.R. Bennett.<sup>30</sup> The reason for this was that, as announced a couple of weeks later in somewhat stark terms:

We understand that the Rev. J.R. Bennett, who some time since has resigned the charge of the Countess of Huntingdon's Church, Basingstoke, has now left the town for Canada.<sup>31</sup>

This suggests a somewhat hasty departure, although whether or not he left 'under a cloud' must remain an open question. What is known for certain is that there followed a further twelve months when the pulpit was again supplied. Barnes suggests that, notwithstanding the 'devoted labours of the energetic secretary, Mr Willis,' this period seems to have almost marked 'the death knell of the Countess' Connexion in Basingstoke,' with the Church losing members to other chapels.<sup>32</sup>

However, with Dr James Barnes's arrival as minister in the summer of 1893, the situation rapidly improved. The circumstances which led Barnes to Basingstoke are not known, but he quickly made his mark. In early September he attended and spoke at the recognition meeting for the new Wesleyan minister, the Revd Herbert Adams. He followed the London Street minister, the Revd Capes Tarbolton, who had commented that:

the name of Mr Adams was in good odour in Basingstoke – a happy and heartily received allusion to a former pastor of the Countess of Huntingdon's Church ... [and] they would probably have reason to be proud of their new minister if half the good things in the books on his shelves were in his mind and heart (applause).

For his part Mr Barnes was praised for 'his pleasant style of address and his evident sympathy with evangelical work ... [which instantly commended] him to the appreciative attention of the meeting.'<sup>33</sup> His suggestion of pulpit exchanges was also well received.

In the circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising, that in his history of the Church, Barnes claims to have turned around its fortunes. To demonstrate this he helpfully provides some statistical data contrasting the position in August 1893 with that at Christmas 1894 (see Table 1).

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<sup>27</sup> *Crockfords* (1905).

<sup>28</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 January 1891.

<sup>29</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 February 1892.

<sup>30</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 August 1892.

<sup>31</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 August 1892.

<sup>32</sup> This Mr Willis was the father of George Willis, after whom the Basingstoke Museum is named.

<sup>33</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 September 1893.

**Table 1: Attendances and Membership 1893-94**

	August 1893	Christmas 1894
Sunday morning - attendance	100	190
Sunday evening - attendance	100	300
Sunday school – attendance	150	296
Wednesday evening - attendance	25	80
Thursday evening prayer meeting - attendance	n.a.	35
Sunday school morning – attendance	35	70
<b>Church Membership</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>153</b>

Moreover, ‘a small Mission hall ... was opened in New Town with a Sunday School of 93, and a Women’s Bible Class of 66, both under the superintendence of Mrs Barnes.’ There was also a Sunday afternoon gathering for men with an attendance of about 80. In addition, the Church sponsored a variety of organisations for young people, including a Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Society and a branch of Christian Endeavour. Thus, by 1895 the Church would appear to have been flourishing again. At a Church event over 30 years later, Barnes was described as ‘an ardent evangelist, carrying the message of the Gospel, and he filled the Church almost to suffocation every Sunday.’<sup>34</sup> It was also during his ministry in July 1894 that the Church was officially named “Immanuel”.

However, notwithstanding an implied criticism of short pastorates, Barnes left at the end of 1895 after just over two and a half years. That said, it is clear from the tributes paid to him that he had endeared himself to the Church. Nearly 150 subscribed to a testimonial which took the form of a gown (Cantab, M.A.) and a hood (Dublin, L.L.D.) and an illuminated address. Reference was also made to the good work he had done by devoting ‘not only the whole of his time to his flock but also ... [by being] unusually liberal to the poorer members.’ The Church had ‘gone on steadily increasing during his ministry’.<sup>35</sup> Barnes moved from Basingstoke to Emmanuel Church in Folkestone. This was to be his large charge since he died in 1902 aged only 55.<sup>36</sup> As reported at the time: ‘He was a man of much experience, tact, readiness of speech, and wise withall.’<sup>37</sup> While at his funeral the Revd J. B. Figgis, a leading Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion minister from Brighton, referred to Barnes as being ‘a man of God, a John the Baptist sort of a man, a man who rebuked vice openly, without fear or favour.’<sup>38</sup>

Barnes was succeeded by the Revd George Pritchard Silcox and in keeping with what was becoming a tradition his ministry was a relatively short one. Arriving in the autumn of 1896 he left in 1898. One event of note during his ministry was a mission conducted during the autumn of 1897 by Mr Henry Thorne, an evangelist of Exeter Hall in London.<sup>39</sup> In early August 1898 it was announced that, ‘having received a hearty and unanimous invitation’ to the Sion Congregational Church in Ashbourne’, Silcox would ‘close his ministry in Basingstoke on the last Sunday’ of the month.<sup>40</sup> If there was a farewell gathering for him, it was not reported in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*. In his official obituary, there is a reference to his ‘resilient faith’, but it contains no insights into his character or approach to ministry.<sup>41</sup> There is, however, an account of his recognition service at Ashbourne which was attended ‘by representatives of all denominations in the town’. In his remarks, Silcox expressed his

<sup>34</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 November 1931.

<sup>35</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 December 1895.

<sup>36</sup> His wife Anne Marie lived until 1928. Both are buried in Cheriton Road Cemetery, Folkestone, see <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=170031463> (accessed 7 June 2018).

<sup>37</sup> *Folkestone Herald*, 19 April 1902.

<sup>38</sup> *Folkestone Herald*, 26 April 1902.

<sup>39</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 October 1897.

<sup>40</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 August 1898.

<sup>41</sup> *CYB* (1937), 707. From Ashbourne, Silcox moved to Ottery St Mary in Devon. Apart from Immanuel Church in Basingstoke, all of Silcox’s pastorates were with Congregational churches.

ambition as being 'to live amongst them as a friend and a brother, and his desire was to help them in whatever way he could.'<sup>42</sup> Presumably, such sentiments would have applied equally to his time in Basingstoke.

By now there was undoubtedly a need for some stability and this was provided by the Revd Eustace Earl Long. Appointed in the summer of 1899, he remained in post until 1906. Prior to his arrival in Basingstoke, Long's 'longest and most strenuous pastorate' had been at Stansted in Essex, where he served from 1884 to 1899. 'To it he brought all his matured intellectual and spiritual gifts.' These were also in evidence during the seven years he spent in Basingstoke where he took 'an active part in the town and neighbourhood.'

The meeting to welcome him formally was attended by the Revd J.C. Davies, the Pastor of Spa Fields Church, London – The City Church of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. He had been 'Mr Long's neighbour for nearly eight years in North Essex, and a more brotherly or kindlier man it had never been his fortune to meet.'<sup>43</sup> While the Wesleyan Methodist minister, the Revd William W. Thackray, believed that the Church now had 'a man who had come to stay – a thoughtful preacher, a sympathising Pastor, and an instructive teacher.' The Congregational minister, Capes Tarbolton was also in attendance and he expressed the view that, on first meeting Mr Long, here was 'a Christian man and a gentleman who, if he came among them, would be an honour and a credit to nonconformity and the town.' Speaking on behalf of the congregation, the previously mentioned Mr G.W. Willis confirmed that 'they had been unsettled for a long time', but since Mr Long's arrival a month ago 'not only had the congregations increased. But also the collections and they had never had a larger tea meeting than they had held this evening.' In his remarks, the new pastor expressed the hope that those attending this 'interesting gathering ... may go determined that Christ shall be more to ... [them] than he has ever been before.'<sup>44</sup> Many years later, Willis's son described Long as a 'scholar and a saint.'<sup>45</sup>

Further insights into Long's character and beliefs are to be found in his official obituary:

Always modest and retiring in disposition, and tolerant towards those from whom he differed ... nevertheless ... [he] had strong convictions which he maintained with unswerving fidelity. He brought to his work great patience and constant study, but while he gave much thought to modern theology and criticism his deepest experiences were with the older evangelical conceptions, and to the exposition of these he devoted his powers. His preaching was scholarly, earnest, and impressive, and its effect was enhanced by his pleasant voice and attractive manner. He loved the Church of England liturgy, which was used ... in his church at Basingstoke and few men could make the familiar petitions more really a vehicle of true devotion ... Generous and sympathetic by nature ... [he] always entered into friendly relations with Anglican clergy and ministers of other denominations in the district where he laboured. It was, indeed, impossible to quarrel with him.<sup>46</sup>

One important event during Long's pastorate was the 1903 census of churchgoing. For Immanuel, there were 90 in attendance at the morning service (26 men, 33 women and 31 children) and 93 (29 men, 48 women and 16 children) in the evening. These were somewhat lower than the figures for 1882. In a sermon on the results of the census, Long based his observations on the text, 'I have much people in this city', words from God to St Paul at Ephesus.<sup>47</sup> Although he found the 'result somewhat discouraging', certainly by comparison with 1882, he argued that since then 'the outward work done by the various Churches ...

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<sup>42</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 October 1898.

<sup>43</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 July 1899.

<sup>44</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 July 1899.

<sup>45</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 November 1931.

<sup>46</sup> *CYB* (1916), 181.

<sup>47</sup> Acts ch.17 v.10.

[had] in many ways greatly developed'.<sup>48</sup> Presumably this was a reference to their philanthropic activities and the increasing number of associated organisations. Nevertheless, he also pointed out that the true people of God had 'always been few in comparison with the world'.<sup>49</sup>

Basingstoke was to be Long's final pastorate. Temporarily incapacitated in 1904, due to a nervous breakdown, he eventually retired in 1906 but continued to live in Basingstoke and maintain his links with the Church. He died in July 1915 after a long illness. In commenting on his death the *Hants and Berks Gazette* referred to his ministry as being 'eminently scholarly, affectionate, and earnest.' While the Revd William Schofield Thomson who succeeded him, observed that:

... he was earnest, devout, thoroughly evangelical, and had a profound reverence for the Word of God. He was a good student, read widely, was familiar with the intellectual movements of his time, but all through his ministry he was intensely loyal to his earliest evangelical convictions.<sup>50</sup>

Long is buried in the Old Cemetery, Basingstoke.

In September 1906 the comment was made in a report on Immanuel's Harvest Services that:

... in spite of the fact that the church is still without a minister, the interest is being well sustained, and the services show no falling off in the number of worshippers. The offertories last Sunday were a practical evidence of this.<sup>51</sup>

In the event, it took the Church some months to find a suitable replacement for Long, but in early 1907 the previously mentioned William Thomson, who had preached at the Harvest services, was appointed to the pastorate. It was said of Thomson, in his official obituary, that his 'patience, tact and devoted Christian character won him the friendship and respect of all'.<sup>52</sup> At his recognition service in April, which 'was characterised with the utmost warmth, heartiness and sincerity', his predecessor commented that when he had first heard Thomson preach the year before he remembered saying: "This is just the man I should like to come here as pastor." Another contributor, the Revd Sydney Tuckey of Henley of Thames, a close friend of Thomson, expressed the generally held view that 'he was a good man, a loyal Christian, a faithful pastor, a man of whom any Church might be proud to call him minister.' In his response, Thomson said that 'there were three things he wanted his people to give him ... sympathy ... a warm place in their hearts and to think of him in a kindly way'.<sup>53</sup>

Thomson was undoubtedly a worthy successor to Long and the church appears to have flourished under his 'zealous' leadership. During 1911 the Church premises underwent substantial renovation and repair, 'the effect of which ... [was] greatly to increase the comfort and convenience of the worshippers as well as greatly improving the appearance of the building'.<sup>54</sup> The cost of the work was £250, of which £70 still needed to be raised at the time of the re-opening of the Church.

After eight and a half years, in September 1915, Thomson left Basingstoke for the pastorate of the Congregational Church at Whittlesford in Cambridgeshire. At a gathering following his last evening service, he was presented 'with a leather wallet containing notes of the value of £15' and many positive comments were made about his contribution to the life of the church and his character. Mr Felgate spoke of his 'staunch adherence to the orthodox faith

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<sup>48</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 April 1903.

<sup>49</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 April 1903.

<sup>50</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 July 1915.

<sup>51</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 September 1906.

<sup>52</sup> *CYB* (1944), p.437.

<sup>53</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 April 1907.

<sup>54</sup> *Hampshire Observer*, 16 August 1911.



and his kind and efficient ministry' and the Treasurer, Mr G.W. Willis, referred to his 'business capacity ... and his ready pastoral sympathy.' In response, Thomson 'spoke of the kind sympathy and help of members and the congregation.' He was going to be greatly missed not only by Immanuel but also by the denomination, which 'he served as President in 1913.'<sup>55</sup>

Thomson's successor was the Revd Frederick William Turner, who had previously been minister of Spa Fields. At the meeting to welcome him in October 1916, he explained that although he had been brought up as a Primitive Methodist, 'by the grace of God he now belonged to the Countess of Huntingdon Church.' He was at pains to point out, however, that his theology was not 'controlled by any denominational point of view.' Rather he took his stand on the Word of God, and he hoped by God's grace and leading to be able to start ... a Bible School.'<sup>56</sup> In the event, Turner's pastorate turned out to be another relatively short one of just over three and half years. A memorable event during his time at Immanuel was a presentation in February 1918 to the Church's long standing organist, choirmaster and church secretary, A.G. Wood.<sup>57</sup> Turner left Basingstoke in November 1919, having accepted the pastorate of St Stephen's (Free Church of England) in Middlesbrough. In acknowledgment of his services to Immanuel he 'was presented with a cheque for £12 as a parting gift.'<sup>58</sup>

Once again there followed a fairly long interval of just under a year when the church was without a settled minister. However, during this period considerable assistance was received from the Revd Dr Lee who 'took the services and kept the Church together.'<sup>59</sup> Eventually in the autumn of 1920 a new permanent minister was found in the person of the Revd Edwin Tully.

In welcoming Tully, Councillor Willis observed that although Immanuel was 'not so large as it had been and not so large as he ventured to think it would be in a year's time ... he would find here the nucleus of sincere and enthusiastic workers.'<sup>60</sup> With the arrival of Tully, Immanuel affiliated itself formally to the Hampshire Congregational Union. Consequently, for the new few years it is possible to monitor, to a limited extent, church membership and the fortunes of the Sunday school (see Table 2). Tully remained at Basingstoke for 10 years, one of the Church's longest pastorates.

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<sup>55</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 25 September 1915.

<sup>56</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 Oct 1916.

<sup>57</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 March 1918.

<sup>58</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 November 1919.

<sup>59</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 Nov 1931.

<sup>60</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 Oct 1920.

**Table 2: Membership and Related Data for Immanuel Church 1921-1930**

Year	Members		Sunday School	
	No	3 Year Average	Scholars	Teachers
1921	87	---	78	10
1922	108	101	88	15
1923	108	111	88	15
1924	115	116	95	13
1925	124	120	95	13
1926	120	121	103	16
1927	120	120	100	16
1928	120	120	100	16
1929	120	120	100	16
1930	120	---	100	16

**Notes**

- a. Most of the data in this table have been taken from the Yearbooks of the Hampshire Congregational Union. HRO: 127M54/62/65-74.
- b. The three year moving average has been calculated to even out sudden changes in the figures for individual years.
- c. It seems likely that the returns for 1923 and from 1927 onwards were not submitted with the figures for the preceding year simply being repeated.

In 1930 Tully and his wife moved from Basingstoke to Great Malvern, after what were described as ‘ten happy years’.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, as the data in Table 2 indicate, there was an increase in membership and the number of Sunday school scholars during the first half of his pastorate. Although it is not known whether this continued, it must be assumed that the Tully’s made a considerable impression on the Church and the wider ecclesiastical community within Basingstoke. Indeed, it is noteworthy that ‘the Mayor of Basingstoke and Councillor Rev S. H. Wing [the Sarum Hill Baptist minister] took part in the public meeting held at Emmanuel Church, Great Malvern on the occasion of’ Tully’s induction.<sup>62</sup> In Tully’s official obituary it is recorded that ‘hymnology and church music were always valued by him.’<sup>63</sup>

The next minister was the Revd Arthur William Sansom, who moved to Immanuel from a Baptist Church in Kettering. With 20 years experience in the ministry he was undoubtedly well equipped to lead the Church. Significantly, all the ministers of the major Nonconformist Churches in Basingstoke were present and spoke at Sansom’s recognition meeting held in November 1931, namely the Revd Howard S. Stanley of London Street Congregational Church; the Revd W. Benjamin Charles, the Wesleyan Minister; the Revd Sydney Herbert Wing of Sarum Hill Baptist Church; the Revd Ezra Ramm, the Primitive Methodist Minister; and Ensign Mitchell representing the Salvation Army.<sup>64</sup> In his remarks, the Church Secretary, Mr E.W. Jones, observed that although the Church had been without a minister for thirteen months it had been the ‘easiest’ period he had experienced during his connection with Immanuel. This he attributed to:

the fact that ... the family spirit had been predominant amongst the members. No matter what job wanted doing, he had always found workers willing to do it. Their members were drawn from all walks of life, but they met on one common ground ...

<sup>61</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 July 1930.

<sup>62</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 25 October 1930.

<sup>63</sup> *CYB* (1953), p.527.

<sup>64</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 November 1931.

He went on to express the hope that the family spirit would continue during Sansom's pastorate. The new minister expressed his thanks for the warm welcome he and his family had received. He continued by saying that he would 'try to fill the position of minister of the Church faithfully, and as he moved amongst the lives of men, women and little children in ... [Basingstoke] he should endeavour to leave always on his way love and light and happiness.'<sup>65</sup> Later in the proceedings, Sansom mentioned that his youngest brother had worshipped at the Church and ended his address with the exhortation that:

They must be loyal to the past and captured by the vision of the future. Their ideal for the future could be contained in the word Forward. He trusted there would be good years before them. They wanted this Church to stand four-square against all the forces of evil, and as a house of refuge for every weak and needy soul, as a beacon of light guiding men into the way of life. If we had faith in the great truths for which we stood, then, in the name of God, Forward.

Although membership of the Hampshire Congregational Union appears to have lapsed, following Sansom's appointment, with the result that there is gap in the statistical record until 1947, when it was resumed, it would seem from other sources that the Church enjoyed a period of considerable influence under his leadership and did indeed move forward.

In 1936, at celebrations to mark the fifth anniversary of his pastorate, by which time Sansom was Basingstoke's longest serving Nonconformist minister, the Chairman paid tribute to his qualities of 'sincerity, earnestness and sanctified commonsense ... [as well as] the saving grace of humour.'<sup>66</sup> It is noteworthy that the event was attended by not only the Congregational minister but also the vicar of Basingstoke thereby symbolising the growing sense of fellowship between the Free and Established Churches which now characterised the town. Interestingly, the principal speaker, the Revd George Henry Crisp who was at the time the President of the Connexion and a minister at Ely, was to become Immanuel's minister after the Second World War. He gave what was characterised as 'a very stimulating address brightened with many witty flashes, and illustrated by anecdotes from his personal experiences.' His main theme was the importance of young people in the life of the church and the need to wisely channel their energies into 'the advancement of Christ's kingdom.'<sup>67</sup>

At the equivalent event a year later, one of the speakers, the Revd C. Barnes, minister of Odiham Congregational Church observed that the Countess of Huntingdon's church had been founded at the time of 'a great revival ... [but] nowadays they had to face not hostility but indifference.' While the Church Street Methodist minister, the Revd Walter Weddell contrasted John Wesley 'the evangelist of the masses' with the Countess of Huntingdon, 'the evangelist of the drawing-rooms in the stately homes of England' and commented that the latter were being neglected.<sup>68</sup>

In 1938, reference was made to 'the esteem in which ... Sansom ... [was] held not only by his own flock but by the townspeople generally.' Sansom in turn 'expressed his gratitude for the individual support of his people and for their unclouded loyalty during his seven years' ministry in Immanuel Church.' Reference was also made 'to the friendly feeling existing among the clergy and ministers of the town ... [as] evidenced by the presence of the Rev. C.R. Macbeth one of the assistant curates of the parish, who in the course of a short and lively address expressed his pleasure in being associated with this happy gathering.'<sup>69</sup>

Sansom's pastorate finally came to an end, after eleven years - one of the longest in Immanuel's history - in November 1942. During this time, in addition to being Immanuel's minister he was 'a Rotarian ... a member of the Board of Guardians ... served on the Old Age Pensions Committee ... [and as] secretary of the Free Church ministers' fraternal for ... ten

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<sup>65</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 November 1931.

<sup>66</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 November 1936.

<sup>67</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 November 1936.

<sup>68</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 17 November 1937.

<sup>69</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 18 November 1938.

years.’ He was also ‘keenly interested in Christian Endeavour and ... served as President of the North Hants as well as the Hampshire Christian Endeavour Federation.’<sup>70</sup>

Not surprisingly at the farewell and presentation event Mr R. Nicolson, the Church Treasurer, ‘in a few well chosen words, expressed appreciation of ... [his] ministry and service.’ Sansom was presented with a leather wallet containing ‘Treasury notes subscribed by members and friends of Immanuel Church’. The gift for Mrs Sansom from the Ladies Committee was ‘a leather utility bag’.<sup>71</sup> From Basingstoke, Sansom moved to the Countess of Huntingdon’s Church in Worcester. He was clearly going to be difficult to replace.

In due course, he was succeeded by the Revd David Anstice, of whom there are relatively few traces in the public record. In part this was due to the exigencies of wartime. The first reference to him is as preacher at Immanuel services on Sunday 7 March 1943 in the “Forthcoming Events” column of the *Hants and Berks Gazette*. On this occasion he was probably preaching ‘with a view’ to the members determining whether or not he was a suitable candidate for the vacancy. The next reference, from the same source, relates to the Harvest thanksgiving services of that year which Anstice led. These were held on 12 September, so it seems likely that he was appointed minister some time between March and September of that year, but his previous church is not known. There are indications, however, that Anstice, as well as ministering at Immanuel, was fully engaged with Free Church life in Basingstoke. For example, in April 1945 he chaired the recognition meeting for the new Sarum Hill Baptist minister, the Revd Leonard Jiggins.<sup>72</sup> While in June of that year he was in the chair when the Basingstoke and District Union of Christian Endeavour held its summer rally at Immanuel.<sup>73</sup> What appears to be the final reference to Anstice is in the context of the United Meeting for Prayer at the beginning of 1946. He was the speaker at this meeting, which was held on 10 January in the Salvation Army barracks in Reading Road.<sup>74</sup> Thereafter there are no further mentions, although he must have left at some point before October when his replacement arrived.

The new minister was the previously mentioned George Henry Crisp. Following his Ely pastorate he had served for a short period at St Ives in Cornwall. Already aged 68 in October 1946, he commenced what was to be his final ministry. As an indication, perhaps, of the difficulties the Church was going to face in the post-War era, at his induction service ‘there was only a small congregation numbering less than forty.’<sup>75</sup> Around the time of Crisp’s appointment, the Church rejoined the Hampshire Congregational Union consequently statistical data are again available. As the figures in Table 3 confirm, since 1930 Church membership had more than halved and the number of Sunday school scholars had dramatically declined from around 100 to just 30.

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<sup>70</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 October 1942.

<sup>71</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 November 1942.

<sup>72</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 25 April 1945.

<sup>73</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 June 1945.

<sup>74</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 January 1946.

<sup>75</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 October 1946.

**Table 3: Membership and Related Data for Immanuel Church 1947-1950**

Year	Members		Sunday School	
	No	3 Year Average	Scholars	Teachers
1947	50	---	30	5
1948	50	49	20	5
1949	48	47	20	5
1950	44	45	12	4

Notes

- a. Most of the data in this table have been taken from the Yearbooks of the Hampshire Congregational Union. HRO: 127M54/62/90-93.
- b. The three year moving average has been calculated to even out sudden changes in the figures for individual years.

Nonetheless, the Church continued to provide a spiritual home for those who revered the Anglican liturgy but favoured a Congregational form of church governance. Whether a younger minister could have reversed the Church's decline is a moot point. When he retired in 1950 Crisp was described as being 'a sick man' and he died the following year. According to his official obituary:

He never forgot his own humble origins, and this, with his wide experience of human nature, enabled ... [him] to be a faithful minister to "all sorts and conditions of men." He will be remembered ... as a great Christian and a great humanitarian.<sup>76</sup>

Crisp was succeeded by the Revd Sidney George Woodget, who came to Immanuel from Zion Chapel in East Grinstead, his first pastorate. An important event during Woodget's ministry occurred in 1952 when Immanuel celebrated 'the 150th anniversary of the present church's opening on the Wote Street site.'<sup>77</sup> Woodget died in January 2018 and in his obituary it is recorded that:

People remember him ... as a man with a loving, caring pastoral nature, who stood by them, in both good and difficult times. Although his faith was always evident, in the 1970s he discovered the experience of renewal and the reality of the Holy Spirit, which transformed his life.<sup>78</sup>

Following Woodget's departure for Sarisbury Green and Warsash Congregational Churches in 1955, the Church did not have a permanent minister for the next five years.

Immanuel's last minister was to be the Revd Walter Edward Powell, who moved the short distance from Odiham and Hook. Like a number of his predecessors, Immanuel was Powell's final pastorate. He served from 1960 until his death in 1967.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, his official obituary gives no indication of his personality or approach to ministry.

For the 1950s and 1960s statistical data relating to Immanuel were published in the *Hampshire Congregational Union Yearbooks* and these are presented in Table 4.

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<sup>76</sup> CYB (1952), 509.

<sup>77</sup> 'Anniversary souvenir programme of the Immanuel Church, Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, Wote Street, Basingstoke 1952', HRO 50A07/E28

<sup>78</sup> <http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Synod-Papers-March-2018-ASA.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2018).

<sup>79</sup> CYB 1967, p.449.

**Table 4: Membership and Related Data for Immanuel Church 1951-1969**

Year	Members		Sunday School	
	No	3 Year Average	Scholars	Teachers
1951	44	43	15	4
1952	41	37	18	3
1953	26	32	21	3
1954	30	29	46	4
1955	32	31	40	3
1956	30	30	42	5
1957	28	29	35	2
1958	28	27	20	3
1959	26	23	22	2
1960	16	20	25	4
1961	18	17	12	3
1962	18	18	12	3
1963	18	18	12	3
1964	18	18	---	---
1965	18	18	---	---
1966	18	17	---	---
1967	16	15	---	---
1968	12	13	---	---
1969	12	---	---	---

**Notes**

- Most of the data in this table have been taken from the Yearbooks of the Hampshire Congregational Union. HRO: 127M54/62/94-112.
- The three year moving average has been calculated to even out sudden changes in the figures for individual years.
- It seems likely that the returns for 1962 and 1963 were not submitted and the figures for preceding year were repeated.

As they indicate, the period was one of almost constant decline, with membership decreasing from 44 in 1951 to 12 in 1969 the last year for which figures were reported and, notwithstanding some fluctuations, this applied to the Sunday school as well. Indeed, it would seem that the Sunday school closed in the early 1960s since figures for scholars and teachers ceased to be reported from 1964 onwards. Nonetheless services continued to be held until the church premises were demolished in the late 1960s a casualty of the Town Centre Redevelopment.

**Aspects of Church Life**

In many respects the life of Immanuel was very similar to that of other Nonconformist churches. That said, as previously indicated, it took pride in having liturgically based services. However, this did not prevent the Church from innovating. For example, in June 1924 it held a flower and egg service on a Sunday afternoon ‘after which 268 eggs were distributed to the Cottage Hospital, the Almshouses, and the sick.’<sup>80</sup>

For most of its existence it supported a number of ministries of which the most important was that focussed on the young. In addressing the needs of children and young people, the Sunday school was inevitably to the fore. A high point in the Sunday school’s year was the celebration, every May, of its anniversary. The earliest newspaper report of this event is for the year 1862:

<sup>80</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 June 1924.

The anniversary of the Sabbath Schools was held on Sunday last, when three sermons were preached. In the morning and evening by the Rev J. L. Wake, of Cheltenham, and in the afternoon by the Rev M. Wilkes, of Basingstoke, when large congregations assembled, and the collections in aid of church funds, were very liberal.<sup>81</sup>

Fifty years later, in 1912, the format was very similar, with more detail of the subject of the ‘most appropriate and helpful’ sermons delivered by the Revd W. Downham of Brighton being provided in the newspaper report:

... in the morning his text was, “The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof,” and in the evening, “For me to live is Christ,” – his theme being the business of life. In the afternoon he gave an excellent address to children on Pins, his chief lesson being that a pin must have a good head, a sharp point, and be straight. These lessons were enforced and pressed home with a number of telling illustrations.<sup>82</sup>

There were also an annual prize giving<sup>83</sup> and a summer treat. For example, in July 1903 it was originally intended to use Goldings Park as the location for the treat, but bad weather required a change of plan. After a tea in the schoolroom the scholars adjourned to the Corn Exchange, which they were able to use ‘due to the kindness of the mayor’, and where they thoroughly enjoyed ‘games and various competitions got up by the teachers.’<sup>84</sup> As previously indicated, the Sunday school appears to have continued functioning until the early 1960s.

Staying with the young, one of the legacies of the ministry of James Barnes was the establishment of a branch of the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavour in 1895. This was intended to encourage young people in their discipleship and prepare them for future leadership roles. As explained at the fifth anniversary in 1900, ‘there was a brightness about Christian Endeavour meetings which kept them alive from beginning to end.’<sup>85</sup> Moreover there was also an emphasis on good works. This was demonstrated in 1906 by ‘a new departure in providing a pleasant evening for a number of old folk.’ Members provided their guests with a ‘meat tea’ and entertainment in the form of songs and recitations. The pastor’s wife ‘gave one of her quiet simple talks’, the theme being ‘the road of life.’ In addition, ‘parcels of good things were subsequently distributed’ to those unable to attend.<sup>86</sup> The Immanuel branch had close links with the Christian Endeavour societies in Basingstoke and the surrounding area.

As was the case in most churches, Immanuel also sponsored a group specifically for women. An outing in 1929 characterised the fellowship and enjoyment associated with what was known as the “Women’s Meeting”:

Leaving Basingstoke at 8.30 the party, numbering 80, travelled by road to Reading and boarded the “River Queen” at 9.30, visiting the historic Abbey Church at Dorchester (Oxon). Tea was served on the boat, and home was reached at 9.30 p.m. a most enjoyable day being spent. The Thames never looked more charming than now, and all along the way the roses were at their best.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Reading Mercury*, 17 May 1862.

<sup>82</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 25 May 1912.

<sup>83</sup> In 1913, ‘upwards of sixty children participated ... [and] a capital programme of songs, recitations, and instrumental music, chiefly by the children themselves was submitted ...’ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 March 1913. In 1914, the minister’s wife ‘presented about 50 prize books to the scholars who had qualified for them by attendance and good conduct during the past year.’ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 28 February 1914.

<sup>84</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 18 July 1903.

<sup>85</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 3 February 1900.

<sup>86</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 17 February 1906.

<sup>87</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 July 1929.

Such events served as a mode of outreach as well as a means of developing friendships.

Another vital strand of the life of Immanuel was that of music, both sacred and secular. Again this was an aspect of church life which it shared with other Free Churches of the town. However, with its strong liturgical roots religious music was especially important. One notable feature of Immanuel's musical tradition was an annual performance of Stainer's Crucifixion at Eastertide. It is not known for certain when this began, but there is a report from 1913 giving details of the soloists and making reference to Mr Wood, the organist's 'musical taste and reverent treatment.'<sup>88</sup> In 1922:

The perennial appeal of devotional music was well exemplified by the large congregation that filled Immanuel Church on Friday, the 7th inst., when the Service of Meditation on the Crucifixion – associated with the name of Dr Stainer – was held. The building was crowded to its full capacity [of 270 sittings], additional seating accommodation having to be provided ... A shortened form of Evensong ... formed a fitting prelude to the choral service. In this the choir acquitted themselves admirably ... [with] both the declamatory and devotional receiving appropriate and effective treatment ... The greatest tribute to both choir and soloists was the devout and reverent atmosphere that was preserved throughout, and it is safe to say that this work has never before been given in Basingstoke with greater acceptance.<sup>89</sup>

While a report from 1937, refers to the Crucifixion as 'probably the best known and one of the most beautiful of all the Passion cantatas ... [and that it] was performed according to annual custom at the Immanuel Church on Tuesday evening.'<sup>90</sup> For this event, the regular choir was frequently augmented with additional members from other churches.

Other examples of sacred music performed at Immanuel include the missionary cantata "Boys and Girls of Other Lands" by members of the Sunday School in March 1925;<sup>91</sup> and a demonstration of Christian Endeavour 'purposes and principles in song and recitation', by the Junior Christian Endeavourers in December 1925.<sup>92</sup>

In 1921 following the renovation of the organ a recital was given with the programme being such as 'to gratify a cultivated musical taste.'<sup>93</sup> Concerts featuring secular music were also organised from time to time, such as one in March 1935, which was described as 'exceedingly interesting and enjoyable'. In addition to piano solos, instrumental trios and songs, both amusing and serious, this included dramatic recitals and dance.<sup>94</sup>

Inevitably, the need to raise funds for church improvements and other purposes was an ongoing preoccupation, with socials events and sales of work being organised at regular intervals. As it was put by the Immanuel Treasurer at the opening of a sale of work in 1921:

This Church was always worrying its treasurer by everlastingly getting into debt, and now and again there had to be injunctions from the treasurer when the water got too deep for safety; but he was glad to say there was never a better Church for getting out of debt than this one, and as financial officer of this Church he had to pay a tribute of appreciation of the way in which the local friends rallied round the treasurer, delivering him from overhanging clouds and from the apparent morass of insolvency that appeared to lie in front of him.

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<sup>88</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 March 1913.

<sup>89</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 April 1922.

<sup>90</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 April 1937.

<sup>91</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 28 March 1925.

<sup>92</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 December 1925.

<sup>93</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 March 1921. On this occasion 'the organ pieces were interspersed with three excellently rendered vocal items' of a sacred character. A collection was taken for the organ renovation fund.

<sup>94</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 March 1935.



Notwithstanding the financial support received from church members, he went on 'to invite the assistance and help of those friends who were in general sympathy with them' but were not directed connected with Immanuel.<sup>95</sup> Thus, such events were seen as a means of engaging with well-wishers from the wider community.

As an earlier example, in February 1913 'a tea and social evening ... [had been] arranged by the men of the congregation in aid of Church funds.' Held in the schoolroom, after a 'sumptuous tea', those attending were entertained with musical items, including a string band, songs and a musical sketch, and a recitation, together with games and competitions. 'At the close a goodly number sat down to supper.'<sup>96</sup>

A further example was a sale of work held in November 1928 at the Town Hall, in aid of the restoration of the Church. The mayor was in attendance and the proceedings began with the singing of a hymn, a reading of the 67th psalm by the Rector of Eastrop and prayers led by the Baptist minister, while later the Wesleyan Methodist minister concluded the opening ceremony with prayer and benediction, so it was a truly ecumenical occasion. The sale was formally opened by Mrs Prance, an ex-mayoress, who mentioned that the church had recently had to tackle the 'awful blight of dry rot' before undertaking a more general renovation. The target was to raise £200.<sup>97</sup>

On a smaller scale, in June 1934 a 'garden party', which was due to be held at Backlands in London Road, had to be moved to the schoolroom due to rain. This raised £14.<sup>98</sup> Again the proceeds were directed at dealing with the problem of dry rot.

A further constituent of church life were *ad hoc* lectures. For example, in January 1929, Miss Sapp 'gave an interesting and instructive lecture on "The Land where the Lord Jesus Lived" ... illustrated by the very fine photographic slides she had taken, vividly depict[ing] the settings of many of the Bible stories.'<sup>99</sup> While in February 1937 the Rev Crisp 'gave a humorous lecture ... [entitled] "Bright Beams from Bristol".' This was based on his time as a city missionary in the city and focused on 'the humorous side of his daily work'. During the course of his lecture, Crisp:

... showed how his calling brought him into contact with the seamy side of life, but in it he also found a bit of cheer which brightened his task. The audience laughed heartily as he described some of the characters he had met, and repeated in Bristol dialect the pathetic but wily stories he had heard from those who sought his help. There were stories also of changed lives, which cause one to exclaim "What God Hath Wrought".<sup>100</sup>

Such an example gives insights into not only the serious side of church life at Immanuel but also the lighter aspects.

Last, but by no means least, two of the most prestigious events in the life of Immanuel were the hosting of 100th and 111th anniversary conferences of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in 1922 and 1933 respectively. The first of these which was held during the pastorate of Edwin Tully attracted about 70 ministerial and lay delegates from a wide variety of Connexion churches. It included a civic reception, devotional meetings and a public luncheon. In keeping with the interdenominational fraternal spirit prevailing within the town ministers of other churches, including the rector of Eastrop Parish Church contributed. As it was put by the Revd Roccliffe Mackintosh, the Congregational minister, at the public luncheon:

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<sup>95</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 3 December 1921. At the time the Treasurer was Councillor Willis and this sale of work was held in the schoolroom attached to the Church.

<sup>96</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 February 1913.

<sup>97</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 10 November 1928.

<sup>98</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 June 1934.

<sup>99</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 January 1929.

<sup>100</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 February 1937.

In the name of the Free Churches I extend to you a very hearty welcome to Basingstoke and to the homes of our people. We are very glad indeed to see you here and we hope your deliberations will be guided by God and fraught with blessing to yourselves and to this town.<sup>101</sup>

On the second occasion ‘about sixty ministerial and lay representatives of churches attended.’ In keeping with the ongoing ecumenical spirit they were provided with accommodation ‘by hosts and hostesses belonging to various denominations.’<sup>102</sup> The format was very similar to the event held 11 years earlier. For those attending it was ‘one of the pleasantest of such gatherings that the Connexion ... [had] held.’<sup>103</sup>

## Demise

As the data in Table 4 illustrate, Immanuel Church’s demise was a very gradual one. Services continued to be held on regular basis in the years following the Second World War and the Church was served by three full time, albeit in the case of two, elderly ministers. As previously mentioned, to what extent a younger, and arguably more energetic minister, would have been able to revive the cause and reverse what was happening is an imponderable.

Undoubtedly Immanuel suffered, perhaps more than many churches, from the general decline in churchgoing and the inexorable march of secularisation. Another factor was that as a town centre church, Immanuel was adversely affected by the process of suburbanisation. Some churchgoers, for whom Immanuel had considerable appeal, were now residing in the suburbs and naturally they looked for a congenial place of worship nearer their homes. It took a strong sense of duty to make the journey to town each Sunday to attend services at Immanuel. That said, some did remain loyal and when Immanuel closed in 1969 a number transferred their membership to London Street Congregational Church.<sup>104</sup> However, as Gregory records, only 25 people attended the closing service.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion Church in Basingstoke experienced a long drawn out decline and a sad end, its contribution to the ecclesiastical life of the town over more than two centuries was considerable and deserves to be celebrated. Its very existence distinguished Basingstoke from other Hampshire towns which did not have a church representing the Connexion. Moreover it served to demonstrate how the liturgical traditions of the Church of England were not incompatible with Free Church ecclesiology. It attracted a loyal congregation but also enjoyed an excellent rapport with churches of other denominations and through its musical tradition reached out to the wider community.

It is interesting to speculate on how Immanuel would have fared if had survived to the present day and remained attached to the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion. The meetings of the 21 churches in the Connexion ‘vary in style with some held in Chapels and others in modern surroundings or even schools, maintaining an evangelical witness in towns or villages, mainly in the southern half of England.’<sup>106</sup>

Roger Ottewill  
June 2018

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<sup>101</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 17 June 1922.

<sup>102</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 16 June 1933.

<sup>103</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 23 June 1933.

<sup>104</sup> At the time, London Street Archive also acquired many of the surviving records of Immanuel.

<sup>105</sup> Gregory, p.6.

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.cofhconnexion.org.uk/> (accessed 6 June 2018).