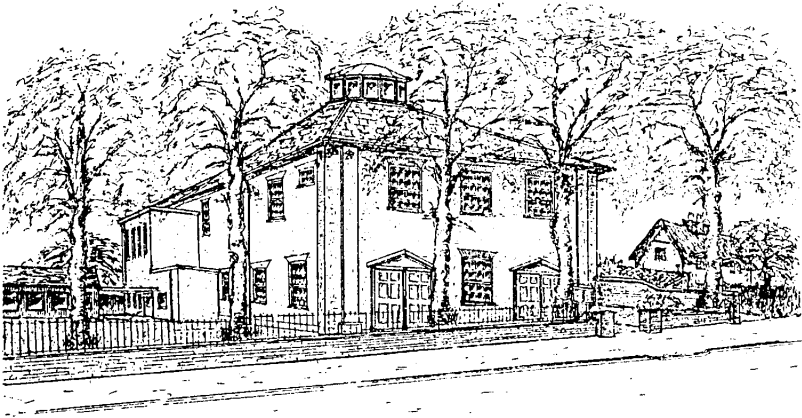


# **‘Convinced that these were Gods People’**

A history of Melbourn United Reformed Church



**By**  
**Rev. R W Rooke B.A**

*This history was written to mark the  
tercentenary of the Church in 1994*



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**CONVINCED THAT THESE WERE GOD'S PEOPLE**  
**Foreword**

Many sources of information exist upon the history of the 'Independent Church' in Orchard Road, Melbourn, Cambridgeshire. Well-documented minute books and three written accounts from first beginnings are still available, and much further detail can be accumulated from national magazines and Year Books.

Several stimuli caused this present account to be written. Foremost was the tercentenary (1994) and the realisation that the last up-to-date history had been written for the bicentenary.

The second stimulus was the wealth of memory held by the older generation of Melbourn residents but never likely to be written down. In particular, I am grateful to the late Peter Wedd, Jack Palmer, Derrick Thurley (who also made the drawings), Gwen Thurley, Daphne Hagger, Alice Cooper and Elsie Fuller for the time they happily spent in resurrecting fond memories.

The third was proximity to Cambridge University Library, which gave access to complete records of magazines and reference books extending back 300 years.

A final but more insidious incentive was to 'cock a snook' at a previous History master, who held the lowest opinion of my abilities in his subject.

It is hoped that the result gives an attractive insight into the life of a lively, independent-minded 'family in Christ' which still nurtures the community life of Melbourn, Cambridgeshire.

Rev. Reginald Rooke  
April 1994

## MELBOURN UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

### **List of ministers**

1694 - 1740	John Nicholls
1741 - 1744	James Watson M.A., D.D.
1745 - 1789	Richard Cooper
1789 - 1790	George Scraggs
1791 - 1825	William Carver
1825 - 1841	John Medway
1841 - 1872	Andrew Curr Wright
1874 - 1888	Burgess Wilkinson
1888 - 1913	George Porter Chappie
1914 - 1916	William Henry Wrigley
1917 - 1945	Jesse George Davis
1946 - 1959	Stanley Hodges
1960 - 1967	David William Goodsell
1967 - 1970	John Rowland Palmer M.A.
1971 - 1981	Wilfred Edwin Hurley
1981 - 1987	Stuart Brooke Jackman
1988 to date	Reginald William Rooke B.A.

## CHAPTER 1

### Early Dissent

Underlying discontent with the established forms of worship in south west Cambridgeshire can readily be seen as far back as 1629. In that year, twenty-four residents in Melbourn and Meldreth refused to contribute towards a forced loan which King Charles sought from the citizens of England.

Similar opposition was made in 1640 against ‘ship-money’, a tax which had been imposed by the King on each county ‘for the setting forth of one ship for the safeguard of the seas’.

This area was fertile ground for other anti-Establishment feelings, for in 1638 it was noted that several persons in one parish were reprimanded for offences of a contrary nature, such as leaving church before the Ser service had finished, or refusing to stand during the saying of the Benediction.

Lest such examples be held to show that the inhabitants of these villages were simply miserly, republican or cussed, it should be noted that amongst defaulters were certain people who came to feature strongly in the support which the region in general gave to the followers of Oliver Cromwell and the later Commonwealth.

In any study of the origins of the former Congregational churches in south-west Cambridgeshire, however, it is remarkable how the name of Rev. Francis Holcroft M.A. keeps constantly appearing. It is to him and a few close friends that the credit must be given for establishing Independency firmly in the region.

He was born in 1633 at West Ham in the county of Essex, son of a knight, and studied at Cambridge University. He later became a Residential Fellow of Clare Hall and during his stay, he became known for his adoption of Puritan principles.

He lived in a room above the gate of his college, shared with a John Tillotson who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. From this vantage point, he would often see a horse brought up to transport a college Fellow to nearby Litlington (or elsewhere) in order to conduct a Service of Worship in the Parish Church, only to observe a little while later that the horse was being taken back to the stable because the Fellow was too drunk from his revelry of the night before to undertake the journey.

Unable to bear the thought that a Service would not be held, Francis Holcroft would offer to take the place of the incapacitated colleague. Over a period, he found himself in constant demand as a result of his own abilities rather than the inebriation of others.

In 1655, Holcroft was appointed to the living at Bassingbourn, a village adjacent to Litlington, although somewhat disappointingly the incomplete parish registers make no mention of this fact.

By this time he had gained a high reputation for his integrity, and was becoming very widely known in the neighbourhood. His preaching was described as ‘truly apostolical, primitive and divine’.

He came strongly to the view that the structure of the church should not be based upon geographical boundaries, but upon a company of Christian disciples, whether they lived in the particular parish or not.

His hearers came to be drawn from a number of different parishes, and were bound together in a covenant, the wording of which was recorded in the Gransden Church Book when members of Croydon church renewed their own covenant in the 1690’s. Holcroft's church could truly be regarded as founded ‘upon Congregational principles’.

By the time of his ejection, Holcroft was drawing large

congregations at Bassingbourn. He was a forceful speaker, and it was recorded that ‘he preached powerfully of hell and judgment.....every time he named the name of Christ, it was as terrible as the thunder upon Mount Sinai’.

The implication of these and other views began to conflict more and more with the principles of the Established Church which Francis Holcroft served.

### John Bunyan

Influences from other quarters were also at work. It is probable that John Bunyan preached in Melbourn Parish Church around 1658, for a biographical sketch published in 1700 relates how William Bedford, a Cambridge scholar at the time, enquired in not quite sober manner upon the intentions of certain villagers gathered in the churchyard on a weekday.

When told that ‘the tinker Bunyan’ was to preach, Mr. Bedford decided to hear him. The forceful preaching converted him, and in later years, William Bedford came to found Congregationalism in Royston. A reference to this visit is embodied in the Melbourn village sign by carvings representing John Bunyan and the tree under which he preached.

### Persecution

Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, a severe reaction against Puritanism took place in Parliament, and a set of laws known inter alia as the Clarendon Code was enacted which restricted forms of worship other than that of the State Church. Severe penalties were exacted on those who disobeyed, and thus the Code brought a crisis of conscience for many clergy who were of Nonconformist persuasion.

Francis Holcroft was one of the first evicted from a living because he refused to obey, and in 1663 he was indicted at



Cambridge Assizes and held prisoner in Cambridge Castle until 1672, although he was treated with leniency as a gentleman. A friendly jailer allowed him out of prison at times. He was permitted visitors, and the prison notes record that these included country gentlemen and London merchants.

Holcroft was freed in May 1672 under the terms of the Act of Indulgence 1672, which allowed the preaching of any gospel, provided that both preacher and building held a licence from the Secretary of State.

Francis Holcroft immediately began preaching again, and with other helpers (particularly Joseph Oddey) he formed small assemblies of the faithful in villages over a wide area of Cambridgeshire, including Bassingbourn, Meldreth and Great Chishill.

His struggles with the authorities were still not over, for in 1681 Francis Holcroft was sent to the Fleet Prison for debt, no doubt caused by the constant fines which had been exacted against him. He was released in 1682 but this spell of prison life caused severe deterioration to his health.

This arduous living over a period of almost thirty years took its toll on the health of Holcroft. A few years before his death, Holcroft had purchased a freehold parcel of land adjacent to Oakington churchyard as a burial-place for himself and friends. He was small of stature but indefatigable in the pursuit of his ministry, a powerful and inspired preacher.

## CHAPTER 2

### Toleration

The passing of the Toleration Act 1689 allowed Nonconformists freedom of worship and assembly once again. The Act permitted them to hold religious Services provided that the preachers and the buildings had been given a licence by a bishop of the Established Church. This proviso had the useful side-effect that records were now established for the state of premises brought into use.

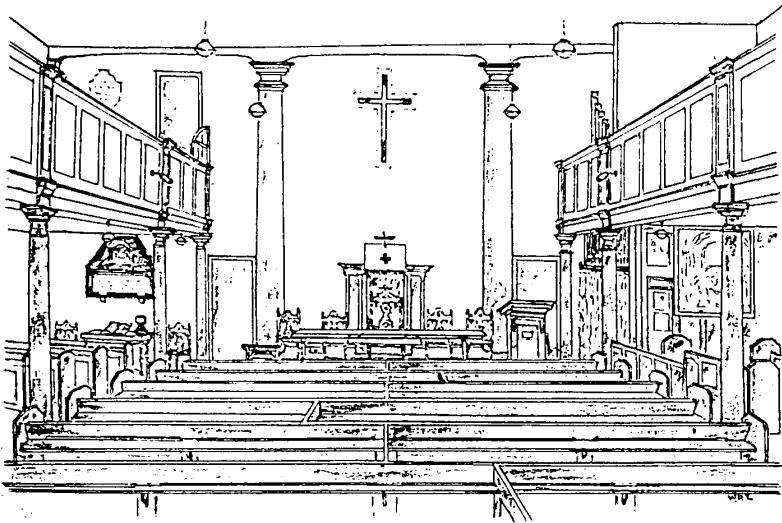
The congregation at Meldreth had grown much during the years of persecution. There is a record that in 1669 a conventicle of approx. 100 persons met once a fortnight in a barn in Meldreth owned by one Edward Summers. Thomas Lock, Thomas Antrum and Thomas Ashton were licensed as preachers for this congregation, which now had strong links with a similar congregation at Bassingbourn under the leadership of Francis Holcroft. The combined total of members was approx. 90. These were obviously not persons of wealth, for the census describes them as ‘quality, not any that seem considerable’.

In 1672 a Congregational meeting was registered in Meldreth, and in 1676 there were 26 Nonconformists over sixteen years of age in Melbourn, and 12 in Meldreth.

Hitherto, Francis Holcroft had regarded these scattered congregations as a combined church, but with the freedom granted by the Toleration Act, these became separate churches and pursued their own paths. Thus it happened that the followers at Meldreth and Melbourn came together and established a meeting-place in Melbourn in 1694. A permanent church building was not erected for over twenty years, however.

An historical account written by a Mr. Robinson states ‘The Independents, and among them those of Chishill and Melbourn, who had been assembled together in churches by Mr. Holcroft, embodied themselves and settled in the year 1694. Such also is the tradition of the place, where it is much to be regretted that neither church-book nor any written documents are to be found except the title-deeds of the meeting-house’.

The first settled ministry covered two groups worshipping in two separate villages, namely Melbourn (with Meldreth) and Great Chishill, and alternate Services were held in the two places.



*Interior of Meeting House built 1717*

### CHAPTER 3

#### Rev. John Nicholls

For their minister, the combined membership called a Mr. John Nicholls. He served the two churches from a house in Great Chishill, although its identity is not known.

Mr. Nicholls was born in Hatfield Regis in Essex, on an estate which his parents owned and he later inherited. Mr. Nicholls was greatly influenced by the Rector of Barley, Rev. Nathaniel Ball, who was ejected from his living in Barley for Nonconformist views which he held tenaciously throughout his life. At his death he is reported to have said ‘I bless God I have never conformed. I have the comfort of it now’.

In his later treatise ‘Method of Divine Grace with fallen mankind’ (1730), Mr. Nicholls writes :

I was accidentally cast to be at a meeting where a private Christian began by prayer, and he was much helped by God, and prayed in a very humble manner. I thought it pierced my soul like a sword.

I did not commonly attend at meetings, but was at that time convinced that these were God’s people. Thought I, where have I been in the dark all this Conviction? I then concluded that I was one that was to be hardened under the Means, and all would rise up in judgment against me.

Under this sore temptation I resolved to hear no more, and was going out of the meeting, but as I was going alone, the man prayed the more earnestly that God would be pleased to show mercy in some one soul here, repeating it over again.

Upon this, pausing on it awhile, thought I, surely God hath laid

this on his heart to pray for me .. There is none here in a bad condition but myself, so this stayed me from going out.

I then turned again to a table on the side of the room, and leaning on it with a heavy burden on my heart, thought I was heavy enough to break down that table. But immediately these words sounded in my heart ‘Is there no balm in Gilead ?’

I knew it was God's Word, and as His voice it came home to my stony heart and arose there as the Day Star, which guided me to the Babe Jesus. No balm would heal my wound but His precious blood applied.

Then was my heavy burden removed, and my heart of stone kindly melted into a flood of tears of joy. I was then at the Gate of Heaven. I was filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Then I thought I was as sure of Heaven as if I had been in it. This overwhelming experience caused Mr. Nicholls (like the rich man in the parable) to be concerned for the salvation of his close family, for in his words :

I viewed them in mind as dead in a spiritual sense ... Thought I, if my relatives had ever known that which I now see, they could not have seen me go on in such gross darkness and ignorance, and not have told me the sad condition I was in.

In this frame of mind, he returned home and, deeply moved, related what God had done for his soul. Touched by his words, his elder sister was also converted.

Mr. Nicholls appears to have been a solid, judicious pastor. He was described as being in sentiment strictly Calvinistic, and in discipline strictly Independent The church was left in prosperous circumstances when he retired in 1735, and he died in about 1740.

## CHAPTER 4

### Rev. James Watson

Despite this successful ministry over 40 years, the congregation remained without pastor from 1735 to 1741, having to rely on help from visiting preachers. Growing rather anxious for a settled ministry, the congregation applied to a Rev. Sutherland, dissenting minister at Saffron Walden, who contacted a theological college in Edinburgh for help.

This led to an introduction to a Mr. James Watson, the son of a farmer, who was born in Aberdeen in 1713 and graduated with a Master of Arts degree at the university there. He became a tutor in literature.

Mr. Watson arrived from Scotland on 3rd June 1741 and accepted the offer to become pastor of the joint church, being ordained soon afterwards. He married Anne Hanchett of Chrishall Grange, and thus gained an estate and the manorial rights attaching to the manor of Great Chishill. To these parents were born nine children.

In 1745, however, the congregation at Melbourn expressed themselves dissatisfied with the ministry of Rev. James Watson and wished his removal, not only from Melbourn but from Chishill as well. Mr. Watson strongly opposed these actions, and adjudication was sought from the Board of Dissenters in London. As a result, the two congregations went their separate ways, Mr. Watson remaining pastor at Great Chishill until becoming pastor of a church in south London in 1760.

Although Mr. Watson no doubt had a strong Scottish accent (his speech being described as ‘not popular’), he was held in high esteem and affection in Chishill. During his residence there, he was honoured with a Doctor of Divinity degree by Aberdeen University. He died in July 1783, aged 69 years.

## CHAPTER 5

### Rev. Richard Cooper

An invitation was sent in July 1744 to a Mr. Richard Cooper, a student at Stepney Academy, to become the new pastor to the Melbourn congregation on its own. This was accepted and Mr. Cooper ordained on 18th July 1745.

A Covenant for the church congregation was written during the pastorate of Rev. Richard Cooper, and it became the practice to read this when persons were received into membership :

We do in the presence of the great Jehovah God and in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ the awful crowned King of Sion and in the presence of his holy angels and saints and all here present

Solemnly give up ourselves in covenant to the Lord and to one another by the will of God

Solemnly promising and binding ourselves by oath and covenant to God and to one another

In all the aforesaid presence to walk with God and in peace and fellowship with one another in a strict observance of all gospel ordinances and in a faithful discharge of all relative duties in this Church of Christ and elsewhere as the Lord the Spirit shall be pleased to enlighten and enable us.

Mr. Cooper was described as ‘an excellent man .... an able, faithful and successful preacher’ and the congregation flourished under his ministry. He remained the pastor until his death on 28th November 1789.

## CHAPTER 6

### Dissension

During his last ten years of ministry, Mr. Cooper had been assisted by a Mr. Samuel Bull, and it was reasonably assumed by many in the congregation that after this long apprenticeship, Mr. Bull would be invited to succeed Mr. Cooper. This was not done immediately, and in fact charge of the congregation was undertaken from 1789 to 1790 by Rev. G. Scraggs.

On 1st April 1790 one of the deacons (a Mr. James Howard) gave notice of bringing to the attention of the Church Meeting certain circumstances in the conduct of Mr. Bull with a widow (a Mrs. Mary Newling?) which he and others thought wrong. Members of the lady's family supported Mr. Howard.

Caution was expressed by a Mr. Thomas Moule, who was a trustee of the family and thus well versed in its affairs. He was of the opinion that this matter would soon be settled to the satisfaction of all parties, but on the other hand Mr. Bull complained that procrastination by certain family members was preventing this.

Tempers had risen to such a pitch that at a Church Meeting on 27th May 1790, it was urged that either the lady should attend and explain, or that Mr. Bull should resign from his post. This meeting was held on a Sunday afternoon, and at one stage the congregation split, one part remaining in the sanctuary and another outside.

The outcome was a motion carried by a large majority that Mr. Bull should resign. A letter of dismissal was then sent to Mr. Bull.

Those who voted against this motion came mostly from Bassingbourn. They withdrew their support and set up a church, to which they called Mr. Bull as minister.



## CHAPTER 7

### Healing the division

The remaining membership at Melbourn now began the task of seeking a new minister, and they settled upon a Mr. William Carver, a student for the ministry who accepted their unanimous invitation.

The internal dissension had taken its toll of the congregation, and Mr. Carver was obviously under no illusions as to the magnitude of his task, for he was heard to say that on his arrival, he found scarcely a person to a pew.

Mr. William Carver was born on 11th August 1770 at Kirtling, near Newmarket, and trained for the ministry at Homerton College. He was himself the son of a Congregational minister (Rev. John Carver), who gave one of the two charges at the Ordination Service at Melbourn on 6th March 1792, his text being 1 Tim. 4 v.1.

Shortly afterwards (19th March 1792) he was married at Islington, his wife Mary giving him great support not only in his ministry but also at the flourishing boarding school which he established at Melbourn.

In his obituary, Rev. William Carver is said to have had ‘heavy trials in his early life, peculiarly distressing to his affectionate sensibilities, which he bore with fortitude and patience’. Since Mr. Carver held only one pastorate (at Melbourn) during his lifetime, it could be that this is a veiled reference to the early difficult years there.

### Revival of the church

A possible combination of Mr. Carver's energy and the return of unsettled members brought about a steady revival in the fortunes of the church, to such an extent that it was decided to enlarge the size of the building to accommodate the large congregations.

Mr. Carver recognised the importance of teaching the Christian faith to boys and girls of the village, and these began to form an important part of his flock.

A report dated 1819 gives this impressive account of the progress of the church :

The meeting-house has recently been enlarged, so as to accommodate about 800 persons, and it is well-filled on Sabbath days. There are two schools connected with this place of worship ..... one of boys who are taught on the Lord's Day afternoon, and another of girls who meet on Thursday afternoons'.

The report went on to regret that there was still not enough room to seat them separately, with the result that children either sat with their parents or were dispersed about the meeting. On the other hand, it was in contemplation to build a schoolroom over the vestry, to communicate with the gallery. The combined total of children in the schools was nearly 200.

In a related but more private capacity, Mr. Carver founded a boarding-school in Melbourn as early as 1792. This school came to have a very high reputation amongst wealthier Congregational families in the whole country, and catered for 90 boarding scholars. With day-scholars, as many as 200 boys were taught each year. The majority of these boys can be expected to have attended Melbourn church every Sunday.

In this respect it must be remembered that public schools at this time were still barred to Nonconformists and the enterprise of

Mr. Carver (and others elsewhere) helped to satisfy the growing demand for alternative but comparable schooling.

In a biography of the well-known Samuel Morley, a Mr. Hodder recounts :

When Samuel was about seven years of age, he was sent with his brother William to a boarding-school at Melbourn, where their brother John was already a pupil. Many sons of well-known Nonconformists were among the ninety scholars whom Samuel found there, and whenever any well-known minister visited the school, he would be acquainted with the families of half Mr. Carver's boys.

The writer then speaks of the school as :

excellent in every respect ..... the best of its kind in the country. Mr. Carver prided himself upon being able to turn out gentlemen as well as scholars, and spared no pains to train the boys in good and useful habits.

The school building stood until the Greenbanks housing project in 1970 brought about its demolition. It was a large, red-brick building with three storeys, of which the topmost contained the boys' dormitories. In its heyday, the premises were not large enough, and many boys had to be boarded out.

### Health problems

Towards the end of his life, Mr. Carver suffered more frequently from the headaches to which he had been prone since his youth, and an alarming attack first occurred in the pulpit, from which he had to be carefully escorted by friends in the congregation.

His son also referred to 'one paralytic attack caused by his chaise

being run down by a wagon, when he miraculously escaped being crushed beneath the wheel'.

Mr. Carver's deterioration in health caused him much concern, for he was 'fearful of becoming decrepit, and a burden to others', and he resigned from the pastorate at the end of 1824. His health and spirits in the last six months of his life remained high, but he realised that the end was close when he became seriously ill on 1st August 1825 and went into a coma. He died on 3rd August 1825, aged 56 years.

A large congregation attended the Funeral Service, including the local Baptist and Parish clergy, and the pall was borne by six Congregational ministers. His body was interred in a vault beside the church, his wife being buried alongside him in later years.

Many of his former pupils were present, and a collection was organised by them to erect the memorial tablet which hangs on a wall in the present sanctuary :

For thirty two years he was the Pastor of the Church and Congregation assembling in this place. He established in this village a large and respectable school over which, during the same period, he presided with equal fidelity and talent.

As a scholar he was distinguished by his extensive learning, as a man by his amiable disposition and as a Christian by his sincere piety.

This tablet is erected by his former pupils, to testify the respect which they entertained for him as their master and the affection with which they regarded him as their friend'.

## Testimonial

Mr. Carver's theological leanings were described as being of 'a moderate Calvinism', which he illustrated in his preaching as giving glory to God, offering peace to penitent believers, stimulating them to live holy lives.

There was a richness and copiousness in all his thoughts and his conduct of worship displayed a free and happy familiarity, but with all due solemnity. He was a practical preacher, faithful and tender, and with a deep sense of the responsibility and greatness of the Christian ministry.

It was noted that in 34 years of ministry at Mel-bourn, 'there was never anything unpleasant between minister and people'. Mr. Carver was universally beloved' and a peace-maker with commanding influence. He carried out his duties with uncommon energies and cheerfulness, was never 'ruffled or fatigued by cares'.

Mr. Carver was well loved by his family, for his son gave testimony that 'as a husband and father, he could not be surpassed. I never experienced anything from him but kindness'. His modesty is shown in the fact that he preferred not to preach away, for he never felt as at home as in Melbourn.

## CHAPTER 8

### Rev. John Medway

On account of Mr. Carver's declining health and consequent inability to perform his pastoral duties, a Mr. John Medway came to Melbourn as a probationer to preach on 4th July 1824. He conducted worship on five Sundays, and was invited for a period of three months.

As a result of this probation, a unanimous invitation was sent to Mr. Medway to become the new pastor. Mr. Medway in turn took a little while to consider this, but on 6th February 1825 signified his acceptance of the invitation.

Mr. Medway was born on Christmas Day 1798, in a village near to Exeter. His parents departed from there when he was seven or eight years old, and while he was still quite young, he became a Christian and attended an Independent Church. In 1818, aged twenty, he entered Homerton College to train for the ministry.

The Ordination Service took place at Melbourn on 26th April 1825, the charge to the minister being given by Professor Walton, tutor to Mr. Medway.

It was noted that in the Service 'Mr. Pepper read the hymns'. This refers to the fact that there were no hymnbooks in those days, and thus it was necessary for someone to read each line of a hymn, and the congregation would then sing that line. Many people knew hymns off by heart.

It was written of him that 'Mr. Medway's labours made him well known in surrounding districts as an able minister of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In 1830, he married Mary, the daughter of John Fordham, a noted member of the Royston church.

## Style of ministry

None could say of Mr. Medway that he was a good or ‘popular’ preacher, there being nothing sensational in his style but instead, a quiet thoughtfulness in which he sought to convince and persuade by the clear presentation of the truth. ‘To him the presence of God was a reality, and his prayers were the real communion with his heavenly Father, of a childlike, devout and loving soul’.

It was said of him that ‘he was singularly pure, modest, gentle and loving ... children delighted in him, and were at home with him at once’.

Mr. Medway was a man of considerable learning, sound judgment and keen intellect, as evidenced by a learned article interpreting 2 Tim. 3 v. 16 in the issue of the ‘Congregational Magazine’ dated August 1838.

Lest it be thought that Mr. Medway was harmless, he was known to have helped the minister at Bassingbourn in March 1836 resist the attempt by the parish priest to levy a church rate (to pay for the upkeep of the Parish Church).

After some years of happy marriage, his wife's health completely failed and Mr. Medway felt constrained to resign the pastorate at Melbourn in September 1841 for her sake. He explained to the congregation ‘In consequence of the distance at which I reside from my sphere of labour, what is done causes greater expenditure of time and strength than if I lived in Melbourn’.

They settled in Ventnor, but after several moves, they did in fact return to live in Melbourn from 1855 until 1858, when Mr. Medway accepted the pastorate of John Street Church, Royston, until 1871. Several years after his retirement, he became confined to his sickroom for a period of five years and died on 7th May 1882.

## CHAPTER 9

### Early ministry, Rev. Andrew Wright

It so happened when Mr. Medway was about to leave Melbourn that a Mr. Andrew Curr Wright was introduced to him. In turn, Mr. Medway introduced him to the deacons at Melbourn as being free to conduct Services throughout October 1841.

Mr. Wright was born in Dundee on 28th July 1808, but with the death of his mother when he was only four years old, he was brought up by grandparents. He became a Christian and joined an Independent Church in Glasgow, before entering Homerton College in 1831 to train for the ministry.

On leaving college at Christmas 1836, Mr. Wright was engaged by Above-bar Chapel, Southampton, to found a church in Itchen, and he succeeded to the extent of having a new chapel erected. To his regret, it was decided not to form a separate church community, and he left to accept a short preaching engagement at Old Meeting, Royston, where he came to know Mr. Medway.

At the end of October 1841, Mr. Wright was invited by the Melbourn congregation to continue with them until Christmas, with a view to accepting the pastorate. This led to a unanimous invitation being offered, which was publicly accepted by Mr. Wright on the first Sunday in 1842, after having been received into membership at the Morning Service.

Seeing that a separate church fellowship had not been formed at Itchen, Mr. Wright had not been ordained there. An Ordination Service was therefore held at Melbourn on 17th May 1842, the charge to the minister being given by his former college principal. At an Evening Service, the sermon was preached by Rev. John Medway.



In his pastorate at Melbourn, Mr. Wright soon wrote a short history of England, which expanded to an account of the rise of Congregationalism and its particular appearance in Melbourn. Detailed information is given upon his predecessors, and in each year from 1846 until his death in 1872, Mr. Wright wrote an 'end-of-year' account of church life under his ministry.

Although the latter end of the nineteenth century is generally reckoned to have been the heyday of Nonconformity in Britain with churches flourishing, it is surprising how pessimistic is the pervading tone of this account. Of the year 1856, Mr. Wright commented 'The year just closed has been still an unsatisfactory one, though not quite so much as the preceding one'.

In this account, an analysis is given each year of the many changes in the church membership roll, but this seemed to hover around 140 for about twenty years. In 1858, a change of minister at the local Baptist Church caused many to switch allegiances, and from then until the close of his ministry, Mr. Wright saw a steady increase to 212.

Mr. Wright was often baffled by the disparity between the effort which he put into his preaching and the lack of response and commitment which it aroused. For 1850 he wrote 'I have been preaching as entirely evangelical discourses as I ever did in my life ..... why it should have been so barren, I cannot tell, but it behoves me solemnly to enquire'.

His diligence did not go unnoticed, for in his obituary it was later written 'Having in the course of his ministry adopted a systematic mode of teaching, he had nearly completed the exposition of the New Testament on Sabbath mornings, and a large portion of the Old Testament on Sabbath evenings; and with what diligence and care these expositions were prepared is discoverable in the volumes of Mss., and in the well-instructed congregation which he has left behind'.

This final sentiment may not have been fully shared by Mr. Wright, who wrote in 1857 ‘the special Services which we held at the beginning of the year have been but little if at all referred to by those who have joined the church ....’.

### Church procedures

It was the practice to hold monthly Church Meetings with the minutes being written by Mr. Wright himself, but the business for the most part related only to the admission or deletion of church members. This was by no means always a straightforward matter, for in March 1850 it was recorded that a Rebekah Chapel ‘was receiving the addresses of an ungodly young man named Emory’, and the application was deferred.

A widow, Louisa Smith, was obviously made of much sterner stuff, for having been adjudged guilty of fornication and her membership cancelled, declared that ‘she was more sorry for the church than for herself’.

Choice of deacons is also described, as for example Mr. Samuel Clear, having been chosen by a show of hands in 1847 and signified his willingness, ‘..... was then set apart by the laying on of hands of the pastor and deacons’.

The pattern of Holy Communion observance was the subject of a referendum in 1851, having been observed every fortnight for a year. Despite Mr. Wright’s preference for more frequency, it was resolved that Communion be held monthly.

A scheme (a foretaste of the later practice of pastoral care by URC Elders) was outlined in 1860 for the pastoral visitation of 240 households with Chapel connections once a fortnight by a team of 20 visitors. Even though religious tracts were to be distributed, the purpose of the visitors was to ‘put forth personal effort for the salvation of the people of their district’.

At the same time, a fund would be set up for the benefit of ‘the poor and afflicted of the congregation who are not members of the church’. This would be administered by two specially appointed ‘assistant deacons’.

### The new church

The project for which Mr. Wright's ministry will be most remembered is the erection of a new church building on a piece of land on the opposite side of Orchard Road.

At Dedication Services held on 2nd January 1866, the preacher was Rev. Thomas Binney in the morning, and Rev.T.W.Boulding in the evening. Amongst those present was Mr. Samuel Morley, a prominent public figure who had been a pupil at the school run by Rev. William Carver, and in the previous year had laid the foundation-stone.

In expansive mood, Mr. Wright gave this account :

‘The goodness of God has been very conspicuous to us in this beginning, and in very many things relating to this new sanctuary altogether. The building is all that we could desire. The weather for the season was very favourable. The ministers whom we expected, and Mr. Morley, all came in good health and spirits. The congregations were respectable and numerous’.

Somewhat disconcertingly, Mr. Wright also quoted a report that the evening congregation reached 1,400 whereas the building was only thought to hold 800. Refreshments were provided to visitors in the meeting-house, formerly the church.

Why was such a large, additional church erected ? Although this may have been influenced by Mr. Wright's pretensions, there were in fact very many children who attended from local boarding-schools, and with other expansionary features, this

would have strongly affected the planning. Sadly, the opportunity may already have been missed, for around this time, the schools began to decline in numbers and the need for extra church accommodation diminish.

Soon after the new church was opened, it was registered for marriages, although it was still necessary for the Registrar to be present. In later years, a red carpet was laid from the gates in Orchard Road to the doors of the church for weddings.

### Family life

In his domestic life, Rev.A.C.Wright was without doubt the wealthiest of the Melbourn ministers. Though he himself came from a poor background, in 1847 he married a widow, Mrs. Ann Ellis (possibly Egg), who was quite well-off, and thus they were able to live in some style in their house in New Road, Melbourn now known as Brantwich. They were married for 25 years.

They employed a coachman/gardener and at least one maid. His means were such that Mr. Wright could afford to waive the small salary that the congregation were able to afford. Children curtsied at his approach.

Family life was marked by some sadness. By his marriage, Mr. Wright acquired a stepdaughter, Agnes Ann Ellis, and to his great joy, she became a church member in 1851. The daughter (Anna Mary) born of the marriage on Christmas Day 1849, however, died 11 months later, and there is reference to a son unnamed, who possibly died in childbirth. Another son, called also (somewhat confusingly) Andrew Curr Wright, was born on 24th July 1951 and became a church member in 1865.

Although Mr. Wright appears to have had friendly relations with the earlier Baptist minister in Melbourn, he entertained strong feelings regarding the Established Church and in particular the

payment of a Church Rate. In 1849, Mr. Wright had had to forfeit a goat 'which had been legally stolen from me in payment of church rate'.

Later that year two men, members of the congregation, were put on trial at Cambridge Assizes 'through the malice of the State priests' for 'refusing to plunder me as constables for a church rate'. He rejoiced that 'God graciously heard our prayer and delivered them out of the hand of the enemy'.

### Declining health

Mr. Wright's health began to deteriorate from the beginning of 1871. He became hoarse and from mid-March to December had to refrain from preaching. Although he resumed in a reduced capacity until 5th May 1872, he became very ill during the night, and after a period of intense pain, died on 1st June 1872. He was buried in an impressive underground vault in the grounds of the new church on 7th June, and a Memorial Service was held two days later, conducted by four local ministers.

A life-long friend, Rev. J. C. Harrison, wrote to his widow 'He was a truly good man. His influence was always on the side of truth, and purity and right, his friendship always to be relied upon, his diligent study of the Scriptures and endeavours really to instruct the people beyond all human praise'.

A tablet on the church wall is inscribed 'His congregation raised this tablet to record their deep sense of his faithfulness as a Christian, his sincerity and kindness as a friend and his generous efforts in the erection of this house of prayer'.

## CHAPTER 10

### Rev. Burgess Wilkinson

For a period of 18 months, Services were conducted by a variety of preachers. On four Sundays in December 1873, the pulpit was occupied by a student from New College, Mr. Burgess Wilkinson, who had been born in 1846. His ministry found such favour that he was unanimously invited to become the next minister. This he accepted and began his ministry on 5th April 1874.

The new chapel was completely full for his Ordination on 18th June, a total of 450 people sitting down to the Tea, held between the Afternoon and Evening Services These were ‘of the most enthusiastic and spiritual character’.

Mr. Wilkinson soon attempted to widen the horizons of church members, and it was resolved on 7th January 1875 to become connected with the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and on 14th October join as a contributing member of the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union, which had been formed in 1875 for the purpose of ‘mutual help by fraternal intercourse, counsel and where needed, financial assistance’.

In 1876 it was resolved ‘that a Choir Committee should be appointed, whose business should be to draw up rules for the guidance of the choir, and to adopt such measures as might be likely to render the service of song more effective’. It was noticeable that the Choir Committee consisted entirely of men, although there is no indication that it was only a male-voice choir.

On 27th May 1888, Mr Wilkinson announced that he had received an urgent and unanimous invitation to become pastor of Tabernacle Congregational Church, Lewes, and a fortnight later he confirmed his acceptance of this invitation.

He explained that ‘My ministry among you has not been for some time past as fruitful in spiritual results as it ought to have been and as I have desired it to be, and the conviction has grown upon me that, if I were to seek another sphere, I might find a better scope for spiritual work, whilst in this place a new voice might win to Christian faith and decision many whose hearts the old voice has hitherto failed apparently to move’.

Despite his humility, however, the church membership had risen to 216, far above that recorded during the ministry of Rev.A.C.Wright.

Mr. Wilkinson conducted his last Service in Mel-bourn on 1st July 1888 and moved to Lewes. From there he retired in 1912 and died in 1928. In his obituary it was stated that he was an ardent student of literature and science, and lectured from his wide knowledge of botany and geology.



*Exterior of Chapel built 1865*

## CHAPTER 11

### A lively ministry, Rev.G.Porter Chappie

Rumour has it that it was the sight of his wife (Anne Selina) bending over the tub doing the weekly wash that persuaded the visiting deacons that Rev. George Porter Chappie was the right person to be their next minister.

Mr. Porter Chappie was born at Nailsea, Somerset, in 1861 and became a member of Langport Congregational Church at the age of sixteen. In 1880 he entered Hackney College to train for the ministry, but a serious breakdown in health caused him to leave in 1882.

After a rest of five months, he became the first pastor at Battle, Sussex. By request of the County Association, he assumed the pastorate at Burwash also in the following year. Under his ministry, the membership of each church increased and the outstanding debt was repaid. Before 1884, he married Ann Selina, whose washing prowess so impressed the Melbourn deacons.

After conducting various Services at Melbourn, Mr. Porter Chappie accepted the invitation to become the next pastor. The new ministry began on 23rd December 1888, and the Induction Service was held on 11th July 1889. One of the first projects was to revise the church roll, which by severe pruning was reduced to 124 (previously 216 at the close of the previous pastorate).

Mr. Porter soon became well known in the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union, and in 1891 was elected its Honorary Secretary. In this office 'he distinguished himself by promptitude, precision, indefatigable industry and efficiency'. In 1897 he became Chairman, and two years later was appointed its representative to the Second International Congregational Council at Boston in the U.S.A. He used the opportunity to visit



various places in Canada and the New England states.

It was written of him that ‘he is a friend of all the churches and of all good causes, never spares himself when help is required, and his help when rendered is fitting and efficient’.

### Bicentenary 1894

The bicentenary of the church was celebrated in due style in 1894. A special weekend was designated for this, Commemoration Services being conducted on 29th April by the Principal of Hackney College, London. The customary Public Tea and Meeting was held the following evening, when the pastor read a history of the church which he had specially written for the occasion.

Full evangelistic zeal was demonstrated in a United Mission, held jointly with the local Baptist Church and led by Rev.R.Mackintosh of Sawston. Large and deeply interested congregations were present each night of the week 17th/25th February 1901, and over 80 people made professions of faith.

For five successive weeks, Mr. Porter Chappie led church membership classes, and 45 persons later joined the church. The church roll at the end of 1901 had risen to 163.

The departure of Rev. G. Porter Chappie took everybody at Melbourn by surprise, for he had been minister of the church for 25 years.

At a specially-convened Church Meeting, Mr. Porter Chappie read out the letter he had received from Worsley Road Church, Manchester, inviting him to become their minister. The deacons proposed a resolution trying to persuade him to remain as pastor, and this was ‘unanimously carried by a rising vote’.

After ‘prolonged and anxious thought’, Mr. Porter Chappie

announced his resignation on 30th June 1913, and conducted his final Services on 21st September, which was Harvest Festival. During this interval, marks of esteem were showered upon him from the Local Fraternal, the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union, the Royston and District Free Church Federal Council and other bodies.

At a farewell gathering, the deacons presented him on behalf of the church with a silver tea kettle and spirit lamp, and a cheque for £50.

In physique, Mr. Porter Chappie was a tall man of strong personality who could preach forcefully for 45 minutes. He was a vigorous Liberal and enthusiastic for the cause of education. He was described as 'upright and unselfish, generous in mind and free from personal ambition, with an intimate knowledge of the problems of a village minister'. He was also known to be very adept in soliciting money for good causes.

In the summer of 1902, he was involved in a serious bicycle accident in Scarborough which gave anxiety for his life, then affected his brain for some months before health and mental vigour was restored.

Of the five children born to the marriage, the eldest (Florence 1884-1956) was well-respected for her singing, Alfred George (1887-1928) was blind throughout his life, Edwin (1890-1901) died at Caterham Congregational School when a pupil there, Albert (1891-1970) became a dentist, and there was a fourth son named Holcroft (1894-1988).

Rev. G. Porter Chappie only remained in Manchester for three years, however, then returned to Cambridge in retirement. After a short time, he resumed office as Secretary to the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union until shortly before his death in 1942.

## CHAPTER 12

### A short ministry, Rev. William Wrigley

Little time was lost in finding a new minister, for after Rev. William Henry Wrigley had preached on two Sundays in November (only six weeks after Rev. G. Porter Chappie had departed), an invitation to become the next minister was received and accepted by him. Born in 1882, Mr. Wrigley was at that time the pastor of a church in Harrold, Bedfordshire.

Mr. Wrigley began his ministry on 1st February 1914. He was welcomed at the Annual Tea and Meeting on 12th February, and the Recognition Service was held on 12th March, being described as ‘a well-attended and very successful gathering’.

It would appear that the new ministry was not an entirely happy one. Mr. Wrigley was a forceful person but did not get on well with certain influential members of the congregation, and so relations became strained.

Thus it was that although the average length of ministry since the founding of the church in 1694 had been 25 years, Mr. Wrigley announced his acceptance of a call to South Norwood Congregational Church after only two years, on 10th September 1916.

In his obituary, Mr. Wrigley was described as ‘a man’s man, and beloved comrade in every Christian enterprise. He had an ordered mind and a care for detail, a genial and brotherly spirit, and was a never failing helper’. He was of very lively disposition, perhaps too much for the congregation's liking, and was known irreverently amongst the children as ‘Wriggly Dick’.

In later years Mr. Wrigley was bombed-out twice in the Second World War, and died in 1946.

## CHAPTER 13

A long ministry, Rev. Jesse Davis

Possibly through being unused to a quick change of pastor, the deacons at first toyed with the idea of inviting Rev. G. Porter Chappie to return, but instead, an invitation was sent on 5th September 1917 to Rev. Jesse George Davis, of Thatcham Congregational Church.

When this was accepted, the tradition of long ministries at Melbourn was restored, for Mr. Davis remained until his retirement 28 years later.

The First World War was very much in the minds of the congregation, for a United Service of Intercession was held in Melbourn Parish Church on 6th January 1918 with Free Church participation. After the end of the war, a Mission was held in the week 10th/14th February 1919 conducted by Rev.F.Hutt of Fowlmere. Church members supported an Appeal for clothing on behalf of stricken people in Belgium and Northern France.

In 1925, the practice of individual Communion cups was made possible by the gift of a set presented to the church by Mr. Alwyne Howard in memory of his mother.

Mr. Davis was the first minister at Melbourn to be appointed an 'Authorised Person', and thus able to officiate at weddings without the Registrar being present.

During the Second World War, the Meeting House was requisitioned for Army purposes, and for a time served as the local Home Guard quarters.

Mr. Davis eventually announced his retirement from the

ministry and conducted his last Service on 30th December 1945. A presentation was made to him in the form of a cheque for £95, a similar ceremony in 1942 to mark 25 years in ministry in Melbourn having been celebrated with a cheque for £105. He continued to live in Melbourn after retirement, being known as a keen gardener, and he died in 1967.

### Character

Mr. Davis was of medium height, well-groomed and widely-read, good looking, gentle and approachable. He was a popular minister, with a gift for prayer, and enjoyed Melbourn so much that he refused many invitations to other pastorates. He was recognised as ‘a most gracious and lovable personality who inspired confidence, indefatigable as a pastor’.

Opinions vary as to his ability as a preacher. His obituary speaks of ‘penetrating and attractive preaching, whereas one of his congregation describes him as ‘not a good preacher, and only ever preaching for 15 minutes’. His sermons seemed to have a fixation upon the Epistles of St. Paul.

Mr. Davis held firm views that he would never give an address at a Funeral Service, but would reserve his tribute until the following Sunday Service, when it was the normal practice for next-of-kin to attend.

In tribute to him as a minister and keen gardener, a large number of shrubs were planted in the burial ground. Similarly, the gates were dedicated to his wife in gratitude for the devoted service she had given.

## CHAPTER 14

### A vigorous ministry, Rev. Stanley Hodges

During the first four months of 1946, Rev. Stanley Hodges conducted worship on two occasions. Trained at New College, London, Mr. Hodges was at that time minister at Tewkesbury. By unanimous vote at a Church Meeting, he was invited to become the next minister.

The invitation was accepted, and Mr. Hodges began his ministry on 1st September 1946. In the Induction Service held on 3rd October, the prayers were offered by the previous minister (Rev. J.G. Davis), and the Charge to the Church was given by the incoming minister's brother (Rev. C. Hodges). Approx. 300/400 people were present.

Mr. Hodges married soon after coming to Melbourn, his wife Edna being somewhat younger than he. A son and two daughters were born to them, two in the manse.

In a national context, discussions began between the Congregational Union and the Presbyterian Church in England upon a possible basis of union of the denominations. After a large meeting in Cambridge, the Church Meeting sent a letter to the General Secretary approving such a union in principle, but voicing disquiet over the role of lay persons and women in particular. Loyalty to Congregational practice in these areas was confirmed.

In Melbourn itself, a scheme for closer working with the Baptist Church was planned in 1950, with monthly combined Evening Services and a three-monthly distribution of pamphlets. Much later (December 1958), an arrangement for combined Christmas Services was agreed.

Within the Church, a possible Mission based upon the national

'Forward Movement' was mooted in 1952, and regular 'invitation Services' were held from January 1953 for many years.

Mr. Hodges was very capable with younger people, and in late 1950 a Games Club for those over 14 years was started and a Pilots Group for those below. After the Evening Service, a discussion group for young people was held in the manse each Sunday. For some years he was the County Youth Leader.

Representatives were elected to the Youth Council formed in Cambridge to encourage smaller churches. It was not until November 1956, however, that the 'Family Church' style was adopted for Morning Worship.

### Church building closure

Serious problems began to emerge over the state of the church buildings, and following advice by an architect (and rather unexpectedly), the strong majority opinion was that the newer chapel should be demolished and the older meeting-house retained as the sole building for all church work and worship. Services in the refurbished Meeting House were resumed in mid-1956.

### End of ministry

On Christmas Day 1958, Mr. Hodges announced that he had accepted an invitation to become minister of Wickford Congregational Church and would be closing his ministry at the end of February 1959.

It was recognised that Mr. Hodges had given firm leadership to the church during a critical time, with the result that the building problem had been solved and a very loyal congregation established.

Mr. Hodges had a lively personality and showed himself to be quite a handyman, making the oak cross above the pulpit. He was a keen bee-keeper, with hives beside the church tennis court. He was a bass soloist, his wife Edna singing a firm alto. Interestingly, he was the first minister to be called by his Christian name.



## CHAPTER 15

### A first ministry, Rev. David Goodsell

An interval of a year ensued, although during this time an invitation was given to Rev.H.Welbourn, minister at Whittlesford. This was first accepted, but then declined when his church members prevailed upon him to stay.

A student straight from New College, Mr. David Goodsell, proved himself acceptable to the congregation after two visits, and an invitation to become the new minister was given and accepted. One particular stipulation was that he should live in the manse. The Ordination and Induction Service was held on 9th July 1960, the charge being given by Rev.J.Huxtable, principal of New College, and the ministry began the following day.

Before commencement, Mr. Goodsell had just married, and as a wedding present, the church gave a month's salary and a larder of food. His wife Jill was a nurse and a more forceful person. A son and daughter were born in the manse.

### Nearby churches

Within two months of his induction, Mr. Goodsell's ministry was extended to include Shepreth Congregational Church. This would involve an afternoon Service once a month and some pastoral visiting. Support was steadily declining, however, and it was later decided to close the church in June 1964, the remaining six members being transferred to Melbourn.

Soon there was a similar experience with Barrington Congregational Church, for in May 1966 the County Union asked whether Melbourn Church would be prepared to give oversight to the small group of members. This was accepted, but in March 1970 the church was closed and its members offered a transfer to Melbourn.

## Nation-wide Church

At this time, much thought was being given nationally to the form of association between Congregational churches, and various Commissions were set up to study vital issues. The Biblical concept of a covenant found growing favour as the basis for a local church, and also for a bond between separate churches.

A wording was thus prepared and agreed for Melbourn church in January 1962, as follows :

We, acknowledging God to be our Father and Jesus Christ His Son to be our Lord and the Holy Ghost to be our Guide, commit ourselves to one another to live together in church order as a company of Christ's people.

We seek to fulfil the will of God, as declared in Scripture by prayer, personal service, and conscientious giving, in bearing one another's burdens and sharing each other's joys, in welcoming the stranger and befriending the poor and lonely, in caring for the young and building up our families as part of the great family of God and by proclaiming His Kingdom.

We intend that our church should be in communion with the Churches of the Congregational order, but seek by God's grace, fellowship with other Churches, especially those of our neighbourhood, working and praying together with them for the unity of Christ's Church in the world, in the knowledge that at the last all will be gathered together in Christ our Redeemer.

A covenant wording was later agreed for the whole Union, which eventually formed itself into 'The Congregational Church in England and Wales' on 22nd May 1966.

## Mission

It was also decided to embark on an 'Every Person Canvas' in

March 1963, whereby a team of visitors would call upon each person (or family) known to have a link with the church, and encourage them to strengthen this link. It was also decided to experiment with monthly Family Services. During this time the Junior Church flourished, and lack of space for its activities proved difficult.

Locally a Council of Churches was formed, and it was agreed to become a member of this. One result was the formation of House Groups for joint Bible study. In addition, a plan was adopted with the local Baptist Church to hold short Services at a local home for elderly people each week. A later campaign 'The People Next Door', however, did not find favour.

In due time, Mr. Goodsell announced on 28th February that he had accepted a call to become the minister of Looe Congregational Church and would leave the pastorate at the end of August 1967. He had proved a well-liked minister, having come straight from college.

He was young and enthusiastic, very anxious to come close to people in their anxieties. His sermons were rather brief, for preaching was not his strongest point, but for housebound people he would make a tape-recording of a Service and play it for them. He was popular with young people.

Mr. Goodsell had many contacts outside church circles and was known for being community-minded. For a time he served the Marriage Guidance Council as a local counselor. After his next pastorate, he left the ministry and became a probation officer.

## CHAPTER 16

### Changing patterns, Rev. John Palmer

Arrangements to find a new minister proved very successful, for a visit from Rev. John Palmer of Solihull during the closing months led to an early invitation being offered and accepted. The Induction Service was in fact held on 11th November 1967.

Mr. Palmer, who was quite unrelated to the local family of fruit-growers who had supported the church faithfully for many years, was born in Bedford on 31st March 1904, one of five sons. His father was a newspaper editor.

He joined Bunyan Meeting Church, and had intended a career in farming. He worked as an agricultural student on the Elbourn farm in Meldreth, and discontinued earlier church connections until he was invited by his employer (who was Sunday School superintendent) to teach in Junior Church one Sunday. This experience renewed his interest and he forsook farming, and trained instead for the ministry at Cheshunt College.

In 1927 he was ordained, and married a Mary Cole. He had held five pastorates before coming to Melbourn.

Mr. Palmer was tall, good at visiting, humorous and of lively mind, capable of unexpected actions such as advising the organist in a Service to play a different hymn tune. His earlier farming interest prompted him to keep a few goats. His wife Mary was supportive but had become an invalid from childbirth, and there were three daughters.

On account of a shortage of ministers and general financial stringency, a plan began to be formulated for a Group Ministry in the area. This was very closely associated with Mr. Austin

Spearing, one of the Melbourn deacons, and under his leadership a meeting of ministers and secretaries was held on 29th February 1968.

The nine Congregational churches embraced by this plan were Royston, Melbourn, Bassingbourn, Litlington, Croydon, Great Chishill, Barley, Fowlmere and Thriplow. They would be known as 'The Western Group of Churches', although this was later renamed 'Royston District Congregational Church'.

It was proposed that the ministers (Revs. Keith Antrobus, Constance Payne and John Palmer) should serve all nine churches, but devote their main time to the church(es) which had originally called them. The Group should strive to integrate the work, fellowship and finances of the separate churches, and to this end a full Preaching Plan was drawn up so that the ministers should visit all the churches.

The plan steadily gained acceptance, a Dedication Service was held at Bassingbourn on 1st October 1968 and a Group constitution was agreed in June 1970. A newsletter found great favour, and a Group Council of ministers, secretaries and elected representatives began to meet regularly.

The ministers appeared to be a well-assorted team. Rev. Keith Antrobus was business-like, Rev. Constance Payne was likeable and outgoing, and Rev. John Palmer was described as full of fun.

Difficulties soon began to arise, most notably in the sphere of finance, where the appropriate level of contributions from the various churches proved very contentious. In particular, the question of manses, their use within the Group, and the rental income from surplus property became very fractious. Other areas of contention could be seen in the future call of ministers in a Group context rather than a local church.

## Wider Union

In a national setting, discussions between the Congregationalists and English Presbyterians were gathering pace with a view to union. The Assemblies of the two denominations had received a report from the special Joint Committee, and churches were urged to discuss and comment upon the implications. The local 'Congregational /Presbyterian Society' visited Melbourn Church on 1st February 1970, and the staff of Westminster College were invited to conduct Services.

The Group arrangements placed great physical strain upon Mr. Palmer (who was not in total sympathy with them), for arthritis in later years reduced his mobility considerably.

## Retirement

Soon afterwards, Mr. Palmer announced that he would be retiring at the end of August 1970. He went to live in Wiltshire, where he served churches in the area and became chaplain to the R.A.F. air base and also in Bath Hospital.

It was said that 'he had a deep faith, humour, love of music and literature, and a skill in speaking and in writing'. He was full of fun, a good story-teller, a fine preacher with a distinguished presence. He died on 24th October 1986, aged 82 years.

## CHAPTER 17

### Group changes, Rev. Wilfred Hurley

The mechanics of choosing a new minister in a Group setting were quickly sorted out when a possible replacement in the form of Rev. Wilfred Hurley began to appear through the good offices of Mr. Austin Spearing.

After conducting a Service on 1st November 1970, Mr. Hurley was invited to become a 'District Church minister and he commenced duties on 1st February 1971, the Induction Service being held five days later. He lived in the Melbourn manse.

Mr. Hurley was born in London on 23rd April 1916, but although being accepted in 1939 by New College for training for the ministry, he had to undertake war work and engaged in heavy rescue during the London bombing.

In 1948 he resumed training, but changed to Yorkshire United College. He served various churches in the North of England until coming to Hadleigh and then the Royston Group.

It was a fortunate choice for the Group, for Mr. Hurley proved a good preacher and a well-organised administrator, conciliatory, likeable, and very effective in holding the Group together. He was a capable chairman in meetings.

### The United Reformed Church

His cohesive power was fully tested in the next few years. The scheme for union of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians was to be voted upon in all churches, and although the voting at Melbourn was quite decisive (twenty-three in favour and four against), the objectors included two deacons (Messrs. Austin

Spearing and Neil Ansell) who, with their wives, transferred their membership soon afterwards to Litlington Church, which voted to stay outside the Union. The remainder of the congregation accepted the changed situation with equanimity.

The United Reformed Church came into being on 5th October 1972, and the Group changed its name to 'Royston and District United Reformed Church' two months later. The loss of Litlington Church was counteracted by the inclusion of Buntingford Church on 30th June 1974.

In Melbourn, increasing concern was felt at the declining attendance at Evening Services. In November 1974, it was agreed to hold monthly United Services with the Parish Church, and to have Bible Study with a short Act of Worship on other Sunday evenings. The latter was discontinued as from April 1978, leaving only the United Services.

In March 1981, Mr. Hurley announced his forthcoming retirement, and he closed his ministry on 3rd May. He continued to live in Melbourn, and served the District Council in various capacities until his death on 16th May 1988.



## CHAPTER 18

### Change of style, Rev. Stuart Jackman

Through the good offices of the Provincial Moderator, contact was made with Rev. Stuart Jackman, minister of Oxted Church. In his earlier ministry, Mr. Jackman had served for two periods overseas and he was already a well-known author and broadcaster.

It is possible that by changing from a large suburban to a village church, Mr. Jackman may have thought that he would have more time for this other ministry.

The invitation given in May 1981 was accepted and the Induction Service was held on 9th October 1981. The spheres of responsibility were re-drawn, and Mr. Jackman took oversight of Melbourn, Fowlmere and Bassingbourn.

Wider ministry was exercised through radio broadcasts from Melbourn, the first being on 6th June 1982, and also through publication of 'Biddings', a book of Service introductions which Mr. Jackman wrote.

Mr. Jackman's period of office, however, was interrupted by a serious operation in June 1982 which severely restricted him for many months and obliged him ever afterwards to restrain his ministry in many ways. From then on, all meetings were to finish by 9.30 p.m.

### End of Royston Group

Strains within the Royston Group became taxing, not least from the reducing number of ministers to which it was entitled as certain churches closed, and the breakup began in May 1984,

when it was proposed that Great Chishill (with Barley; Church should separate and link with Saffron Walden Church.

The actual end of the Group occurred in March 1985, when it was agreed that Melbourn and Fowlmere Churches should retain their own minister (Mr. Jackman). By this time, the Melbourn membership numbered 49 and there was concern as to whether the combined membership was sufficient to justify full-time ministry.

In March 1986, a reception was held for Mr. Peter Wedd, who had held the office of church secretary for 50 years. All previous ministers were present, and a presentation was made of a glass decanter with an engraving of the church building on it. Mr. Wedd continued to serve in this capacity until his unexpected death in April 1994, a total of 58 years.

Mr. Jackman retired to Barnstaple in 1987. Whilst he accepted the new denomination, he remained firmly of the Congregational wing and was not of an ecumenical frame of mind. He had a dislike of administration, which showed itself in guillotined meetings and rather quick decision-making. His sermons were excellent but short, spoken for the most part without notes, and he was very sociable.

## CHAPTER 19

### Linked Pastorate, Rev. Reginald Rooke

Various combinations of churches were suggested so as to justify full-time ministry, and for many months the possibility of joining with Whittlesford Church was investigated.

An alternative link was mooted with Great Chishill, Fowlmere and Bassingbourn URC's. This last grouping, under the title 'Melbourn Linked Pastorate', had been suggested at a special meeting of representatives of the churches south of Cambridge on 22nd January 1988.

The new plan was given impetus when it was learned that Rev. Reginald Rooke, who had served as minister of a similar group of churches in south-east Cambridgeshire since 1982, had expressed interest in becoming minister of the new group.

It was stressed, however, that there were reservations over the way in which the earlier Royston Group had been administered, and the new association should be organised as four parallel churches, coming together in order to sustain ministry for each.

A gathering of Elders of the four churches met Mr. Rooke on 3rd June 1988 and a call was subsequently given which Mr. Rooke accepted. The Induction Service was held on 1st October at Melbourn URC.

Mr. Rooke was born on 9th March 1930 in Bethnal Green, East London, and became a member of the Congregational Church there in 1947. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Nottingham University in 1952.

He was invited to become lay pastor of Ramsay Road

Congregational Church, Forest Gate, in 1964 after a period of fifty years in which the church had been without a minister. In 1967, he resigned this ministry to study in his spare time for the Roll of Ministers examination which would allow him to be ordained. This was completed in 1970.

During this period (until 1982), he continued his secular career as Insurance Manager of various large industrial Companies. The opportunity to be ordained was forestalled by the negotiations concerning the United Reformed Church, but Mr. Rooke became lay pastor of Fetter Lane Congregational Church, Leytonstone, in 1971. On 5th October 1973, the first anniversary of the new denomination, he was ordained.

After three years and a further four years as minister of Ongar United Reformed Church, Mr. Rooke entered full-time service as minister of the Haverhill Group.

In readiness for new ministry, the four churches agreed upon Morning Service timings which would enable Mr. Rooke to conduct two Services each Sunday, and thus conduct worship at each church every fortnight. If he should be held up in the intervening journeys, it was arranged for Services to begin at Melbourn and Fowlmere.

Special arrangements had to be made for conduct of Holy Communion. Celebration was to be held in weekly sequence, and four lay preachers were commissioned to share this with the minister.

A scheme of Elders Pastoral Visitation was begun so that care of members and adherents was more closely exercised, and a social programme was followed which included periodic Church Lunches. For the benefit of the hard-of-hearing, a Loop System was installed in memory of a church friend.

## CHAPTER 20

### Housing and stipends

From the beginning, it was important that the minister (and his family) should be suitably housed, and some information is available upon the various changes in domicile which have taken place. It is rather more difficult to trace the amount of stipend paid, especially in the early years. Certain ministers had private means and so were not so dependent upon this income.

The first pastor (Rev. John Nicholls) served both Great Chishill and Melbourn churches, which he did from a house in Great Chishill, although its whereabouts are not recorded. Seeing that he had inherited an estate from his parents and this was his only pastorate, it is quite possible that he owned this house.

Rev. James Watson became possessed of an estate and the manorial rights attached to the manor of Great Chishill upon his marriage to Anne Hanchett, and thus provided his own housing. The two congregations separated in 1745, and the Melbourn congregation invited Rev. Richard Cooper to be its pastor. The terms of appointment are not known, and it must be presumed that the pastor followed the existing pattern and made his own housing arrangements.

A later minister, Rev. William Carver, combined his ministry with ownership of a flourishing boarding school in Melbourn. This was held in a house called Greenbanks in High Street, Melbourn, owned by a Miss Mary (Molly) Palmer, but a receipt shows that this was rented by Mr. Carver, and was no doubt where he lived.

Whilst the amount of Mr. Carver's stipend as minister is not known, it was clearly augmented by private contributions from members of the congregation. Thus, for example, there is a note that Miss Palmer subscribed to the 'Meeting House Fund', but

also to Mr. Carver's ordination expenses in 1792. She also met the sum of £2.15.0 for his hire of a post-chaise to London and other incidental expenses regarding the death of his father-in-law.

Rev. John Medway was a bachelor when he began his ministry in Melbourn, living in a house in Chiswick End, Meldreth, owned by the Howard family, but he later married a Miss Fordham from Royston, and it is very probable that they lived in a house in the town, for in his resignation letter he referred to the journeying from there to Melbourn causing him some inconvenience.

Rev. Andrew Curr Wright became quite affluent upon his marriage and lived in style in his own house in Melbourn, which was tended by a maid and gardener who served also as handyman and coach-driver. He was able to waive the stipend which the congregation could offer.

This affluence created a problem for the congregation when calling the next minister (later Rev. Burgess Wilkinson) in 1874. A strong obligation to provide a manse for him was felt, but a sustained fund-raising project completed payment by 1880.

A further problem was that Mr. Wilkinson had no private means, and not surprisingly expected to be paid for his services. A visitation of all members was made so that sufficient funds were made available.

In later calls, it became the established form to spell out the terms of settlement in the letter of invitation. For Rev. Porter Chappie, the deacons explained that 'As regards stipend, all we can say is that this will be £150 per annum and upwards, which will depend upon your ministry proving acceptable to the congregation. Occupation of the manse was included, at a nominal rent of £3 per annum to meet insurance and repairs.

There were obviously certain years when his ministry proved

very acceptable to the congregation. In 1889 and 1891 the church accounts showed an item 'Subscriptions for Minister's Stipend' amounting to £163.19.10 and £163.9.3 respectively. In one particular year, the congregation gave Rev. Porter Chappie an extra £300.

Either this was a generation oblivious to the effects of inflation or the settlement terms were exceeded each year, for they remained unvaried during the pastorate of Rev. Porter Chappie (25 years), and were accepted without demur by the next minister, Rev. W.H. Wrigley.

The terms of settlement for Rev. Jesse Davis have unfortunately been lost, but the church accounts in 1928 show that an amount of £225 was paid by way of stipend and incidental expenses. Later accounts show that this increased steadily during his ministry to £254 in 1944.

In one year during the 1930's, however, a severe frost at a vital growing-time eliminated most orchard produce. Farmers, farm labourers and fruit-pickers had little or no income for that year. Offerings were drastically reduced, and Mr. Davis was obliged to take a cut in stipend as a result.

The letter of invitation to Rev. Stanley Hodges in 1946 explained 'with regard to stipend, we offer you a minimum of £250 per annum with manse rent and rates free, and as our church never carries a large balance, should the income exceed that amount it would be passed on to our minister, as it always has been in the past. This, of course, will largely depend upon your ministry among us'.

In this form of 'payment by results' (adopted also for previous ministers), the letter was silent upon what might be the effect of a deficit in the church accounts. This could well have been of material concern in some years, for example in 1952, when contributions to the minister's stipend amounted to £242. In 1955 and 1957, however, the stipend was shown as £345 and £377.

Over the years, the minister's stipend had been gradually increased to allow for inflation, and in 1958 this was already in line with the guideline of £430 per annum offered nationally. The church finances, however, could only provide an allowance of £10 per child, whereas the national figures suggested £40 for the first and £35 for other children. The church agreed also to participate in the new ministerial superannuation scheme.

The effect of inflation was shown in the agreement made in 1967 with Rev. John Palmer, who was paid a stipend of £640 per annum, plus expenses, and a contribution of £80 towards the cost of heat and light. The manse was provided free of expense.

### Nation-wide funding

In the 1960's, movement was steadily made towards the denomination assuming responsibility for centralised payment of ministers' stipends, using a central pool towards which all churches contributed according to their financial resources.

This meant that local churches were relieved of the responsibility of setting and paying the stipend, and more uniformity was made possible, particularly with regard to minimum levels and pension arrangements. This scheme came to the rescue when the Royston Group found it difficult to provide adequate stipends to their three ministers, and in July 1971 made application to the central 'Maintenance of the Ministry Fund' for help.

The predicament was solved when three years later, a national scheme was brought into being. A document called 'Plan for partnership in ministerial remuneration' was adopted for spelling out entitlements.



## CHAPTER 21

### Financial aspects

Information upon the financing of the church is a little sparse until the coming of Mr. Wilkinson, but it is known that from this point, a system of 'pew rents' enabled the minister's stipend to be met. These were paid by worshippers every three months or year, and allowed a particular pew to be reserved for Services. For this purpose, numbers were painted on the ends of pews.

Mr. Peter Wedd explained the system as follows :

Pew rents paid the minister's stipend and were used until we moved out of the 'large church'. Until 1926, we had one offering per month for 'Incidental Expenses', and from 1926 an offering every Sunday. If pew rents fell, short of the minister's stipend, it was made up out of the Incidental Expenses fund.

The church finances were sometimes bolstered by legacies made by such persons as Mr. William Stockbridge who died on 24th November 1892 and whose tombstone tells

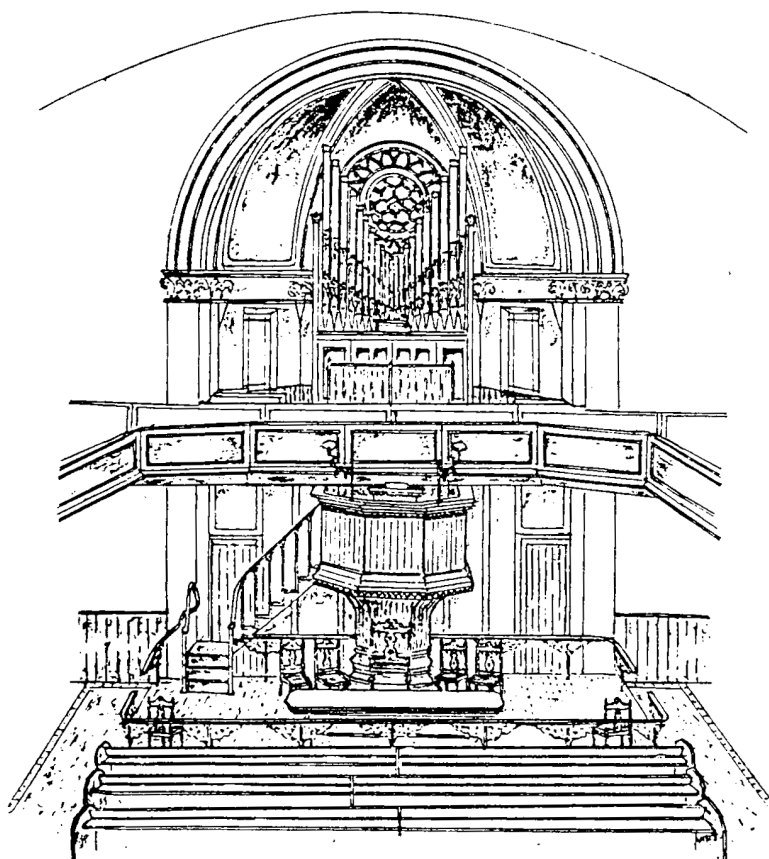
He bequeathed the sum of £200 to be invested in Government Funds and held in trust by the Minister and Deacons of Melbourn Congregational Church the interest thereof to be applied annually in equal proportions to the stipend of the Minister of the said Church and the funds of the Sunday School.

In 1919 the congregation agreed to give support to the scheme put forward by the Congregational Union in England and Wales for one penny per month per member to be given for church extension, ministerial superannuation and other worthy causes.

It was the practice for Mr. Davis to call monthly upon the

treasurer for his payment cheque. The church did not have any bank account of its own, and the treasurer carried out all financial transactions through his own private account. It was not until church accounting became more involved after the Second World War that it was felt necessary to open a church account.

Consideration of a possible Free Will Offering scheme took rather a long time, but was introduced in June 1960.



*Interior of Chapel built 1865*

## CHAPTER 22

### Buildings

Although the combined Meldreth and Melbourn congregation established itself in Melbourn, the whereabouts of the first building used for worship are not known. The number of attenders increased steadily, reaching a total of 400 hearers each Sunday, however, and in 1716, a piece of land was purchased in Orchard Road for the erection of a place of worship.

Some confusion has arisen over the actual date of erection, various authorities giving the date 1723. A detailed account by an earlier minister, Rev.A.C.Wright, gave the date 1723 but this was altered to 1717 by a later scribe.

On the other hand, it is recorded that ‘Ambrose Benning, a Thriplow gent’ did appear personally at the office of the Consistory Court on 20th July 1717 seeking a licence for the newly-erected ‘house of burial’, and the wording of a letter of the same date (which hangs on the rear wall of the church) is as follows :

'To Sir ... Johnson comisarie to the Bishop of Ely 20 July 1717. This is to certifie you and all others in authoritie whome it doth or may concern that there is lately erected a house of burial in Melborne in the Countie of Cambridge by the Protestant Dissenters on purpose to meet together in to worship God. It is humbly desired that this certificate may be registered and a certificate thereof may be given according to the directions of an Act of Parliament made anno primo William and Mary'.

There are no pictures of the first building extant, but it occupied the major part of the site. This left no space around for burials of church members, and it was necessary to dig out and install a brick-lined vault beneath the building for this purpose. This explains the term ‘house of burial’ in the above letter. The vault (which also contains earth graves) still exists.

An interesting feature of the building consisted of galleries along two sides which were supported by timber columns, all hewn out of single oak trees.

### Extension

It is thought that the building remained unchanged in shape until the ministry of Rev. William Carver, when it was decided to enlarge the size of the building to accommodate the large congregations.

The project consisted of extending the front of the building southwards, with a gallery connecting those along the two sides. The latter was supported on timber columns, but hewn from pitch-pine rather than oak. In addition, a 'lantern' (or cupola) was installed to allow more light into the interior. The date is variously given as 1813 or 1819, but a 'coin' minted in celebration bears the date 1815.

This work increased the seating capacity from 400 to 800. The cost exceeded £900, but was raised almost entirely from within the congregation.

The church at Melbourn continued to expand under Mr. Medway's leadership, and in 1830 the building was enlarged by the addition of a vestry with gallery along the north side (later known as the 'Small Hall').

### An imposing new Chapel

The project for which Rev. A. C. Wright's ministry will be most remembered is the erection of a new church building. The existing Chapel, dating from 1717, had become in much need of repair and it was thus decided to build another, on a piece of land on the opposite side of Orchard Road. This land had been acquired by Mr. Wright in 1862, and was given by him to the Trustees by conveyance dated 19th April 1865 on payment of ten shillings. The conveyance rather surprisingly includes

stipulations upon the appointment and faith of the pastor and the role of the Church Meeting.

A number of architects were invited to submit their designs, and these were displayed for public viewing in the school premises in Mortlock Street. The design submitted by Mr.R.H.Moore of London was selected, and the building work was undertaken by Luke Gimson of Royston. The foundation stone was laid on 23rd February 1865 by Mr. Samuel Morley of London, and the building was open for worship eleven months later, on 2nd January 1866.

The large and commodious building was described as being in 'the Italian-Gothic' style, rectangular in shape measuring 80 feet by 51 feet, and built of white bricks with slated roof. The front of the church was flanked by two towers higher than the roofline, each having an entrance door, and the main central door had windows either side and a large circular window above. A flight of steps rose to this central door approx. two feet above the ground level.

Inside, a gallery stretched the four sides of the building, with the organ (hand-pumped) and choir-stalls contained in an apse behind the large free-standing pulpit. Underneath the pulpit was a minister's vestry, and a boiler-room beneath that. Seating consisted of fixed pews, and the building held in all 800 people.

The cost of the new Chapel amounted to £3,000 if the value of gifts was included. Amongst these gifts were the site, organ and stained glass window, all donated by the minister and his wife. Apart from an interest-free loan of £200 from the English Chapel Building Society, the cost had been met in full by the end of the official opening. The loan itself was extinguished in 1870.

The original illumination was by gas until about 1917, when the local gas-works closed. Oil-lamps, the lighting of which was a lengthy job for the caretaker, were used until 1929, when electricity came to Melbourn. The oil-lamps gave a dim light

overall, and it was difficult to see from one end of the Chapel to the other.

The new Chapel was not without inadequacies. In 1865 Mr. Wright confided a degree of disappointment in his diary 'I wished it to be a somewhat better place than it is now to be, but this has no doubt been overruled for the best'.

Already by the first half of 1868, it had , become apparent that the building was too wide, and that the walls were beginning to bulge outwards with the weight of the roof. It was necessary to insert tie-rods at a cost of £156, and for the period from June to August the old meeting-house had to be used again for worship.

The heating system also was not entirely adequate, for the hot water to radiators relied upon gravity-feed and the heat could not reach certain parts, thus creating 'cold spots' in winter. It was necessary for the caretaker to start heating the building on Friday in order to be warm for Sunday Services.

The building did not contain any small rooms, nor such elementary features as a kitchen, and the water-closet in the vestry was never known to work. In fact flush toilets were unknown in the village at this time. The towers had continually to be protected against bird-entry, and movement of slates on their roofs involved severe access problems.

### The manse

The affluence enjoyed by the Wright household was to cause a problem for the congregation when calling the next minister (Rev. Burgess Wilkinson) in 1874. An obligation to provide a manse for him was felt keenly, but this was satisfied firstly by a half-acre plot of land in New Road being offered by Mr. Andrew Curr Wright, son of the former minister, who laid the foundation stone at the close of the afternoon Ordination Service for Mr. Wilkinson.

Secondly, the cost of building the manse (£707) was met by fund-raising by the congregation. This was begun with a gift of £25 from the former minister, Rev. John Medway. The campaign culminated in a bazaar in 1880 which cleared the £200 debt. Subsequent ministers lived in this house until 1950, when it was sold and given the name Mansfield House.

### The Meeting-House

During the bicentenary year 1894, the stepped floors on the two sides of the gallery in the old Meeting House were leveled to provide passages and three Sunday School rooms each. A central-heating system was installed there, and the organ in the main church enlarged from one to two-manual, the total cost being £650. A recital to show off the expanded organ was held later in the year.

### Demolition of the Church

Serious problems began to emerge in the 1950's over the state of the church buildings after the discovery of dry rot in the Meeting-House floor, and an architect was appointed to give a full report on the position.

In his report given on 29th April 1953 to the Church Meeting, Mr. Jeffs reported that the complex of buildings was much too big for present need and the cost of maintenance could prove crippling. The church thus needed to consider carefully its long-term strategy, but in the meantime, the dry rot had to be eliminated.

In rather unexpected fashion, the strong majority opinion was that the newer Chapel should be demolished and the older Meeting-House retained as the sole building for all church work and worship. The wood floor was accordingly replaced, and the windows renewed. Over a period the organ (with professional help), Communion table and chairs, pews and all furniture were carried by volunteers from the new to the older building.

An agreement was subsequently reached whereby Pye Ltd. of Cambridge rented the abandoned building for the storage of radio and television sets for a period until January 1959. The total rent received paid for the cost of eventually demolishing the building.

To the sadness of many, the abandoned church was demolished in May 1963, but interestingly, papers and coins were found hidden in the foundation stone.

### Meeting-House refurbishment

Meanwhile, in order to upgrade the re-used Meeting House, plans were drawn up for a new kitchen, vestry and toilets at the rear of the building, and a tender for £1,400 was accepted in November 1959. This work included the building of the present wall behind the pulpit, incorporating the two roof-high pillars. The gallery on this side was leveled to provide an upper room, and the classroom partitions along two sides were removed.

During the ministry of Rev. David Goodsell, the present pulpit was installed in memory of four deacons.

It became obvious from March 1968 onwards that more space was needed for the thriving Junior Church, and two months later, a plan was made for a new schoolroom to be built on part of the graveyard adjacent to the church building. A tender of £2,000 was accepted for the work, some to be undertaken by church members. Planning permission was granted and the schoolroom was opened on 13th April 1969.

In 1979, concern was felt about the condition of the Meeting-House (now the main church) building. Major roof repairs were becoming necessary, entailing provision of new roof timbers and slates, and complete refurbishing of the two large rooms at the rear.

An 'Urgent Restoration Concern' Appeal was made to all those



known to be connected with the church, so as to raise £6,000 for these repairs. Application for a grant was also made to the Historic Churches Trust. The necessary repair work increased more than expected and approx. £7,500 was raised, with a grant of £5,000 forthcoming from Government funds.

### Manse enlargement

When negotiations began with Rev. Stuart Jackman, it was immediately apparent that the manse was too small for his family, and although the Church Meeting agreed to extend the manse so as to provide four bedrooms and a downstairs study, the project took until the end of 1982 to complete and during this period, Mr. Jackman was obliged to take lodgings in Melbourn.

### Redecoration of Church

When Tercentenary celebrations were mooted, it was strongly felt that the premises once more needed overall redecoration in readiness. This project would include installation of a new ceiling in the sanctuary, and repainting of the premises. Such was the enthusiasm generated that a gift of new carpeting was made, the pews re-varnished, and a small organ repair carried out.

## CHAPTER 23

### Sunday School memories

The Sunday School met in all its Departments in the Meeting House every Sunday afternoon and was supported with enthusiasm, as the following accounts from two sisters (Mrs. Alice Cooper and Mrs. Elsie Fuller) show :

(1) The church that we now have used to be our Sunday School. It began at half past nine in the morning. We had a card which was stamped with a star, then we had the opening and went to our own classes in little rooms in the gallery.

For our anniversary, we had to come from Meldreth to Melbourn to practice some weeks beforehand. It used to be in May, and the church that used to be on the other side of Orchard Road was full up from top to bottom.

Then a few weeks after that, we had our Sunday School treat which was a nice dinner in the Sunday School. The tables were laid out with nice white table cloths. Then we used to walk to the Bury Meadows for tea and games, and a boat ride on the river.

On Sunday afternoons there used to be 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' in the church for women if they liked to go.

The organ in the old church had to be pumped by someone while it was playing. I think a Mr. Ward was the organist at that time.

(2) Two things I remember in the history of our Church, firstly our Sunday School teacher, Miss Dandy. She lived in Melbourn Lodge, on the High Street opposite the Dolphin. In the autumn she would have the older girls one evening a week for needlework.

We would make kettle-holders, which sold well in those days, and also little aprons. These were all to sell at the Christmas Bazaar. Then in May or June according to the weather, we would go into the meadow and help with the hay-making, which was good fun.

The second thing is that one of the concerts the Sunday School children did was a tableau. I am not sure what it was called, but there was a Welsh girl in it and we all wanted to be that Welsh girl. Lou Winter was chosen.

At the end of the concert we all went up on stage and sang 'Jesus shall reign ..' which we had to learn to sing without books. Strange as it may seem, but Lou Winter married a Welshman by the name of Howell.

## CHAPTER 24

### Organisations and social activities

In its heyday between the two World Wars, the Chapel could have laid claim to being the hub of Melbourn social life. The premises were in use all day Sunday and most nights of the week, with a wide range of activities and interests.

The church building was in use three times on most Sundays, with congregations reaching 400 for the Evening Service. Once a fortnight during the afternoon, there was a meeting known as 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' (PSA) which included talks of a devotional nature and music-making. Much hymn-singing took place, and its members were sufficiently talented to form a small orchestra.

A Prayer Meeting was held one night a week, except for the week when the Church Meeting was held.

Traditionally there has been a strong church choir, with an anthem performed at each Service. Each Good Friday, other choirs would join to perform the 'Messiah' or other such longer work.

For children, the 'Band of Hope' met each week from October to April, and its registers and minute-books covering the years 1898/1914 show that regularly over 60 children aged 6-13 years attended. The optimum appeared to be 19th December 1906, when 86 attended. In 1905, 35 children signed the pledge 'I promise to Abstain from all Intoxicating Drinks as Beverages'. A large number of adults gave supervision, and a paid organiser for the county visited twice-yearly.

A Young People's Guild (previously the 'Mutual Improvement

Society') met regularly, providing a wide range of activities including lectures and lantern slides. Another such activity was drama, with many sketches and one-act plays being performed around the villages. The Guild was mainly for church connected young people.

A Boy Scout company was formed soon after the First World War by a Belgian refugee, and regularly attracted 15 to 20 older boys. A Girl Guide company was equally successful over a long period.

A weekly Ladies Working Party was first formed to make clothing for the poor, but over the years this changed to making items for sale at the Christmas Bazaar.

The Upper Room housed a library open once a week to any borrower, and a separate library catered for Sunday School children.

On the large area of land behind the Church stood a tennis court used regularly by the Tennis Club, and many tournaments and ordinary matches were played there. A special hazard was that Mr. Hodges also kept bees on the land, and the two activities did not always co-exist amicably.

## CHAPTER 25

### Salient features

With this life of witness and worship spanning over 300 years, it is instructive to try and identify those features which mark this history of the church.

The first is the strong sense of continuity. This is particularly true of the ministry, for most ministers have stayed for long periods, but it is also true of the succession of 'lay' people who have likewise served for long periods as church secretaries, treasurers, Sunday School teachers, and in other posts of responsibility.

The faith they have held has been of a quiet, confident and tolerant nature, but firm and deeply held, and always allowing of new insights. Apart from the early dissatisfaction with Rev. Samuel Bull, there has been a noteworthy absence of friction and quarrelling.

For most later history, there has been steady interest in the wider church, primarily through local associations of various kinds and in County Unions, and a willingness to contribute to financial needs. This has given the church a far wider horizon than its own immediate affairs and problems.

This combination of steadfast loyalty, open-ness, and wider vision perhaps highlight those areas important to the future well-being of Melbourn United Reformed Church as well.



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3 Walsingham Drive  
Corby Glen, Grantham  
Lincolnshire  
NG33 4TA