

‘ a candle glowing in a quarry’

A history of
Swanage United Reformed Church

from
Independent Meeting House
to
Congregational Chapel
to
United Reformed Church

1705 - 2005

by
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Swanage

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Foreword

It seems appropriate to mark the Tercentenary of the founding of what is now the Swanage United Reformed Church (URC), by not merely writing a third supplement to the history of the Church, but by starting from the original history and its two supplements and expanding them into this 'new' history with the aid of other source material. The Church is grateful to Rollo Woods for undertaking this task on its behalf.

Swanage URC in many ways is no different from the early dissenting congregation which moved from being an Independent Chapel, possibly even Presbyterian, through Congregational to its present form. When I look out from the pulpit on a Sunday, I see people of many traditions and none. There are those who have always been Congregationalists and can trace their own family history back through the three hundred years of the life of this church. But also there, are former Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists and Roman Catholics – and even a growing number who have only ever been members of the United Reformed Church.

In putting this short history together, Rollo has brought some of the characters of the last three hundred years to life. Without his research some of our ancestors' stories would have remained buried in the dusty archives. I pray that when in due course another 'new' history is prepared in the future, our stories will make just as fascinating reading.

Dave Harkison
Swanage URC Manse
March 2005

Short History of Swanage United Reformed Church, 1705-2005

This account updates and expands the brief accounts of the Church published in 1951, with Supplements, and is prepared for the Tercentenary Celebrations in 2005 by Rollo G Woods.

Preface

1 – Background, to 1705

2 – 1705 – 1832

3 – 1832 – 1908

4 – 1908 – 2005

Acknowledgements

This brief history was commissioned to amplify and update the previous histories of the Church: *A short history of Swanage Congregational Church ...* by Leonard Tatchell (1951), and its two Supplements: *Supplement to the History of the Swanage Congregational Church ...* by L. Tatchell (1955), and *Second Supplement to the History ... now the Swanage United Reformed Church, 1955-1980*, compiled by the Rev. Hugh R. Dolphin. (1980). Copies of all three of these were lent to me by Mrs Jenny Lazenbury. I also consulted Leonard Tatchell's daughter, Miss Sophy Tatchell. I used two books in the Church Library; *The story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset ...* by W. Densham and J. Ogle. 1899. (Densham, the minister at Wareham, wrote the section on Swanage, p.306-314.), and *The story of the Dorset Congregational Association*, by Lionel Brown. (1971). A copy of the A-level paper: *To what extent does the history of Swanage Congregational Church, 1850-1950 reflect the national trend in Protestant Nonconformity?* by Lucy Walsh (now Lucy Brierley), was lent to me by Mrs Judy Walsh. Mr Bill Bradford, having read a letter by the Minister in the Swanage

Advertiser, sent me a photocopy of an obituary of Sir Stephen Collins. The Minutes of recent Church AGMs and Elders Meetings were lent to me by Jim Farrer, Church Secretary. To all these good friends I am most grateful.

The main source of all historical information about the Church is the collection of Church records, now stored, and well cared for, at the Dorset Record Office. Access to these is still controlled by the Church. The time-scale of the project did not allow me to study more than a few of these. *The Church Book*, begun c. 1832, and the *Church Book of the Mission Hall, 1872-*, were checked. Many of the records of the Choir were checked, because a cd of Church music over 300 years was also to be produced. The Church magazine (now *The Link*) was used whenever issues were available; there are none before 1900, or between 1908 and 1930, and there are many gaps after that date. This means that the Church's financial records, the Minute Books of Church Meetings and Deacons/Elders Meetings, and those of the many societies and institutions which are an important part of Church life, remain for some future historian to examine and analyse. Nor have other local records been checked – the records of other Churches, the local press, and books on Swanage history, except those I happen to own. Any errors in interpreting these sources are mine.

Such errors are, however, remediable. The text was input to my computer, for transfer to another for the insertion of illustrations, and formatting for publication. This onerous work was undertaken by Jim Farrer. The computer file will not then be destroyed. It can be updated at any time to cover new developments, and to insert additional information uncovered by further research into the records.

Section 1

‘Jesus Christ, the only head of the Church’ – By using this phrase in its sacraments and ordination services, today’s URC proclaims its links with the first Congregationalists. In about 1586 Henry Barrow, the Founder of Congregationalism, wrote: ‘*Christ is the only head of the Church, and His Laws no man may alter.*’ For this treasonable statement – Queen Elizabeth I thought she was head of the Church, and could make its laws – Barrow and his colleagues were first imprisoned, and then, on April 6, 1593, hanged at Tyburn.

Barrow also wrote: ‘*The least member of the Church that is a communicant, hath as much interest in all the censures of the Church as the pastor, and hath equal power according to the rules of the Word to censure the pastor for errors or transgression, as the pastor hath to censure them.*’ Believing that Christ was the head of the Church, that the Church consisted only of those who had accepted Christ as Saviour, and that all members, on profession of faith, were equal before God, small groups of Independents – or Separatists - began to meet for worship privately during Elizabeth’s reign. The Presbyterians, a much larger Puritan group, continued to believe in a national Church. The Independents supported them during the Civil War and during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. Under Cromwell, the Church of England was Presbyterian, and parish priests had to accept puritan beliefs and a Presbyterian form of Church government, or could be replaced.

When Oliver Cromwell died in 1658, there was little enthusiasm for continued puritan rule, and the Protestant dissenting bodies (Baptist, Independent, Presbyterian, and Quaker) joined with the Anglicans in supporting the restoration of Charles II. Dissenters generally supported the idea of a national Church, but one tolerant enough to include them as well as the Anglicans. Charles recognised this before his return by his Declaration from Breda: ‘... *no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matters of religion, which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom.*’

However, when Charles did return in 1660, all priests who had been dispossessed since 1640 were reinstated, and the Cavalier Parliament, seeking revenge, passed a series of Acts, the 'Clarendon Code' (Lord Clarendon was Lord Chancellor). The first of these, the Corporation Act (1661) laid down that *'no person shall hereafter be elected or chosen into any of the offices or places aforesaid (i.e. hold any elected post in local government), that shall not have, within one year next before such election... taken the sacrament of the Lord's supper, according to the rites of the Church of England...'* This was followed by the Act of Uniformity (1662), which required all clergy to use the new Book of Common Prayer, to accept Episcopal ordination, and forbade others to preach or conduct worship in any Church. These conditions had to be accepted before St Barnabas Day, August 24, 1662; the date was chosen because tithes, on which most of the clergy depended, were paid the following week, so that those who did not conform lost the equivalent of a year's salary.

Other Acts restricted the rights of dissenters. The Conventicle Acts, 1664 and 1670, prohibited any gathering for worship of more than five people (*'Some families scrupled to ask a blessing on their meat, if five strangers were at table'*), and the Five Mile Act of 1665, which forbade ejected ministers from preaching in the towns where they had previously been installed. The fines for breaching these laws were heavy, and as one-third was paid to the informant, it encouraged snooping on your neighbours. Other acts barred Non-Conformists from most professions, and from the Universities. Dissenters had to set up their own Academies, primarily to train students for the ministry, although, because more varied courses were later offered, and some of the Dissenting Academies were good, some Anglican students studied there rather than at Oxford or Cambridge. Some Academies were later absorbed into the 19th century civic Universities, and the Libraries of 12 were transferred to New College, London, and later to Dr Williams's Library.

Despite all threats and regulations, over 1900 ministers preached farewell sermons on August 17, 1662, and then resigned their livings, refusing to conform to the Act of Uniformity. They were to be known forever as Non-Conformists. Edmund Calamy, the historian of the Great

Ejection, wrote of these men: *'Had all the ministers conformed, people would have thought there was nothing in religion, and that it was a thing only to be talked of in the pulpit and serve a state design, while ministers turned and changed with the state. But these men giving up their livings, and exposing themselves and their families to outward evils, rather than conform to things imposed not in their eyes agreeable to the Gospel they preached, have convinced men there is a reality in religion.'*

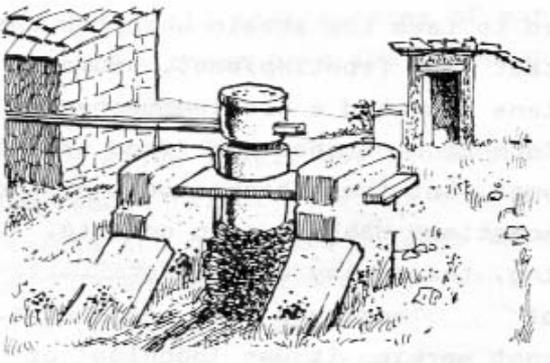
It was to be 200 years, and after many battles, before all the restrictions of the Clarendon Code were removed, and some of its results are with us still. However, the most extreme regulations were soon relaxed, and a Toleration Act of 1672 allowed non-conforming ministers to have a licence to preach, and so to gather a congregation of committed Christians. This Act was soon withdrawn, and there was further persecution for a while. However, the Revolution of 1689 expelled the Roman Catholic James II, and replaced him with the staunchly Protestant William and Mary. The Toleration Act in the same year allowed Non-Conformists not only to worship in their own way, but to register houses, converted outbuildings, etc., as places for worship, and even to build, not Churches, of course, but Meeting Houses and Chapels. Among these was Swanage Independent Meeting House, at the far end of the High Street, erected in 1705.

Although the turmoils of these years cannot have passed the town by altogether, Swanage was never a major player in any campaign. Calamy does not mention Swanage, and neither does John Walker's *Sufferings of the Clergy during the Grand Rebellion, 1642-60*. In fact, the parish living was held by Brune Cockrum, D.D., from 11 November 1614 until his death in 1667. How he managed to meet the successive requirements of Archbishop Laud, Cromwell, and the Clarendon Code, is not known. The relative peace of the town was probably because it was never a borough with a Corporation, nor was there any wealthy family who could compel their tenants to attend a particular Church. Most of the townsfolk were quarrymen or fishermen, and relatively, or very, poor. Things were different elsewhere in Dorset, where there were in all 52 ejections. (Dorset has about 270 parishes.) Dorchester itself had long been a major Puritan centre. In 1629 a party went from

Dorchester to found the colony of Massachusetts; they called their settlement Dorchester. (It is now absorbed into the city of Boston.) Use of the Clarendon Code led to 6 ministers and 70 others being in Dorchester prison in 1664. Nearer to Swanage, Thomas Chaplyn, the minister of the three parishes in Wareham, who had been 'intruded' in 1648, was ejected in 1660. He had been prudent enough to invest £100 in the East India Company, and as that paid dividends of 40, 50, even 70%, his family was well provided for. When his wife died in 1681, she was buried in the chancel at Wareham. The Bishop's Court objected, as she was excommunicate, and so the body was dug up and re-interred in the Churchyard. The Court again objected, but the Mayor and others pointed out that the Churchyard was divided into three sectors, one for each parish, and that she had been reburied under one of the paths dividing the plots, so she was allowed to lie in peace.

Section 2

The Clarendon Code drove the Non-Conformists underground. Small groups of believers met in private houses, farm outbuildings, or even in the open air. Prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, and preaching had to be concealed, and any singing was 'in a low tone' to avoid detection. (The Independents, unlike some other puritan bodies, supported singing as a part of worship, though they drew the line at singing prose – as in the Book of Common Prayer – and sang only metrical psalms and hymns.)



There is a strong local tradition that the Swanage Independents sometimes met in the quarries, which at that time were closer to the town, and included the area that is now Park Road. Whether the first Non-Conformists in Swanage were Independents or

Presbyterians is not certain, though the Church was registered as Independent. Nor do we know whether its members had left St Mary's because of the Act of Uniformity, or at some later date, but there were enough of them for the Rev. William Clark, the minister at Wareham from 1670 to 1722, to walk over to Swanage on a weekday and lead worship in a house on Church Hill. A secret signal summoned the quarrymen in his congregation. At least once he had to escape from his persecutors by hiding in a quarry.

William Clark had married Mary Eastman, the daughter of an ejected minister from Everly, Wilts., who had settled in Shaftesbury, and later became the first licensed minister there. At his death, his papers were given to William Clark. One of her family was an ancestor of G .H. Eastman, OBE, a well-known missionary to the Gilbert Islands, who settled in Swanage on his retirement, and played an active part in the life of the Church, his wife being active in the Women's Guild. Their son,

the Rev Philip Eastman, is a member of Swanage URC.

By 1705 the congregation was large enough to build its own Meeting House, on part of the garden of a house belonging to John Stevens. No drawing or description of it seems to survive, nor is there any account of how the building was financed. As similar buildings elsewhere were erected by members of the congregation, and many of the Swanage Independents were quarrymen, they may have done much of the work themselves. The Church was also strong enough to call its own pastor, and the Rev. Jonathan Wheeler was able to preach the first sermon in the new Meeting House on August 15, 1705. He chose as his text *'Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.'* (Nehemiah 13.14.). The building was certified under the Toleration Act by seven leading members of the Church: Walter Scott, James Thompson, Samuel and Anthony Serrell, John Hayward, John Pushman and Charlotte Weekes. The land was conveyed to Wheeler, Thompson, William Seymour, Abraham Smith, Charles Weeks, Stephen Lock, John Howard, and Nathaniel Clarke. Many of these names recur in later documents, and some are well-known in Swanage still.

Jonathan Wheeler served until 1708, and then removed to a Church in Tiverton. Another pastor was not found until 1714, when Richard Darracott was called. His wife's maiden name was Risdon. She died in 1717, following the birth of her son, who was baptised Risdon in her memory. Risdon later became a noted Independent minister (A biography was published, which is among the Church records), and the name was used in the family for several generations. Richard's second marriage, to Lucy Thornhill, was disastrous - *'instead of soothing he only aggravated his cares and sorrows by a second marriage who – till the union, concealed her wickedness under the garb of superior piety'* - and was the reason he left Swanage in 1722.

Richard Glanvill was pastor for 20 years (1723-43), and he was followed by James Whittaker (1743-50), and two short pastorates: John Copplestone (1751-2) and Mathew Twogood (1753-57). John Morrison was called in 1757. By 1774 his congregation was *'about 120, but poore, and scarce raise Mr Morrison £16 a year for himself and his wife,*



William Sedcole 1786-1806



and even that is in danger of being diminished by the attachment of his hearers of late to the Wesleyan Methodists'. Morrison retired in 1785, and died in 1787. His successor, William Sedcole, was ordained in 1786. He was therefore pastor when John Wesley made an unscheduled visit to the town. Wesley, then 84, had planned a visit to Guernsey, and recorded in

his Journal:

'August. Monday 13. We set out from Yarmouth with a fair wind; but it soon turned against us, and blew so hard we were glad to put in at Swanage. I found we still had a little society here. I had not seen them for 13 years, and had no thought of seeing them now; but God does all things well. In the evening I preached in the Presbyterian Meeting House, not often, I believe, so well filled; and afterwards passed half an hour very agreeably with the minister, in the parsonage-house, which he rents, a neat, retired house, with a delightful garden. Thence we adjourned to the house of our old brother Collins, and between eight and nine went on board. (He sailed from Swanage the next day, but was driven into Alderney, where he held a service on the beach.) Sedcole was also a founder member, in 1795, of the 'Dorset Missionary and Itinerant Society', the first of the organisations formed by the Congregational Churches of Dorset, from which the Dorset Congregational Association was to develop. Swanage has always supported the Association, several of its meetings have been held in Swanage, and some of the Pastors have held office in it.

The congregation had got smaller, and when Sedcole resigned in 1806, it was clearly going to be difficult to find a new pastor. The next was to come, not from a Dissenting Academy, but from among their own members. John Collins was a quarryman, who began preaching after his own conversion. The members succeeded in persuading him to preach on Sundays, while working at his trade during the week. A little later he received tuition from the Rev. T. Durrant of Poole, and was ordained in 1808. During the early part of his pastorate children were baptised by a minister from Wimborne, the Rev. David Ralph, who no doubt helped and guided him in other ways. (The refusal of Anglican clergy to recognise baptisms by Non-Conformists, and so to refuse burial in consecrated ground, was a constant source of friction at the

time.) John Collins, however, was on excellent terms with the Rev. Thomas Oldfield Bartlett, Rector 1817-41, who encouraged what would now be called ecumenical worship. Bartlett kept a diary, which is an important source of information about Swanage in the early 19th century. When, in 1820, King George III died, Bartlett arranged appropriate ceremonies, at his own expense, the Churchwardens being unwilling to put the costs on the rates, but he noted that *'Mr. Collins with his congregation attended and shewed his usual respect.'* On a Christmas Day, when there were 93 communicants, he noted, *'The Rev. Mr. Collins, the Independent minister, and the Rev. Mr. Hyde, the Westlyan minister, attended with many of their people. The Church uncommonly crowded.'* Did the Non-conformists take communion with the Anglicans?

Collins' close friendship with Bartlett ended only with his death in 1833, when Bartlett not only conducted the funeral, but wrote an acrostic epitaph for the tombstone :

I speak not now the dead to praise,
Or on this stone falsely to raise
His name, whose bones lie mould'ring here,
Nearer to dust year after year.

Content am I with truth to say,
Onward he paced his heav'nly way,
Loving all those who sought the Lord,
Loving all those who loved His Word;
Instant in prayer, in doctrine sound,
No bigotry in him was found;
So may we all in grace abound.

This was a remarkable relationship at a time when many Anglican clergy would hardly have spoken with a non-conformist minister, or recognised his ministry. Densham speaks of Collins' common sense, natural ability, kindly disposition, and unwearied industry, *'all consecrated to the service of his Lord and Master'*. He was taken ill in 1832, and a co-pastor had to be called to carry on his work.

While John Collins was minister the many Independent chapels had

begun to seek a closer association, that eventually led to the Congregational Union. One mark of this gradual centralisation is that from 1832 there is a fairly complete set of Church records available, based on a ledger – the Church Book - with pre-printed page headings, which must have been centrally produced for distribution to local chapels. It opens with a printed statement of Congregational belief remarkable for its tolerance. A few of the sections are given here.

5. Disallowing the utility of Creeds and Articles of religion as a band of union, and protesting against subscription to any human formularies, as a term of communion, Congregationalists are yet willing to declare, for general information, what is commonly believed among them; reserving to everyone the most perfect liberty of conscience.

6. Upon some minor points of doctrine and practice, they, differing among themselves, allow to each other the right to form an unbiased judgment of the word of God.

Later, in the section on Principles of Church Order and Discipline:

II. They believe that the New Testament contains, either in the form of express statute, or in the example and practice of apostles and apostolic Churches, all the articles of faith necessary to be believed ... and that human traditions, fathers and councils, canons and creeds, possess no authority over the faith and practice of Christians.

III. They acknowledge Christ as the only head of the Church, and the officers of each Church, under Him, as ordained to administer his laws impartially to all; and their only appeal, in all questions touching their religious faith and practice, is to the Sacred Scriptures.

XII. They believe that the fellowship of every Christian Church should be so liberal as to admit to communion in the Lord's Supper, all whose faith and godliness are, on the whole, undoubted, though conscientiously differing in points of minor importance ...

Section 3

The first pages of the Church Book contain an analysis of its financial position, reported to a Church Meeting on April 4, 1832:

Communicants 20, occupying Sittings 54 producing about £1 per annum per head £54.5.

Subscribers or hearers 62, Sittings 130, producing £82.3, or about 13/- per head. The labours of collecting the sitting rents being very great, Resolved that a Committee of Five Persons be appointed to collect it... and that Sam'l Marsh be requested to undertake the office of Treasurer.

The same Meeting decided to invite Robert Chamberlain to be co-pastor, and wrote to him on May 1st, 1832, the whole of the correspondence being copied into the Church Book:

Revd and dear Sir,

It has you are aware pleased God to deprive us of the services of our Minister the Revd. John Collins who has laboured amongst us for more than 20 years. We the Subscribers and Communicants of the Independent Church and Congregation, having had the pleasure and privilege of hearing you during February and March last, now after prayer & consideration and in the fear of God cordially and unanimously invite you to take the oversight of us in the Lord. ... We have made provision for the comfort of Mr Collins to the extent of our ability, and we promise to raise One Hundred Pounds per Annum for you, less than this, we are aware you ought not to receive. More than this our circumstances do not permit us to offer. Hoping that it may please God to incline you to listen to our request...

Robert Chamberlain replied on May 9, at great length, and making various stipulations:

Dear Brethren,

I received your call dated May 1st. I am gratified with the sum promised which I consider in your circumstances munificent ... I feel inclined to accept the Call... I have a few questions to propose to which I must request explicit answers ... It would have been more consistent

with Congregational New Testament Order, if the Call had come exclusively from the Church, seconded by the wish of the Subscribers. This only strengthens the opinion I had previously formed, that if I came amongst you it must be in the delicate & difficult Character of a Reformer, not that I have discovered any defects that may not easily be rectified ... Let me assure you I desire your support only to such measures as you are satisfied are borne out by New Testament authority ... My first question is

1. Are you willing to subscribe your names to an Agreement in the fewest & simplest words, expressive of your belief in the New Testament Doctrines and willingness to submit to New Testament discipline? This will stand at the Head of your Church Book as the badge of your profession & the bond of your union.

2. Will you look out among yourselves suitable Men as Deacons to superintend your pecuniary affairs?

3. Do you acknowledge the Pastor as the overseer of the Flock & as ordained by, and under, Christ to superintend all the spiritual Affairs of the Church ?

4. That I may faithfully discharge the pastoral Office I shall feel it my duty stately to visit you in your Houses and converse with you, not in an inquisitorial but affectionate spirit, on the subjects of vital godliness – watching for your souls, as one that must give account, that I may do it with joy & not with grief. will you encourage & welcome such visits?

5. Should unhappily inconsistencies appear in any of the members, & should private means fail or be insufficient, will you support the Pastor in the exercise of discipline as directed by the Saviour, Mat. 18, 15-17, and elsewhere by his apostles?

6. It is not my wish to be idle; at the same time I am conscious that I can do little alone; may I calculate on your co operation, support and prayers in my endeavours to promote the knowledge of Christ in Swanage and the neighbourhood. ...

I think it is better that the engagement should be considered probationary for the first 12 months ... “Brethren pray for us. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, amen” so prays your Affectionate Friend & Brother in Christ

Robt Chamberlain

A covering note to Mr Marsh added:

My dear Sir,

I will thank you to assemble the Church Members only & read the beforemention'd to them - as I have preserved a copy, your answer need only be numbers & a simple expression of Assent or otherwise will be sufficient. Your affect.ly Robt Chamberlain.

The Church Book records that *'The principal part of this letter as respect to the Congregation read on Sabbath day 13 May 1832,'* and further that *'Agreable to the Request as above the Members of the Church assembled Thursday evening 19th May 1832. Opened with prayer. Revd Mr Chamberlain's letter read.'* Unanimous assent was given to all the questions, with *'Surely' added for No 6'*, and *'Mr Marsh was desired to write to Mr Chamberlain'.*

Another Church Meeting, on May 29, agreed *'that in future the Lord's supper should be observed by them the first Sabbath in the month'* – as it still is.

Robert Chamberlain was presumably unaware that the Church Book already existed. He came to Swanage in 1832 as co-pastor, becoming sole pastor next year. He had been educated at the Hoxton Academy, and had previously been pastor at Petworth, Sussex. He was to remain in Swanage for 18 fruitful years. It was under his leadership, for example, that *'The Church agreed to set apart Thursday next the 6th December as a day of thanksgiving for a plentiful harvest, preservation from the Asiatic Cholera which has swept away about 20,000 of our countrymen, and that this plague is nearly removed from our country. This day was very generally observed by the Episcopalians, Wesleyans, and Independents in Swanage.'* (Most Church histories state that the first Harvest Festival services were held in Cornwall in the 1840s).

Question 6 in Chamberlain's letter found a response as early as 1834, when 8 members were *'appointed to go out two by two as evangelists into the outlying villages.'* Another new development came in

September 1835, when *'the prayers of the Church were desired on behalf of Joseph Smedmore, a member, who was accepted on probation for ministerial training at Coward College.'* Smedmore was accepted into the ministry, had a long pastorate in Leicester, and spent his retirement in Swanage.

As pastor, Chamberlain had expected to need to be a strict disciplinarian, and on July 31 it was *'unanimously agreed by the whole Church that Thomas Marsh be excluded from Church fellowship with us, in consequence of being intoxicated and otherwise walking disorderly according to the direction given us. 2 Thess. 3.6.'* (Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness...) This was not to be the last exclusion of his pastorate.

The Church Meeting on November 4, 1836, recorded *'The Pastor and Deacons recommended the introduction of the Congregational Hymn Book as a supplement to Dr Watts, and the Church voted its introduction through Mr Cribb.'* Isaac Watts had paraphrased most of the psalms, and written a further 365 Hymns, mainly on themes from Scripture, and they had been sung in all Independent Churches since the early 18th century. Indeed, there are still 33 in *Rejoice and Sing*, and as many in other hymn-books. There were, however, many aspects of Christian worship not covered by Watts, which the new book was intended to meet. Its full title was:

The Congregational Hymn Book : a supplement to Dr. Watts's Psalms and Hymns. Compiled by direction of The Congregational Union of England and Wales.

It was published in 1836, with a second edition in 1844, 90,000 copies of the first being sold in that time. The editor was Josiah Conder, journalist, geographer, and hymn writer. (*'The Lord is King, lift up thy voice'* is his best.) He used many different sources, noting in his Preface: *'The productions of Bishops Ken and Heber, of Wesley and Toplady, of Doddridge and Hart, Cowper and Newton, Fawcett and Beddome – Episcopal clergymen, Moravians, Wesleyan Methodists, Independents and Baptists, all harmoniously combining in this metrical service, prove that“ by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body”,*

and that there actually exists throughout that body, a “Communion of Saints”. It contained 620 Hymns, with special sections for Missionary Work, Baptisms, Funerals, Ordinations, Founding and Opening a Place of Worship, Admission of Members, Prayer Meetings and Church Meetings. The fact that eight out of ten of the hymns he selected are still in use shows how good his judgment was, but two that are now forgotten are quoted here.

No.192 is a short hymn to open a Church Meeting:

Grant, O Saviour! to our prayers
That this changeful world's affairs
Ordered by Thy governance
May so peaceably advance
That Thy Church with ardour due
May her proper work pursue,
In all Godly quietness,
Through the Name we ever bless.

No. 471 is for the Admission of Members, and is by the Moravian-educated James Montgomery.

Come in, thou blessed of the Lord,
Stranger nor foe art thou;
We welcome thee with warm accord,
Our friend, our brother, now.

The hand of fellowship, the heart
Of love, we offer thee,
Leaving the world, thou dost but part
From lies and vanity.

The Cup of blessing which we bless,
The heavenly bread we break
(Our Saviour's blood and righteousness)
Freely with us partake.

Apparently this service has not changed in essentials since 1836.

However, Conder's book differed from modern hymnbooks in one essential: it contained no music, no suggestions even as to what tunes might be appropriate. The current practice, where the editors allocate a suitable tune for every hymn, came in with *Hymns Ancient & Modern* (1861). Before that, it was normal for the choirmaster to select suitable tunes from whichever tune books he favoured, and there were many of them. Nor was there any organ in the chapel. Originally all singing would have been unaccompanied, and the Church appointed a reader, responsible for 'lining-out' (reading each line before it was sung), and then starting the singing. Frank Haysom was appointed reader in 1834, and held the post for 30 years, when he was presented with a handsomely bound hymn-book to mark his retirement. Lining-out was abolished a few years later. It is not known when the Church introduced a band to lead the singing, but it was probably during Chamberlain's pastorate. Nothing is known of the band, except that it owned a 'bass-viol' (probably a cello), nor do we know its repertoire. Arthur Hancock tells us that, when the 24th Psalm was announced - 'Who is the King of Glory?' a fiddler in Swanage Chapel was heard to say : '*Pass us thik rosin, Jim, and then us'll show' em who is the King of Glory*' - but this story is told in many Churches.

The Hymn Book also contained funeral and wedding hymns. When the Chapel was first opened it had been possible to conduct weddings there, because a simple statement before witnesses was all that was needed to establish a legal union. Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 was primarily intended to prevent clandestine weddings, but as it ruled that all weddings must take place in the local parish Church and after the calling of banns, it actually added to the restrictions placed on Non-Conformists. A new Marriage Act in 1836 (currently under discussion because it refers to Royal weddings) allowed Dissenting places of worship to be licensed to conduct weddings, but the fee was set higher than for a Church of England wedding, and notices of application for marriage had to be read before the Guardians of the Poor, thus implying, deliberately, that couples marrying in Chapel were in receipt of parish relief. This law was not amended for 20 years. Nevertheless, weddings were held in Swanage Chapel from this time. The wedding of Charles and Jane Phippard, in 1843, was to produce an extensive

family, all loyal to the Chapel. In 1980 between 15 and 20 of their descendants were among the members, and even today, when so many have had to leave Swanage to seek work, there are still at least eight, including Jeanne Harrison, a former Church Secretary, and Bunny Weeks. In 1837 any problems with the conduct of funerals for Non-Conformists were ended when Mr Smedmore gave the plot of land in Queen's Road to be consecrated as a chapel burying ground.

The success of Chamberlain's pastorate can be measured by studying the Rolls of Church Members in the Church Book. These list all communicant members, their occupations, when and how they were elected – it was always unanimous – and 'General Remarks'. The first list dates from 1832, and starts with the name of John Collins, followed by 33 names. This corresponds roughly with the account given earlier of the number of Sittings in the Church. The General Remarks are few but revealing:

*Died in the faith and hope of the Gospel;
Seven years a patient sufferer,
Excommunicated July 31, 1835.*

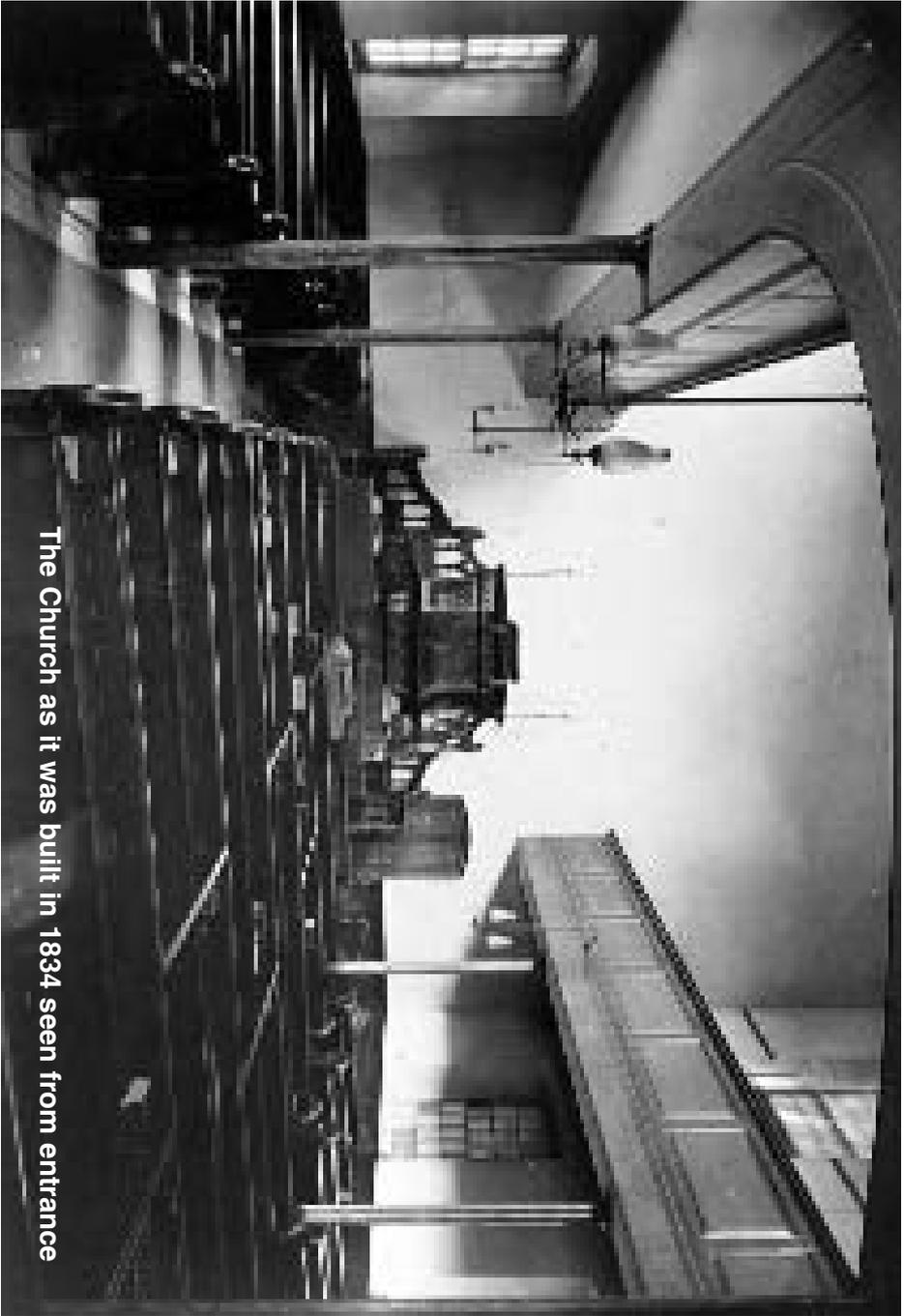
A new list was begun in 1834, headed by Robert Chamberlain, pastor, and began with 24 names. By 1850 a further 96 names had been added, and as the ratio in Dorset of Members to 'Subscribers or Hearers' in 1841 was about 1 to 7, the congregations must have been large. Several were noted later as disaffected or excommunicated, while the last on the list, Isaac White, 'ran off to America.' Little is on record about these lapses, but the Church Meeting Minutes in the Church Book tell us that :

'1844. July 5. Sarah Toop, having given her company to a young man neither pious nor moral, and having disregarded the repeated admonitions of the pastor, her parents, and several of the members ... the Church would be compelled to separate her entirely from fellowship.

1844. Nov. 8. Carried unanimously that Sarah Toop's name be erased from our Church Book ... at the same time it mitigates our grief to learn that her correspondence with the young man has ceased, and that she is regular in her attendance at the worship and the Sabbath School of



The Church as it was built in 1834 seen from the Pulpit end



The Church as it was built in 1834 seen from entrance

our Wesleyan Brethren.'

John Collins had given the congregation stability and wise leadership. Robert Chamberlain's zeal for evangelisation had so increased the congregation that the 1705 Meeting House was now far too small, and it was decided to pull it down and build a larger chapel. For this the Church needed additional funds, architects and builders to carry out the work, and somewhere to meet while the work was being done. A Committee was formed, consisting of the Minister, two Deacons, Samuel Marsh and Joseph Seymour, and eight other members. Their first care was to raise sufficient money to cover the cost of rebuilding. Some of this was collected locally, some came from former members who had moved away, but most was collected by Chamberlain himself, who travelled for some weeks, visiting wealthier cities where there were large Congregational Churches, sending back regular reports on his successes, and returning with a grand total of £557 – more than half the amount required.

The Church had been unable to buy more land, so the new chapel was on exactly the same site. No record says where they met during the rebuilding; T.O.Bartlett was unwilling to let them use his new schoolroom. The Foundation stone was laid on July 20, 1837, by the Rev. James Brown of Wareham, assisted by S. Marsh. The builders were Messrs Smedmore and Spencer, and the plans were drawn and the work supervised by Mr George Gollop of Poole, who made no charge for his services. The total cost was about £956, and all had been paid for by 1841. As in most Non-Conformist – and many Anglican – Churches of the time, a large U-shaped gallery was installed, to bring all the congregation as near as possible to the preacher; there were no microphones in those days. The Building Committee Minutes show that the Committee took a day to day interest in the work, specifying cast iron for the gallery pillars (Minute 67) , and *'a neat cast iron front to the children's gallery'* (Minute 84) - as shown in the picture on page 22.

This new chapel (it was still known to many as the Meeting House in its earliest days) still stands. After serving as the sanctuary for worship until the new Church was built in 1901, it was then, and is still, used for the Sunday School, for meetings, bazaars, social events, and for the meetings of organisations attached to the Church. The pulpit, pews,



etc., have been removed, and a small stage erected At present the gallery is out of bounds, because the ceiling is unsafe, and a false ceiling covers the space around the gallery, but otherwise, the room is much as Robert Chamberlain first saw it.

Robert Chamberlain continued to serve as pastor until 1850, when he removed to a Church on the Isle of Man. He left a Church that was strong in the faith, and with a greatly increased membership. The Church Book made this comment on his ministry:

'The Rev. Robert Chamberlain was a zealous and godly man, very strict (perhaps too much) but he leaves behind a memory not soon to be forgotten, and was in every sense a liberal-minded man. During his ministry 21 Members received dismissal cards, and 4 members were excommunicated, one for drunkenness, another for fornication, and two for marrying unbelievers.' (These were probably Anglicans or Methodists, not atheists.)

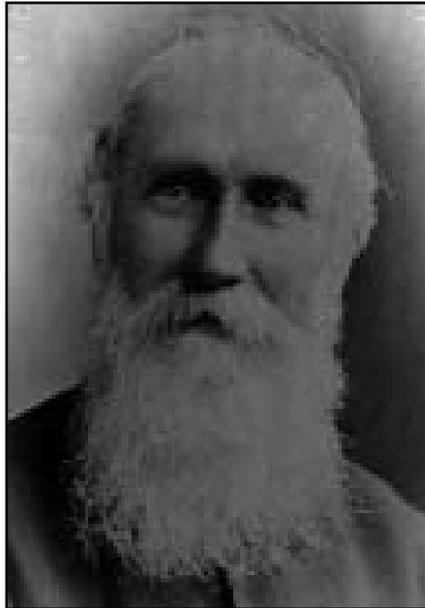
This is not faint praise, but does suggest that not all Chamberlain's methods were popular with his congregation. He would clearly be a hard act to follow, and the Church may have looked for someone equally zealous, but perhaps less autocratic. It was to be a long time before there was another lengthy ministry. John Collins Fairfax was inducted on June 7, 1850. At the end of his first year some members and adherents were dissatisfied with his ministry, and especially with the practice of chanting the Scriptures – something probably started by Chamberlain. A Mr Browning sent him an insulting letter, we are told. In June 1851 Fairfax asked for a vote of confidence, and a special meeting was called. 64 members voted for Fairfax, and only 4 against. Even so, by August 1853 he had decided to leave, saying : *'He could not continue to be their leader any longer with comfort to himself nor with advantage to them.'* He preached a farewell sermon on December 4, and pastor and people seem to have parted on friendly terms. Samuel Thoday Allen was called to replace him, becoming minister from July 9, 1854. He was an ardent preacher and also a good musician. The first schoolroom was built during his ministry. However, he removed to Birmingham in 1857.



Reverend John Collins Fairfax



Samuel Thoday Allen



Thomas Seavill

Under his successor, Thomas Seavill, who had removed from Wareham, Day and Evening schools were established, and the Church paid £130 for a house and garden next to the schoolroom for the schoolmaster. Conder's hymnbook was replaced by the New Congregational Hymnbook (1858), and four members of the congregation were deputed to raise funds to buy copies. It also had no music. Another now traditional practice began at this time – the weekly freewill offering. The Church again found it necessary to excommunicate two members. Seavill was followed in December 1864 by George Hinds; by this time the minister's salary had risen to £110. Hinds stayed until October 1871, but his ministry was not as successful as had been hoped. The only permanent result of his stay in Swanage was the decision to use non-alcoholic wine at Communion. The Schoolroom was let to the British Schools Committee in 1867. Church life continued to deteriorate, and around 1870 Thomas Seavill and a group of dissatisfied worshippers left the Church and founded a separate Evangelistic Mission. A letter from Seavill in the Mission Hall Church Book, says that Hinds had written to him, despondent about the prospects for the Church: *'Whilst lying, slandering, cheating, and other evils are accounted nothing, there can be no spiritual life.'* The



George Hinds

Mission Church was soon able to build its own chapel a little further down the High Street, and a leaflet of 1872 describes its work: *'In this district, where among the thousands of quarrymen, farm labourers, and others, a practical infidelity is painfully manifest, the services of Church and Chapel need to be supplemented by a new agency, that the old Gospel may be brought with warmth and freshness closer to the homes and hearts of the people.'* The Mission Room, Workmen's Hall and Classrooms were erected in 1872, and it soon had a Sunday School, Young

Women's Association, and adult Bible Classes. The Workmen's Hall was used by a Young Men's Association and a Girls Day School. The Mission Hall Book lists 153 members admitted between 1870 and 1887, and records 40 baptisms, 3 marriages, and 15 burials. After 1887 it declined in numbers, and the Mission Hall was at first leased, and then sold, to the Salvation Army, which is why Swanage Salvation Army Citadel looks like an old-fashioned chapel.

Even if Hinds' assessment of the spiritual life of the Church errs on the pessimistic side, there is no doubt that the membership declined, and that the Church was in financial difficulties. A Church Meeting on January 2, 1872, invited Henri J. Le Fevre to take pastoral charge of the Church for one year, but could only offer him £60 per annum. The invitation was not renewed at the end of the year. The Church sought the help of the Dorset Association of Congregational Churches, and the Rev. John Keynes of Wimborne came to preside over a special Church Meeting, at which he explained what the Association required from the Churches it aided. Aid, in the form of £10 a year, was offered. It was not till June 2, 1873, that an invitation was sent to a student at the Bristol Congregational Institute, Charles Chambers, to take oversight of the



Charles Chambers

Church for 12 months. He began his ministry on August 3, leading a series of special meetings that November which did much to revive the Church, which begged him to remain as their pastor, an invitation accepted on July 26, 1874, and he was ordained on August 27. The number of members seems to have remained steady, despite the rival attractions of the Wesleyans and the Mission Hall. A list begun in 1875 eventually included 110 names, though of these William Meikle, admitted July 1, 1875, resigned, with his wife, on December 5, 1876, because some Good

Templars (an aggressive Temperance movement) were members, and some entries are marked as *'Returned from Mission Hall'*, or *'Lapsed, attends Mission Hall'*. (A William Meikle, however, was among the members of the Building Committee when the new Church was erected in 1901.) Nonconformists were the main supporters of the temperance movement, and Swanage Congregational Church maintained a register, starting in 1883, of those who signed the Pledge: *'We hereby agree to abstain from all Intoxicating Liquor as beverages, and to discountenance their use by others.'* The Dorset Congregational Association recommended the formation of a Temperance Society and Band of Hope in every Church and Sunday School in the county. In 1908 the Church officially supported a new Licensing Bill, and expressed regret when it was thrown out by the House of Lords – the British Beerage thought it too restrictive.

Mr Chambers seems to have wished especially to raise the standard of singing in the Church, and on June 29, 1876 a committee was elected *'with power to make such alterations as they deem advisable'*. They immediately introduced the supplemented Bristol Tune Book to replace the old tune books, reformed the choir, and soon went further. The little organ that T.O.Bartlett had introduced in St Mary's was to be replaced, and so the Church bought the old organ for £18, through the good offices of W. Hardy. It was re-erected in the Church by F.J. Duncan of Poole, who charged £10 for his work. The organ was opened on September 17, 1876, by the Rev. Jos. Halsey of Anerley, Surrey. The organ needed an organist, who was paid £1 a quarter if a woman, and £1.5.0 if a man. A boy to pump the bellows was also required. The Church later received £1 for the sale of its bass viol, but a group of string players remained associated with the Church for many years, being referred to in the records several times.

The Church became a more cheerful place, and on May Day, 1876, the celebrations included the erection of a May Pole (which their puritan ancestors would have called a *'stynking Ydol'*) outside the Sunday School. The 1876 Autumnal Meeting of the Dorset Association of Congregational Churches was held in Swanage ... *'The musical arrangements were conducted by the Rev. O. R.Barnicott, Wesleyan Minister.'* Later that year there was another major event. *'As a fitting*



close to a 3-week United Evangelistic Mission it was suggested that the Wesleyans, the congregation at the Mission Hall and ourselves hold United Services on Sunday December 17th. The Rev. T. Seavill declined, but the Wesleyans and our own people entered heartily into the arrangement, and services were held in the Wesleyan Chapel in the morning and in our Church in the evening (The two ministers preaching) There were large congregations and a most hearty and united feeling prevailed.'

It was a sad day for the Church when, in 1878, Charles Chambers resigned, accepting a call to a London Church. His successor, F.A. Warmington, was appointed in 1878, but left again in October 1880, and the Church seemed to be heading for a further period of decline. Someone who remembered that time wrote 40 years later:

'Only a few of you can go back with me in memory to the close of the year 1880 ... and recall (as they and I can do) the forlorn state of the Church; its buildings out of repair, its institutions depressed, its outlook seemingly dark. But faithful ones who loved the "Old Meetin" (as it was called) – loved it, I say – refused to despair, and their devotion redeemed the situation and changed the outlook. Years of strenuous, sustained, self-denying efforts followed – renovation – revival – enlargement – rewarded those who laboured because they loved. As I think of it all I am constrained to borrow the words in which the worthies of the Old Dispensation and their deeds of faith are spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and say, "Time would fail me to tell the story.'

Those words were written in 1921 by the Rev Thomas Richardson Steer, the minister from November 28, 1880, until September 27, 1908, whose leadership produced these changes. It had been agreed that his first year should be a trial period, but a Church meeting on November 21, 1881, renewed the invitation, and the formal ordination took place on April 27. Thomas Steer's ministry was blessed from the start. The Church was soon filled every Sunday, and week-night services were also well supported. The Sunday School was reorganised with Frank Stevens as Superintendent, another inspiring leader, who was to guide many later leaders of the Church. There were some 200 scholars in

1900, and the surnames on the roll include Hardy, Marsh and Weeks. The Sunday School Anniversary and Prize-giving was a major event in the Church's year. In 1888 Steer married Katherine Wallace, the daughter of a minister, and they had five children. In 1893 the Church recognised both his achievements and his needs by building a Manse in Gilbert Road, at a cost of £1000. Some £400 was also spent in



improvements to the Church building, extra seating being needed to accommodate the larger congregations.

During this period Swanage was changing from a small quarrying and fishing village to the popular seaside resort it now is (or until recently was), though it was always larger than the small farming villages served by student missionaries prepared to do *'hard, rough, ill-paid Home Mission work'* for a year. Lay preachers have often spoken, and very ably, from the Swanage pulpit. Church records speak of increased numbers attending services in the summer months, and of the Church's



The Choir at the dedication of the Choir Gallery in 1905



Thomas Steer

special duty towards them. This was also an important point in Congregational history. The Parish Councils Act, 1894, at last allowed Dissenters a say in the administration of local charities, which had previously been under the control of the Churchwardens, who often distributed funds *'in a sectarian spirit'*. However, it was mainly for its local members that the Church decided that a new, more modern, building was needed. The land for this, a plot adjoining the Church, had been bought from George Burt in 1893 for £50, and it was in the same year that the new building was first discussed. Stephen Collins, a wealthy member with many London interests, who later became an M.P. and was

knighted, collected among his friends in London £1004.6.0. He himself gave over £1000, but not all at once, preferring to give about £200-250 a time, so that local people *'might be encouraged to put their backs into the building schemes.'* He also had the whole front of the new Church made in his masonry works without charge. Appropriately, he laid the foundation stone on August 22, 1900. The architect was Thomas Stevens, and the builders William and George Hardy. The Building Committee consisted of Ernest Homer, Chairman, Thomas Tatchell, Secretary, his brother Spencer Tatchell, Treasurer, and nine other members. The work was completed in 1901:

'The new Chapel was opened for Divine worship and the Proclamation of God's Grace on Thursday, July 4th, 1901; it was a memorable service, and helpful interest was shown by the town's people generally.'



Sir Stephen Collins

One innovation from Thomas Steer's pastorate was a monthly Church magazine: *'The Congregational Messenger, A monthly magazine for the Homes of Swanage. Issued by the Congregational Church Sunday School.'* From 1900 to 1908 it provides both historical information and a running commentary on the Church's activities. It was not, like today's 'Link', a wholly independent product. Instead, a cover and local advertisements, plus two duplicated pages of Church news, were stapled around The Congregational Church Monthly, a magazine on the lines of the current 'Reform', though considerably less glossy. The duplicated sheets announced the Sunday services: Public Worship 11a.m. and 6.30p.m., Sunday School 9.45a.m. and 2.15, and Women's Own, 2.30p.m. There were other services on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and 'Evangelistic Services, with singing from Sacred Songs and Solos, on the second and fourth Sunday Evenings of the month.'

From the magazine for March 1900 we learn that the choir gave a concert in aid of a fund for a new organ, which would cost £60: *'A capital programme of songs, recitations, and music by the String Band was rendered on Wednesday 21st.'* In December it performed a Cantata, *'Under the Palms,'* and similar concerts and cantatas were given every year. The music of these Victorian Cantatas is now entirely forgotten. The opening of the new Chapel made 1901 a big year for the choir, and it was marked by the decision to replace the old Hymn Book and the Bristol Tune Book with the Congregational Church Hymnal. This had been published in 1887, with the words selected by G.S.Barrett, and, following the example of Hymns Ancient & Modern, a specific tune for each hymn, edited by E.J. Hopkins. Many of its hymns and tunes were borrowed from Ancient & Modern, as it was the policy of that work's editors to grant permission to other denominations to use their hymns, but only if the linking of words to music was retained. This helped to put an end to the custom of every Church choosing its own repertoire of tunes.

However, all was not well with the choir. On April 27, 1903, a meeting was held *'for the purpose of reorganising the choir'*, attended by 6 ladies and 6 men, at which new rules were discussed. Mr Parry, the conductor, proposed that members *'should be expected to attend 9 of*

13 practices per quarter in the March, June, and December quarters, and as often as possible in the September quarter, which was adopted.' (This is an early mark of the importance of the summer visitor trade.) The other rules of 1903 include:

3. *The Conductor shall select tunes and have complete control of the singing*

4. *The Organist (who shall be elected by the Church) shall be amendable (sic) to the control of the Conductor.*

However, before the end of 1903 Parry had been replaced by Mr Edmonds, and he in his turn threatened to resign that November. However, he agreed to continue, *'on conditions that Miss E. White become Secretary and a committee be formed to draw up fresh rules and enforce them, thus doing away with the unpunctuality, irregular attendance, and the thorough disinterest which had been so characteristic of the choir in the past.'* Miss White was later to serve as organist for more than 40 years.

Among the more social events announced in the magazine, one which shows how the Church was keeping up with the times is *'A lecture by Mr Stephen Collins on Good Friday, (April 10, 1903) – to be illustrated by upwards of 40 coloured lantern slides, which will be shown by limelight.'* (italics original).

There was a great celebration on July 20, 1905, to mark the bicentenary of the Church, and additional funds were raised to complete the building by adding an organ loft and choir stalls. The magazine announced the programme in its July issue:

'3p.m. Thanksgiving Service. Preacher, Rev. C. Sylvester Horne, M.A. The Organ Loft and Choir Gallery (completing the new Chapel) will be opened at this Service.

5p.m. A Public Tea in the Schoolroom. Tickets 9d.

6.30p.m. Public Meeting. Chairman, Ernest Homer, Esq.' There were seven speakers, including Sylvester Horne, Stephen Collins, and the Pastor. *'Special hymns with Orchestral Accompaniment.'*

The August issue carried a most enthusiastic report on the day:

'Our beautiful House of Prayer is finished, and its completion in connection with our Bicentenary Commemoration was celebrated with such joy and thankfulness as made the 20th July a day which the

Church in all its history has not known a gladder or more inciting one ... The singing was glorious. Choirmaster, Organist, singers and instrumentalists together made the Service of Song a delight and an inspiration ... "It was success all along the line", as Mr Collins aptly says in a letter expressive of his own joy and satisfaction.' Tatchell reports that people were standing in the galleries and lobbies and sitting on the pulpit steps. The magazine notes ended:

'The closing Sunday Services of the Second Century will (God willing) be conducted on the 13th inst. by the Pastor, and the opening services of the third century on the 20th inst., by the Rev J. McClune Uffen, of Dorchester.' (McClune Uffen had come to Dorchester in 1890. He was a strong supporter of the Christian Endeavour Movement, of which there was also a branch in Swanage.) Steer completed 25 years as Pastor, and the presentations included £40.

The choir continued to lead worship, and the evangelistic services became ever more popular, and in December 1905 - *'The singing of old hymns to old tunes at our evening service of the 19th ult. was a treat to our ears and a means of grace to our hearts'*. Another new development was noted in October 1907: *'Harvest Thanksgiving Services. We have not followed the custom so generally adopted of decorating the Church at these services. A good deal, however, can be said in its favour, and the resolve to do so in connection with our services on Sunday the 6th will have the assent of many of us.'*

Thomas Steer had not shirked his duties towards other citizens, and was noted for his visiting of people suffering during an outbreak of typhoid fever in the town. Like many strong leaders, he could be difficult, and the Church Minute Books show that he threatened to resign in 1898 and 1907. *'I feel very keenly that my judgement and convictions have not had the respect due to my position and lengthy ministry.'* In fact, he did find the continuous strain was affecting his health, and in 1908 he announced his intention to resign. He preached his farewell sermon on September 27, and removed to Reading, where he died in 1927, aged 82. He was buried in Swanage. Leonard Tatchell wrote of him :

'Thomas Steer was a man wise in counsel, sympathetic in sorrow, a tower of strength for those in difficulties; exemplary in life, he was loved

by old and young, not only by the Members of his Church, but by all the town folk; he was called by many the "Nonconformist Bishop". The Swanage Urban District Council did him the honour of naming a street after him. He was a sound Liberal, a ready listener, and above all a true Christian.'

At the end of the 19th century the Free Churches were enjoying a period of unmatched respect and influence. The last relics of the 1662 Clarendon Code had been repealed, and Nonconformists could enter the professions, sit in Parliament and on local councils, and go to the older Universities. Moreover, because many able Nonconformists had chosen a business career, they now, in an expanding economy, enjoyed the influence which wealth brings. Stephen Collins was not the only wealthy Non-conformist to finance the building of a new Church. When in January 1907 the Rector of St Mary's circulated an appeal to all Non-conformists to rejoin the Church of England, Thomas Steer pointed out in reply that that *'we do not accept political control over the Church'*, and noted also that the Church of England had usually voted against liberal reforms. The *'Non-Conformist Conscience'* was a force to be reckoned with in politics, while the social superiority claimed by the Church of England, itself then in conflict over matters of doctrine and ritual, was ending. The progress of science, and especially geological discoveries about the age of the earth, and Darwin's Theory of Evolution, were affecting some of the traditional beliefs of the Christian Churches, but they had not destroyed the Victorian belief in the continued progress of mankind, and this could be seen as related to Christian doctrines of redemption.

Swanage Congregational Church shared in this. Besides Stephen Collins, another member was the Chairman of the Urban District Council, and not the last member of the Church to hold such office. The Church registers, which had listed mainly stonemasons and farm labourers, now began to include teachers and solicitors, though it remained the Church of choice for those manual workers who attended a Church. What had been a little chapel, scarcely able to pay its minister a proper stipend, had become a substantial, modern Church, funded by its own efforts, with its own halls, schoolrooms and manse, and a minister whom local people compared to a bishop.

Section 4

That strong, confident belief in progress did not long survive, and by the middle of the 20th century every Church was involved in a desperate, often forlorn, rearguard action against the advancing forces of atheism and materialism. Two world wars, the first destroying a generation of Europe's finest young men, the second more widespread, involving not only casualties in battle, but also the deaths of millions of civilians, and the displacement of many more, have been followed by over a hundred local and civil wars, many including 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing' – both concepts alien to Christian faith and practice. For the first time, there were powerful states, and groupings of states, which were militantly atheistic, and persecuted the Church. Competitive materialism in western countries does not actually persecute the Church. Instead it despises it, and tries to keep it out of public affairs, even complaining when Christianity lays claim to Christmas. Sunday observance has become an outmoded concept, and Whitsun so much a secular holiday that the Churches now prefer to call it Pentecost. Nor was it only the powerful who rejected Christianity. The poor, for whom the Church had always felt a special concern, now refused to accept their poverty as a prelude to eternal bliss, and demanded the luxuries seen in films and on TV during their earthly lives. The rapid transmission of news made everyone aware of conditions in the theatres of war and in the 'Third World'. Seeing a baby die of hunger in its mother's arms stimulated a remarkable upsurge in charitable giving, and even political initiatives to raise standards of living to those of the affluent west, but made it harder to believe in a loving, or indeed any, God. As science solved more of the physical world's mysteries, and psychology revealed the primitive sources of human behaviour, traditional Christian faith was no longer accepted as credible, and the Churches were dismissed as simply centres for the elderly, the emotionally or intellectually limited, and those with a special interest in music and the arts. Ignorance of the basic beliefs of Christianity is now widespread, and schools prefer to teach comparative religion (admittedly a desirable subject in many places) rather than the tenets of Christianity. When, in 1956, the Archbishops of the Church of

England and the Roman Catholic Church, and the Moderators of the Free Churches, went in deputation to the Prime Minister to protest about the invasion of Egypt, they were brusquely rebuffed. Fifty years earlier, this would have been unthinkable.

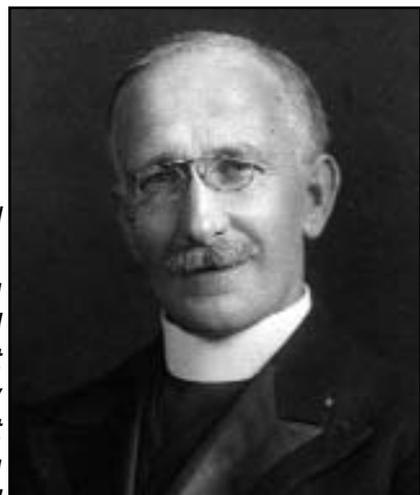
In response, the Churches, with no wish to be thus sidelined, were forced to re-examine traditional theology, teaching, and their role in society. Some retreated to an early 19th century position, rejecting not only the Theory of Evolution and the Big Bang, but recent Biblical scholarship as well. Others seized the opportunity to publicise the work of advanced scholars, and attempted to educate the public in what Christianity really meant in the 20th century. British Free Churches, rejecting all teaching that was not Bible-based, yet encouraging their members to interpret the texts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were bound to follow this line. (They got little support from the press, which preferred to have the old stereotypes to attack.) Christian thought and teaching came to focus less on personal salvation than on developing Christian, especially serving and caring, communities, and attached less importance to personal sinfulness than to the problems of globalisation, the arms trade, and prevention of famine. Support for overseas missions was replaced by support for organisations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, who adopted slogans like *'We believe in life before death'*, and never made aid conditional on conversion. Campaigns for social justice and economic reform were led by all the Churches, the Church of England ceasing to be *'the Tory Party at Prayer'* of the left-wing press. But though the Churches scored many small victories, overall the story is one of retreat. Church buildings were declared redundant, parishes amalgamated, Non-conformist Churches joined forces on a national or local basis – all trying to cope with dwindling, ageing, congregations, financial shortages, and public apathy and contempt.

Swanage fared better than many. In Dorset, the number of Congregational Churches declined from 61 in 1915 to 45 in 1970, with more amalgamations since. Their membership fell from 2610 to 1999, the number in the Sunday Schools from 4589 to 1010. The numbers of Sunday School teachers and lay preachers show a similar fall. But Swanage lost only the little chapel at Ulwell, and the union of the

Congregational and Presbyterian Churches which created the United Reformed Church had little effect locally, as there was no rival Presbyterian Church nearby. Nevertheless, the national trends can be seen and felt. The congregation is ageing, the Treasurer appeals regularly for funds, Junior Church and Youth Group are robbed of their senior members whose `Saturday jobs' have become `weekend work', with Sunday shifts compulsory. In 1900 the Sunday School taught 200 children. Today's Junior Church cannot muster 20. As the town becomes less a holiday resort than a retirement haven, young people are forced to leave to find employment or affordable housing. The account which follows, even where it catalogues progress, must be read as reflecting the general trend.

(From the end of 1908 to the beginning of 1930, there are no Church magazines on file. It seems unlikely that none were printed or circulated, and probably the box with the missing issues was lost, or destroyed, in the War. Between these dates, Leonard Tatchell's account is my main source, extensively quoted or paraphrased. Like his father Thomas, he was a long-time member, and Church Secretary from 1924 –42, which makes him an invaluable and reliable source. At some future date, however, it may be possible to read and summarise the Minute Books of the Church Meetings and Deacons'/Elders' meetings.)

The Choir seems to have been determined to assert its rights in the interregnum following Thomas Steer's departure, and at their annual Business Meeting on October 16, 1908, recorded that *the practices had been discontinued since 24 April, 1908, and only ordinary hymns sung on Sundays. Mr Burrige proposed and Miss E. White seconded that special singing should be sung every Sunday, starting from November 1st at the evening service, the choir having the right of deciding what to sing, and*



Reverend G H Clothier

in what part of the service. This was carried unanimously.'

What the new pastor, the Rev. G.H.Clothier, thought of this proposal is not recorded. He had been born in Bristol, and trained at Western College, Plymouth, where he gained three scholarships in five years. He was working in Somerset when he accepted the Church's call on February 20, 1909, and began his ministry on March 28, with a Recognition Service on May 20. This was a grand, formal event, presided over by Stephen Collins, MP, who composed a poem recalling the occasion :

*I arrived in dear Swanage just in time for the tea
And to see such a crowd was delightful to me :
His Worship of Wareham (the Mayor) took the Chair,
And gave us some jewels, all bright, rich, and rare :
After which Rev. Wilkins, of the same ancient town,
Gave an eloquent speech , worth his well-known renown :
Then came Brother Perkins for Corfe's hoary Castle,
Feeling proud to be called its brave faithful vassal :
And then our friend Wyard, a retired Baptist pastor,
Spoke in eloquent phrases, of which he is the master :
Followed by Rev. Dawson, who with Methodist fire,
Made the electric sparks flash, as he played with the wire :
Then Staff-Captain Baxter breathed words of good cheer,
And hoped Mr Clothier to his flock might be dear.
Last came Bishop Ogle of Dorset renown,
Who to all the warm greetings added the crown.
Yes ! the sendoff was grand, and surely foretells
Happy times at old Swanage for the Pastor from Wells.'*

The new Pastor in his address thanked the people for their trust and confidence, stating that he intended his ministry in Swanage to be `a teaching, an evangelical and a pastoral ministry'; there would be nothing sensational about his teaching, but it would, he hoped, be deep and abiding; he believed in visiting his flock, holding with Dr Chalmers that `a house-going minister makes a Church-going people; the secret of a successful ministry was prayer, forbearance and co-operation; he prayed that he might be wise to win men for Christ and strong to feed the flock of God, and that his ministry in the town might be one of

IN
 CRATEFUL MEMORY
 OF THE MEN CONNECTED
 WITH THIS CHURCH AND
 CONGREGATION WHO LAID DOWN
 THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR
 1914 - 1919.

CAPT. W.H.C. HOMER M.C.	GLOS. RECT.
LIEUT. F.C. POND	R.C.A.
SERGT. E.B. BROWN	R.C.A.
SERGT. A.H. WYATT	R.A.S.C.
SERGT. P.G. STEER B.A.	R.FUS.
L/CPL. F. HANSFORD	M.C.C.
BMDR. J.C. LOW	R.F.A.
BMDR. B. MORRIS	R.C.A.
PTE. L. BOWER	NORTH'D FUS.
PTE. E.W. BRADFORD	WARWICK REGT.
PTE. B.E. BURGESS	DEVON REGT.
PTE. H.A. BURNS	R. FUS.
RFM. F.J. CHINCHEN	LONDON REGT.
CNR. F.J. CLARKE	R.C.A.
PTE. C.J. CURTIS	BORDER REGT.
CNR. C.W. EDMONDS	R.C.A.
CNR. F. FOOT	R.C.A.
PTE. F. HOWSON	R. BERKS. REGT.
PTE. A.H.W. NAYLOR	R.A.O.C.
CNR. C.C. NORMAN	R.C.A.
CNR. C.T. NORMAN M.M.	R.C.A.
A.B. P.J. PESSSELL	H.M.S. HAMPSHIRE.
PTE. P.W. STRONG	R. BERKS. REGT.
PTE. H. UDELL	DORSET REGT.

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS; THAT A MAN
 LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS." JOHN XV. 13.

faithfulness and abiding power.'

The choir continued to lead 'Musical services', to fund the purchase of new music. At this time they were able to use the anthems included in the Hymnal, though their Musical Services also included violin, cornet, and organ solos, etc. The practice of singing a Sacred Cantata at Easter also continued, and the evangelistic services using Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos. (When the choir was reorganised in 1919, they decided to buy 24 copies of Songs and Solos, but only 12 of the Congregational Hymnal, 'with Chants and Anthems complete.') The early years of Mr Clothier's ministry saw increased co-operation between the Congregational Churches of Dorset, whose spring meeting was held in Swanage in 1914. That year also saw the start of the first World War, with up



to 5,000 soldiers being quartered in the town. Much of Mr Clothier's time was devoted to their welfare; 'he was appointed Joint-Chaplain to the Non-conformist forces, and was much appreciated by the men.' The Church nonetheless found time to conduct a successful evangelistic mission in 1916, with another in 1920, which added many members to the Church Roll. The Church lost 24 members during the War, and a Memorial Tablet in their memory was unveiled by the Pastor on August 7, 1919.

The Choir sang a carol service after the evening service on December 21, 1919, with a collection being taken for the National Institute for the Blind. Similar Carol services were sung for several years for those blinded in the war, and though the collections seldom totalled more than £3, they were part of a national effort repeated in many other Churches.

The Lambeth Conference in 1920 had issued an appeal for unity among the Churches, and the Congregational Union sent a reply, saying it was basically in favour of union, but 'We are not, however, prepared to surrender our idea of the Church as a company of

believers, wherever gathered together in the Name of Christ, our claim to the validity of the Ordination of our own ministers, and our full freedom as to modes of worship and Church government.' This clear restatement of the principles of Independency would have been supported in Swanage.

Mr Clothier had come to Swanage with a considerable reputation as a scholar and preacher, and by 1920 it had become clear that he should seek a larger Church. After discussion with the Deacons he announced on July 25 that he had accepted a call from Surbiton Park Church. He preached his farewell sermon on September 12, with a public Farewell meeting the following day, with William Collins, JP, Chairman of the Urban District Council, presiding, supported by the Rector, the Baptist minister, and Captain Foster of the Salvation Army. Presentations were made from all the organisations, and in thanking the donors Mr Clothier also thanked them for their support during his ministry; he described his wife as *'the power behind the throne'*.



Reverend Tom Isaiah Dolphin

The next minister, The Rev. Tom Isaiah Dolphin, came to Swanage from Ryton-on-Tyne, and began his ministry here in December 1920, with the official Induction on March 17, 1921. There was a Public Tea and Meeting, presided over by Sir Stephen Collins, at which he said his chief desire was that he and his wife should serve the Church to the best of their powers, and asked for the prayers of the Members and friends. He was deeply concerned about the Sunday School, and, with the help of Albert Masters as Superintendent, started the Junior Church Roll. He had a brother in the ministry, Philip, who conducted a successful mission in the Church. On May 24, 1925, for the first time, a woman, Miss Ballard Dawson, preached in the Church. In 1925 Sir Stephen Collins died. He had been born in the Court Hill Post Office in 1847, and began work



with his father, a quarryman, but left in his teens to work in London. Though he never settled in Swanage again, he retained a great affection for the town, and was a frequent visitor. He was a President of the Dorset Association of Congregational Churches, a founder member and President of the Society of Dorset Men in London, and a member of various Councils in London before becoming Liberal MP for Kennington, 1906-18. He had been knighted in 1913. A memorial service was held on April 29, 1926, at which Dr. J. Alfred Sharp, Chairman of the Methodist Conference, preached, and unveiled a tablet, which records that electric light was installed in the Church in his memory. The gathering was chaired by Mr Charles Rogers, 'Wold Charl', and included a poem in the Dorset dialect.

Tom Dolphin's wife took her full share in the work of the Church, conducting a Bible class for many years. They had four children, one of whom, Hugh, also entered the ministry. Hugh remained a friend of the Swanage Church, and in 1980 wrote a *'Second Supplement to the history of the Swanage Congregational Church... 1955-80'* which he dedicated to the memory of his parents and to *'the children and grandchildren, now in the Church, of my boyhood friends.'* Tom Dolphin's health deteriorated during 1929, and he died early in 1930. Leonard Tatchell summed up his time in Swanage in these words:

'The Pastor, though not a great preacher, had other gifts which greatly outweighed his lack of oratory, especially that of bringing comfort and help to the aged and sick whom he visited regularly. He was a true friend of the young, esteemed by all for his



Reverend Ernest Dowsett

sincerity and his unswerving loyalty to his Master.'

In September 1930 the Rev. Ernest Dowsett accepted an invitation to become the Pastor. He had originally trained at New College, London, and began his ministry in Brighton, and had served four other Churches before coming to Swanage as his final pastorate before retirement. Unlike Tom Dolphin, he was a fine preacher, and his sermons brought back many former adherents, and attracted new members as well. He organised a series of weeknight services, and was also a popular lecturer, giving lectures not only in Swanage but throughout the County to help other Churches. He reorganised the Sunday School and started a Young Worshippers League. The Church at this time had several generous friends, known collectively as 'The Dear Anonymous' who financed various improvements, repainting the Manse and the interior of the Church, providing copies of the new Congregational Hymnary (first published 1916) for the Choir and the Young Worshippers League, and a set of plate for the Communion Table. During the inter-war period the Church came to focus more and more on the social services it could offer not only in Swanage but further afield. The Way House School used the Church premises for many years during August to give their children a seaside holiday, and this practice still continues, with Scouts, Guides, or Boys or Girls Brigade companies camping in the Large Hall for a week at a time in the summer.

The Choir flourished during this period. A Choir Outing was arranged each year, and the trip to Sidmouth in 1925 had left them with a balance in hand of £3.10.2. The Choir, *'rather than refund the Church Treasurer, (agreed) after considerable discussion to spend the money on the choir loft – namely, 2 curtains and fittings for the west window, also a curtain to screen the Organ Blower.'* Even after electric light was installed, the organ continued to be blown by hand. In 1933 it was noted that a Miss Bailey was the Organ Blower, rather than one of the younger men, but she said she was quite capable of it, and wished to continue in post. On August 16 1931 the Church recognised the forty years of service as organist by Miss E. White with a presentation, and by affixing a tablet to the organ. However, the old organ installed in 1901 was wearing out, and a new one, with electric bellows (Miss Bailey joined the Choir), was ordered from George Osmond of Taunton,

at a cost of £665, to be installed by Easter, 1934. The official opening of the new organ took place at the Sunday morning service on April 15, with the hymn specified in the Hymnary for the Dedication of an Organ : *'Angel voices, ever singing'*. The choir sang an anthem from the Hymnary : *'Let all the world, in every corner sing'*. In the evening there was an organ recital by John E. Leah, FRCO, from Bournemouth, with further anthems by the choir. In the same year, however, *'Mr D. Brown brought forward for attention that there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction regarding the introduction of set prayers and responses to be used at the meetings of the Choir previous to joining the Church services on Sundays ... The responses savoured too much of the orthodox was the opinion of several, an extempore prayer being much more appreciated. It was later agreed 'to dispense with the cards, but not to indulge in idle chatter while waiting for the Minister to come.'* Perhaps they had been discussing the choir outing to Bath, where *'at the tea table a mail of comic postcards was distributed among the members, evidently sent from some humourous friends at Swanage'*. The choir also gave a secular concert each autumn, which included songs, monologues, and usually ended with a selection of *'Coon songs with Plantation Band'* – definitely not politically correct today.

In June, 1935, Mr Dowsett decided to resign, partly because of failing health. He preached his farewell sermon on September 9, at the Harvest Festival, and after the evening service gifts were presented to



Reverend Henry Atkinson

him and to Mrs Dowsett. Leonard Tatchell, as Church Secretary, made the presentation, saying : *'We ask you to accept this gift, and in doing so thank you for all your unstinted labour ; we wish you all happiness and can assure you of a real Dorset welcome when you visit this capital of Purbeck.'*

Unlike most ministers at the time, Dowsett's successor, Henry Atkinson, had been trained as a scientist before being ordained. He began his ministry in February 1936, and had an immediate



*Back Row, left to right: Mr Burridge; Mr Brennan; Mr Tatchell; Mr Bowley; Mr Watts
Front Row, left to right: Mr Masters; Miss Bailey; Reverend Atkinson; Miss Summers; Mr Rollins*

influence. Tatchell says: *'his preaching was arresting, indicating a certain grace and sensitivity in thought and expression which was the reflection of his own gracious character.'* He was never able to develop his work as he would have liked, for the war which started in September 1939 soon took away many of the younger members. In 1940 the schoolrooms were requisitioned as a Reception Centre for evacuees, and were later taken over by Dorset County Council as a British Restaurant, which opened on January 10, 1942. Soup and bread cost 3d., joint and veg. 8d., a sweet 3d., and a cup of tea 1d. (Prices were kept low; by the time the Restaurant closed on September 15, 1945, joint and veg. were still only 1/-) This seriously affected the work of the Sunday School and other organisations. The Church contributed 3/4 of a ton of iron railings to the war effort in 1942. In February 1943 the Church was badly damaged by a bomb which passed through the south wall, and then demolished the north wall, completely destroying the organ. It was not possible to hold services in the Church, but happily the Rev. Stanley Smith, of Emmanuel Baptist Church, offered on behalf of his Church the suggestion that the congregation should worship with them until their own Church was repaired. This offer was accepted, and the two Churches worked together until 1945. In the next month Atkinson resigned, saying that he felt that now his flock had found sanctuary with the Baptists, his presence would only jeopardise matters. But this may not be the full story. Tatchell says: *'Early in the war the Pastor, in order to help the Church in her time of need and financial difficulty, sacrificed a portion of his stipend and took over some important and secret work for the T.R.E. scientists stationed at Worth Matravers.'* Dr W.H. (Bill) Penley, a member of the TRE team, which was working on the development of Radar, and who is now resident in Swanage, remembers Atkinson well. He was the centre's Librarian, responsible for circulating and retrieving scientific journals, and for collecting and storing the secret reports produced by the researchers. He was assisted by a team of young ladies, one of whom later became Dr Penley's wife. Dr Penley remembers that Atkinson transferred to Malvern with the rest of the group. The bomb damage to the Church may fortuitously have simplified his transfer there.

Henry Atkinson died in London on December 16, 1948, and his ashes were scattered on the grave of his wife, who was buried in Swanage.

Tatchell wrote of him: *"H.A.", as he was affectionately known to his intimates, was a man of many parts. He was an expert photographer, a fine colour artist, a musician, and possessed a scientific brain of no mean order. In the last few years he had much private trouble, but there was never a sign of rebelliousness or any faltering in his Christian conviction and devotion.'*

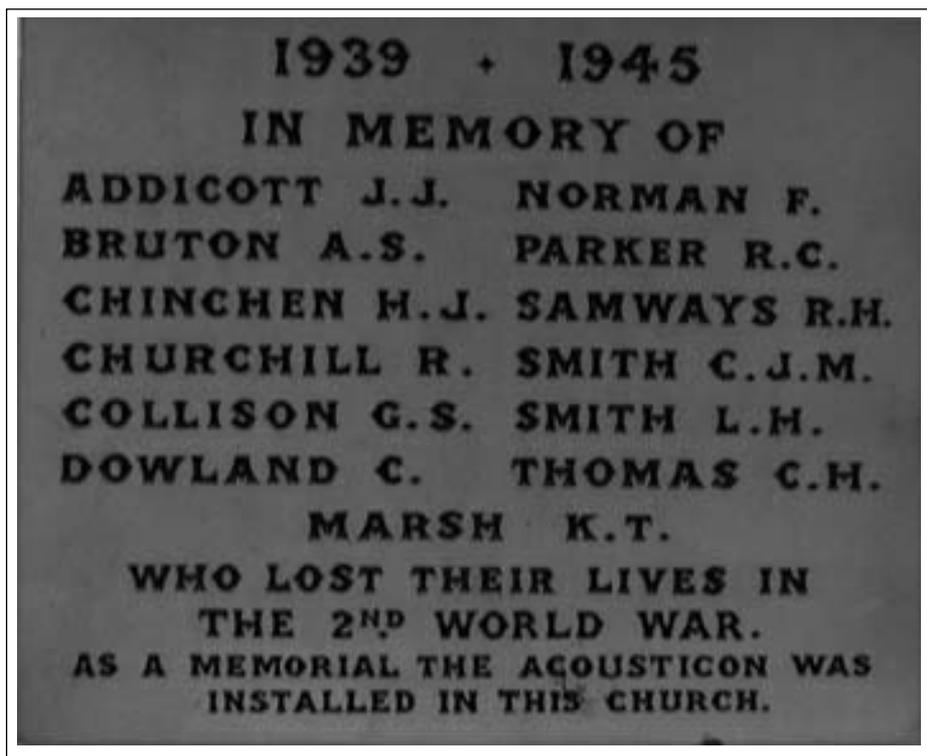
It was the practice at the time to carry out 'First Aid' repairs on damaged buildings, leaving the complete rehabilitation to more settled times. Towards the end of 1944 these repairs made it possible to reopen the Church for worship. The actual reopening took place on May 6, 1945, the congregation assembling under their own roof for the first time since 1943. *'A beautiful and restrained service of rededication and thanksgiving was conducted by our former minister, Rev. Ernest Dowsett. The singing was led by a large choir under the direction of Miss Grace Hardy, and the organist was Mr A.W. Coleman.'* The original organ installed in 1934 had been destroyed, and for three years the Church made do with pianos and harmoniums, but these were inadequate, especially as congregations increased and visitors returned. In 1948 a Hammond Electronic Organ was purchased. A Dedication Service was held on April 13, with a recital by Wilfred Smith, formerly organist of Calcutta Cathedral.

The Church had been without a minister for three years, and the task of arranging for someone to conduct the services every Sunday was complicated by the poor transport facilities of the time. (Petrol was not available for such non-essential journeys.) Much of the work was done by the Church Secretary, W. H. Smith, who also had to deal with the War Damage Commission, the architect, and other authorities. The Church invited the Rev. Donald Horder, the young associate Pastor of Lyndhurst Road Church, Hampstead, to fill the vacancy. He accepted, and was inducted on December 13, 1945. The charge to the Minister and to the Church was given by the senior pastor at Lyndhurst Road, the Rev. C. Stanley Herbert.

Donald Horder came to a Church which had been without a minister or a home for nearly three years. Some had worshipped with the Baptists, others had moved from Church to Church without settling. Gathering

them together was a difficult task. Horder was still a young man, recently trained at New College, London, and '*modern in outlook and theology*'. The post in Hampstead had been his first. There were occasions when his plans did not bear fruit, and he had many disappointments. He concentrated on working with young people. It was he who renamed the Sunday School 'Junior Church', and, from June 1948, introduced the Family Service, where all met for the first part of the service, before the younger worshippers left for their own departments. He also sponsored the formation, in November 1946, of a Boy Scout Troop, followed by a Wolf Cub Pack, and, within the year, a Guide Company and Brownie Pack. A farmer. Mr Harry Curtis, who also played the violin at Ulwell Mission Hall, generously made a campsite available at Knitson for their use.

As the schoolrooms were derequisitioned, they were redecorated and restored to use, the Large Hall finally becoming available in 1948. Stonework and rafters in the sanctuary were replaced, and the interior



redecorated in 1949. Some of the effects of the wartime damage, however, were to persist, and may not have been finally cured even now. On April 16, 1951, a Service of Remembrance was held, and a Purbeck stone tablet was unveiled in the vestibule, listing the 13 members who had died on active service. (The longer list from the 1914-19 war had been in order of rank, and was headed by Capt. Homer, MC. This later list is in alphabetic order. Many well known Swanage names appear on these lists, Chinchin and Norman appearing on both.)

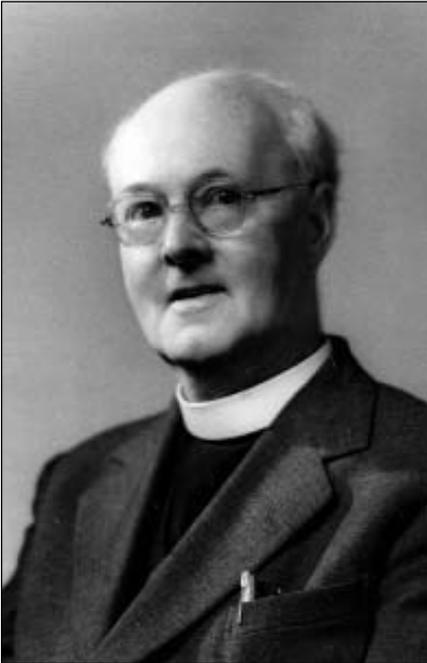
Swanage was becoming known as a good place for retirement, and the Church benefited from the advice and service of several distinguished people. Among them were the Rev. G. H. Eastman, OBE, a former missionary to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and Dr A.M. Chirgwin, the former Secretary of the London Missionary Society.

The other organisations in the Church were also revived. The Women's Guild flourished under the able leadership of Mrs G.H. Eastman and Miss E.F. Tarrant, and is still active. Because it meets in the afternoon, it has always been supported by the older members of the Church, and provides an opportunity for worship as well as for practical service. For some years it had a successful choir, which gave concerts for good causes in the town. A Young Mothers' Club was formed, with a crèche attached, and also a Young People's Club. The Dramatic Club, under the leadership of Iris Smith, was particularly active for many years, with at least three productions a year, often linked to the Church Year, and incidentally providing a valuable source of income for the Church. Many of the plays presented had a religious theme; in fact, when three one-act comedies were presented in 1960, a critic in the magazine thought they were *'too slight to be worthwhile'*. A special Committee supported the work of the London Missionary Society. In addition to support from the Dramatic Club and the Women's Guild, other social events included Garden Fetes, a South Seas Supper, arranged by the Junior Church, a Treasure Hunt and an African Exhibition.

Among many Church charities supported was the Home Churches Fund, which replaced and extended the annual Christmas collection for Village Churches of Dorset. Its object was to secure a satisfactory basic

salary for all ministers in the denomination. At the same time, the minister *'was instrumental in starting the Swanage United Christian Council'*, and was its Secretary... *'It has brought the Churches and their Ministers into the closest and happiest relationship, through a series of public Religious Brains Trusts, Open Air Services, and public Meetings for the discussion of the Faith, the Churches, and the application of Christianity to world affairs and to daily life. ...'* This organisation, now the Association of Churches Together in Swanage (ACTS) has continued to provide a focus for ecumenical thought and worship, responsible locally for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, for joint services at Christmas and Easter, the Lent discussion groups, and other collective ventures. *'As a direct outcome of meetings planned by the Christian Council, the Minister brought into being a local European Relief Fund, which in the course of five years raised over £1000, as well as collecting and despatching large quantities of rationed foodstuffs and clothing.'* A film about the plight of refugees in Europe was also shown, and the Women's Guild urged the Church to *'adopt'* an Austrian refugee family, George Sebastian, his wife, and five children. Arthur and Betty Hancock visited them a few months later, returning with photographs and slides of the family. Arthur then proposed that the Church set up a Committee to organise support, and a cupboard was set aside to hold gifts of all kinds pending despatch. This support continued into the 70s. Among the social events of this period were the Eisteddfods held in 1948 and 1951, the second attracting nearly 400 entries, and revealing *'all kinds of hidden talent among the members of our Church family'*.

After 15 years with only an occasional Church Meeting, Donald Horder re-introduced a regular monthly Meeting, *'making it the centre of the Church's life, for inspiration, planning and control'*. A proposed union between the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches was a topic discussed. The monthly Church magazine, which had always been edited by the Minister and published by the Sunday School, was taken over by the Church, redesigned, and given its own editorial committee, and was soon selling 200 copies each month. A new Church Constitution and Covenant of Membership were other products of Donald Horder's ministry, which ended on October 15, 1951, just after the Church had celebrated the Jubilee of the opening of its new



Reverend Stanley Herbert

building. The guest preacher on that occasion, Thursday, August 17, was the Rev. Stanley Herbert. The service was followed by a public tea and an evening meeting, at which Herbert again spoke, and on the Sunday following the Moderator of the S.W. Province of the Congregational Union, the Rev. Harold Bickley, addressed a crowded Church, making the whole Jubilee a memorable occasion.

While it was without a minister, the Church Roll was revised, showing the actual membership to be 116. Donald Horder had left a Church that was active and united, and it was to his old friend and mentor Stanley Herbert that the Church turned for its next minister. His ministry began at Easter 1952, and continued the pattern

Horder had set. Worship on Sundays, and Corporate Prayer or Bible Study on Wednesdays were one aspect of the Church's life, but so were the Sunday night socials after the monthly Youth Service, the productions of the Dramatic Club, and the 'Festivals' that were replacing the 'Anniversaries' in Junior Church, the Choir, and the Women's Guild. Mr Herbert also suggested that evening services in the summer should be held at 8.00p.m., and this change, advertised in leaflets distributed on the sea-front, was, for a time, very successful, and has been revived occasionally since.

During the first half of the 20th century, many of the members held office for very long periods. Leonard Tatchell was Church Secretary from 1924 to 1942, and was elected a Life Deacon in 1956. He died in 1963. He was well known as an entomologist (FRES); the bench provided in his memory near his cottage at Peverell Point is inscribed '*Leonard Tatchell – Naturalist*'. Alexander A. Watts was a Deacon for

18 years, and Treasurer from 1936 to 1948. David Rollins was chosen as Deacon in 1913, and was Treasurer of the Sunday School for 41 years. P.H. Burrige served as a Deacon for 37 years – and these are only the most striking examples. None, however, gave greater service than the Missionary Secretary, Miss S.E. Summers, who had held office since the end of Thomas Steer's ministry in 1908, resigning in 1955



owing to ill-health. During those 47 years the Church's annual contribution to Mission work had risen from £24 to £300. The Church appointed her niece, Minnie Summers, whom she had trained as her successor, to replace her.

An equally devoted servant of the Church was W.H. (Harry) Smith, Church Secretary from 1942 to 1979. This post was particularly onerous in the years immediately after the war, and indeed was never easy, yet he was also Scoutmaster of the Church Troop for 25 years, and was Chairman of the Urban District Council, 1972-74, and a member of Dorset County Council. His wife Iris was in charge of the Primary Department of Junior Church for more than 25 years, and also led the Dramatic Club. She also took a special interest in the chapel at Ulwell. Harry died in 1983, his wife in 1992.

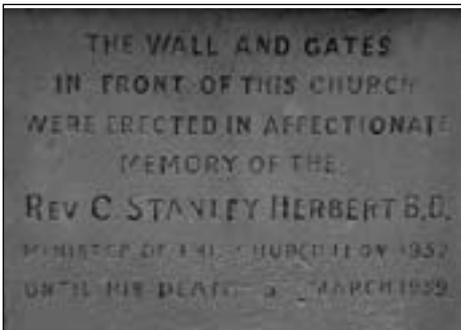
The Church now needed to raise funds for further domestic problems. Redecoration of the Manse cost £300, a new heating system £450, and copies of Congregational Praise £130, while replacing the windows destroyed in the War cost £400. All of these were paid for with funds raised locally. Members also did much of the work themselves. For example, in 1959 the floor of the Manse garage was concreted by three young elders, G.H. Pike, A. Hancock, and R. Wickens.

Another, major, event was celebrated in 1955, the 250th Anniversary of the opening of the first Meeting House. Nine Special Services were held between June 12 and July 7, with other events which included an 'I remember' Social', 'A Pageant of Freedom', presented by the Dramatic Club, a Festival of the Junior Church, and a Garden Fete and Sale in the Rectory Garden. Church Meeting decided to launch a Thanksgiving

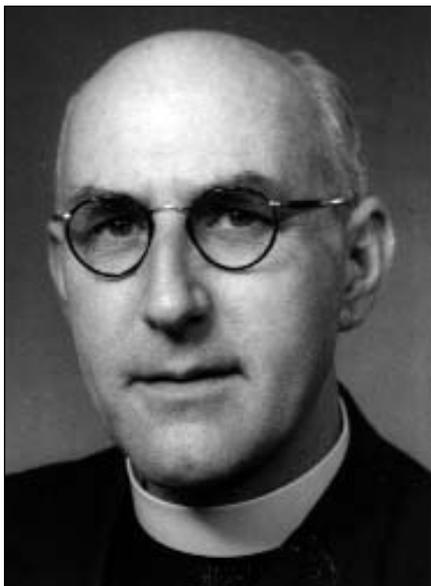


Minister & Deacons, 1962
Back Row, left to right: Ray Wickens, John Pullen, C Bradford, Arthur Hancock, R Bennett
Front Row, left to right, Iris Smith, Harry Smith, Reverend Denis Lawson, Geoff Pike, G Hardy

Fund to raise £1000. When the Fund closed in 1956 £1144 had been raised, which was used to install a new lighting system and a cloakroom. Stanley Herbert wrote in the magazine for July 1955: *‘Let those who will one day be organizing for a Tercentenary find their way back to this number of the magazine and, reading, take heart from what has happened among us and build an even more noteworthy Thanksgiving for the additional 50 years. Will some teen ager among us whose life is set to be lived in Swanage, keep this magazine and produce it in Church Meeting round about 2005 a.d. for the delectation of his fellow elders of the day? What will they learn from it?’*



In 1959 Mr Herbert suddenly died while away from Swanage. The Memorial Gates in front of the Church were dedicated in his memory in 1960. The Rev. Denis E. Lawson accepted the invitation from the Church in that year, and his ministry was characterised by his deep concern for all members of the Church.



Reverend Denis Lawson

In this he was supported by Dorothy, *‘a wife of warm and understanding nature.’* Denis Lawson was thus there to help the Church through the first of many reorganisations that occupied the next 12 years. The Congregational Union had published the reports of the ‘Ten Commissions’, which examined all aspects of the Churches’ life, and in particular the relations between the various, still largely independent, Congregational Churches. The property of the Church had already been transferred, by agreement, from personal trustees to the trusteeship of the Dorset Congregational Association. Now local Churches were encouraged to

covenant together for mutual support, and Swanage began to form links with Corfe Castle and Wareham. This was to lead, a few years and much debate later, to the formation of the URC. Dorothy Lawson started the Elders' Circle, providing a daily morning meeting place, with coffee, for senior citizens. It now meets at the Mowlem, and Church members are still involved in its management. Other organisations either started or supported by the Church include the Swanage Christian Centre, which now runs a café and bookshop with inter-Church support, and Communicare, which provides help for those in need of any kind.

The social functions in the Church flourished, and included '*Supper with Sankeys*' – Victorian dress optional – organised by the Young Wives, and a Mission Evening, at which members of the Guide Company, dressed in grass skirts and with seashell necklaces, sang '*Jesus bids us shine*' in Gilbertese. The translation was no doubt provided by the Rev. G.H. Eastman. In 1967 Denis Lawson accepted a call from the Church in Barnstaple, but returned to Swanage on retirement in 1973. He died in 1986, but his wife remained in Swanage, a much loved member of the Church and leader of the Women's Guild, until her own death in 1993. .



Reverend David Holley

Denis Lawson's successor, a younger man, the Rev. D.W. Holley, came in 1968. He is described as 'a man of fresh approach and method', and had a special concern for the suffering and hardships of the whole world. His wife, who was a teacher on weekdays, became the leader of the Junior Church. She was also instrumental in establishing the Friendship Club, which meets every Wednesday in the Large Hall, to provide a good lunch and a chance to meet friends for retired people living alone. Members of other Churches, and of none, are involved in this project.

The various Churches in the Congregational Union had decided in 1966 to unite more closely as the Congregational Church of England and Wales. Now each Church had to decide whether to join the proposed union between the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church of England, to be known as the United Reformed Church. A Church Meeting was called, and resolved, by 47 votes to 12, in a secret ballot, to join the new Church. Their neighbours in Corfe Castle decided against joining. The URC was formally inaugurated at a Thanksgiving Service in Westminster Abbey on October 5, 1972, where Mr Holley and Muriel Hunt represented Swanage. Swanage held its own Thanksgiving Service a week later. Among the changes which the URC introduced was the payment of ministers' stipends from a central fund, and the introduction of Interim Moderators, who have pastoral oversight of a Church in the interval between two ministers. In May 1967 the Missionary Societies sponsored by the Churches also amalgamated, and the London Missionary Society became part of the Council for World Mission. CWM itself was to be renamed World Church and Mission (WCM) in 1991. The Church retains an interest in overseas missions, but giving is now focused more on organisations like Christian Aid ; the Church has a named representative for Christian Aid, but not for WCM. In December 1968 the Choir decided at its AGM that it could not continue without some new, younger members, and it was disbanded in the following April. It was later revived for a while during Louise Drake's ministry, but was never again the lively organisation it had once been. In 1968 the Manse in Gilbert Road was sold, and the present Manse in Queen's Road replaced it.

A further sign of the growing links between the Churches was a large-scale revival programme in 1974-75 in which all the Churches participated : Call to Purbeck. It ended with a great open air service on the Downs, led by the Bishop. By 1975 David Holley had completed an Open University degree, but he then decided to take the opportunity of a further course of study at Glasgow University, and resigned in the same year. His farewell sermon was on the text : *'I wish you all joy in the Lord'*. (Phillippians 4.4.) The Rev. Norman Cave, of Parkstone URC, was appointed the first Interim Moderator for Swanage URC.

During Holley's ministry, some services had been taken by a minister

from Vermont, USA, the Rev. Louise Drake. She had spent her early days in the ministry in places which, if no longer the Wild West, were certainly some distance from the comforts of civilisation. When it was discovered that she would welcome a pastorate in England, the Church decided to invite her. She accepted by return post (from 3000 miles away), and brought with her Francis, her husband, a retired minister, and their daughter, Kathy, who was to find a husband in Corfe Mullen. Her induction was fixed for 17 January, 1976. Her ministry was marked especially by the family's kindness and thoughtfulness,



Reverend Louise Drake leavened always with a wry humour, which saw the comic side of human weakness. Her sermons were always carefully planned, but delivered with little rhetoric, which concealed their power. She paid regular visits to her home in Vermont, always arranging for her work in Swanage to be carried on by an American minister visiting England, so that the Church benefited from a wide range of talented pastors. Louise was here for nearly ten years, announcing her retirement in 1985 just as the Church Secretary planned a ten-year celebration.



Reverend Martin Nicholls

After Louise Drake left, the Church had to wait until July 1986 before a new minister arrived.

It is impossible to write about the ministry of Martin John Nicholls without a deep feeling of sadness. Martin Nicholls had had a period in business before deciding to train for the ministry, a lengthy course requiring considerable commitment. He had also developed skills as an entertainer, a singer-songwriter. He came to Swanage as a fairly young man, with a great deal of energy. His services, which could range from popular

performances to the deeply theological (he had clearly been well taught.) at once began to attract young people to the Church in unanticipated numbers. By 1990 Junior Church had 27 in its Senior Department, as well as increased numbers of younger worshippers, some 185 children being attached to the Church. 16 new Members of the Church were admitted at Whitsun 1990, and the average congregation at morning services was 175. There were 13 serving and 11 non-serving Elders. In May 1989 a Pilot Company with 45 members was commissioned, led by Gloria Marsh. The Fellowship of United Reformed Youth (FURY) was also flourishing.

Within weeks Martin had started a guitar class to encourage the use of modern worship songs. He developed the Good Friday Procession of Witness, in which all the Churches take part, and the Sunrise Communion on the beach on Easter Sunday. He also organised Church week-end camps, planned to end just in time for all to return to Swanage for the Sunday evening service. He could devise entertaining displays; the URC entry in the 1989 Swanage Carnival, the Red Barrows – half-a-dozen small boys in flying helmets in wheelbarrows equipped with red wings, and pushed by bigger boys, zooming to and fro while Martin gave a BBC-style running commentary – was brilliant. In 1990 the Church hosted a concert of Spirituals and Gospel music at the first Swanage Jazz Festival. He directed two musical productions in the Church; the platform remains as a souvenir of them. *‘Woodland Gospels’* used characters from a popular television series, and had a large, well-drilled children’s chorus. *‘Greater than Gold’*, a dramatisation of the quest by a poor Welsh girl for a Bible in her own language, had a chorus of 40 voices. Both were much admired and attracted large audiences. He organised a Safari to all the 48 URC Churches in Dorset, accomplishing this in one day. He continued to write songs, some for Church use, some for entertainment, and gave several concerts for charity at the Mowlem, with his family as his backing group. Cassettes



Tapestry depicting all aspects of Church life

of his music were eagerly awaited. His wife Jan gave him steady support, leading the Senior Department in Junior Church, and founding Sigma, an organisation for Single and Married women.

The new URC hymn-book, *'Rejoice and Sing'*, was adopted in 1991. The Church magazine was reorganised from 1994, and took its present form, though it was still cyclostyled. Computer-based desk-top publishing arrived a little later, giving the monthly its present professional look.

All this did not pass unnoticed. The URC was planning to set up a National Residential Youth Training and Resources Centre at Yardley Hastings. The post of Chaplain and Director was mentioned to Martin Nicholls in September 1990, and formally in July 1991. He accepted, and was pressed to move as soon as possible. The Church Magazine for September (there is no August issue) carried a long account of his time in Swanage, deciding that *'They've achieved more in five years in the URC than most of us would in ten'*. Martin's own letter to the congregation included a revealing sentence: *'It has made me a hero to some people, and a villain to others'*. There were certainly some members who could not accept his style of leadership.

Many members of the Church went to Yardley Hastings for the opening ceremony in 1992, which was used for the BBC Songs of Praise on August 9. He remained at Yardley Hastings till 1997, and the Centre reported: *'We owe Martin an enormous debt of gratitude for his vision, enthusiasm, and inspirational leadership. The Yardley Hastings Centre has become a by-word for quality and heart-changing experiences, and has been referred to as 'a jewel in the crown of the URC'*.

In fact, Martin Nicholls had left to seek a divorce, and to marry a girl who had been in the Junior Church in Swanage. His name was removed from the list of approved ministers. How much this contributed to the subsequent collapse of the Yardley Hastings project one can only guess. In Swanage, many of the new members, young and older, who had followed the messenger rather than getting the message, began to fall away, and few now remain attached to the Church.

Martin Nicholls' departure was so sudden that there was certain to be a

lengthy interregnum before a new minister was appointed. He had anticipated this, and arranged for the training of a laywoman, Mrs Judy Walsh, to be then authorised to lead the Communion Services. As early as 1850, the pastor at Blandford, Richard Keynes, had published a pamphlet, against 'Puseyism', claiming that the members of a Church could celebrate the Lord's Supper without an ordained minister, because *'the faith of the communicants and not the Orders of the minister give validity to the sacrament'*. The URC often speaks of 'the priesthood of all believers', but there was some opposition to Judy's ministry, though others thought the simple and reverent services she led were wholly appropriate, and she was thanked by Church Meeting in 1991. Tony Geddes was also authorised to lead Communion in 1992. Other services during the 23-month gap were conducted by visiting ministers and lay preachers, and by Elders, who gave the Church some memorable sermons.

During this period the old Hammond organ was clearly nearing the end of its useful life, and the Church considered how it might be replaced. A new pipe organ was out of the question, and a satisfactory new electronic organ would cost around £6000. Fortunately, the Church was able to acquire an almost new organ from Richmond Hill URC, in Bournemouth, for half this amount, the total cost, including installation being £4880. Some members felt it was little better than its predecessor, but during a visit from the Welsh choir Cambrensis for a Christian Aid concert, their organist played a voluntary which made the walls shake, and all present realised its potential. The choir, which had been briefly revived during Louise Drake's pastorate, was finally disbanded in April 1989. A small Singing Group of 12 singers replaced it for a while, and the instrumental group founded by Martin continued for a while, but in 2005 there is no organisation responsible for leading the singing on a weekly basis. Four organists share the duties on Sundays, using not only the organ but also a keyboard for modern worship songs. However, an ecumenical choir, 'Purbeck Praise', based at the URC, has been organised to lead the singing at important services, and can draw on orchestral accompaniment.

It was not until February 21, 1993 that David Harkison came to preach 'with a view', and a Church Meeting in March, with 67 present, decided



to call him, but by an insufficient majority. A second ballot was needed before an 85% majority allowed the call to be confirmed, and he was inducted on August 7. Dave Harkison was born in Glasgow, and came to the Manse with a wife and two children. He and his wife Jackie had a long-standing connection with Scouting, and he was also a registered football referee, occasionally flourishing a Yellow Card from the pulpit. The Church, still remembering the Nicholls ministry, received him cautiously, but before long he was well established, his ministry accepted.

In September 1993 one of the Senior Department in Junior Church, Lucy Walsh (now Lucy Brierley) announced that she and the FURY group would raise £1000 to buy copies of Mission Praise for the Church. This was accomplished by 1994. Lucy felt an early call to the ministry, and spent her Work Experience weeks understudying Dave Harkison. At 16, she was elected Elder, and two years later, like Joseph Smedmore in 1835, went with the Church's blessing to study for a degree in Theology at Oxford (choosing a High Church College), and from there to train for the ministry at Westminster College, Cambridge. The Church Secretary at that time, Chief Superintendent Brian Hesketh, also completed training for the Non-Stipendiary Ministry, and Jill Thornton, after a short period in Swanage, working at the Mowlem, also trained for the ministry. She will be the Moderator's Chaplain in 2005. These were very welcome vocations at a time when young candidates for ordination were becoming rare. The Elders elected during the next few years included several younger people.

The decline in numbers has made maintenance of the Church buildings particularly onerous. The Church is now a listed building, and no changes may be made without local authority permission. At one Church Meeting it was pointed out with some bitterness that, to remove the partition in two pews – to allow mourners to follow a coffin and then take their seats – had needed 18 months of negotiation, and 90 minutes of carpentry. In spite of this, improvements to the building have been

made regularly, and it is hoped that it will be possible to take the gallery of the Large Hall back into use eventually.

The Church lost a valued member, and the town an admired citizen, in 1997 with the death of Vic Marsh, BEM. He had been Coxswain of the Lifeboat for many years, with many commendations for his seamanship and courage. In the Church he was an energetic Chairman of the Fabric Committee. The Church was filled for the funeral. In the same year Betty Scott set up a Toddlers Group, which welcomed children, and their mothers, on one morning each week. The Church has supported several campaigns for social justice, including Fair Trade, Water Aid, and Amnesty International – all to some extent replacing the support once given to overseas missions.



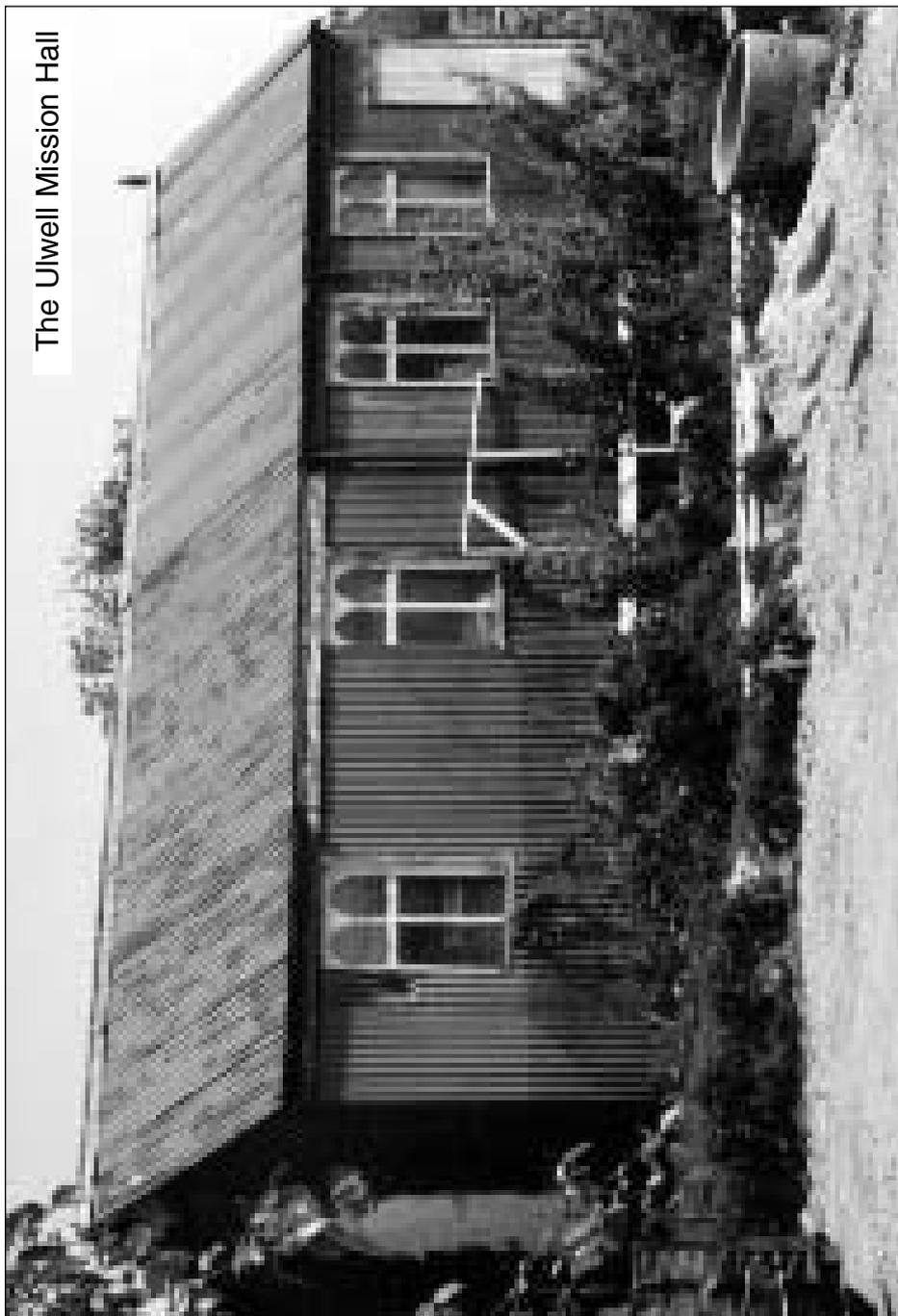
Toddler Group Cross One hardly dare describe Swanage URC as thriving. Expenditure regularly exceeds income, and demands for repairs and maintenance, and ministers' salaries, can barely be met. Dave Harkison fears he may be its last full-time minister. Yet in its spiritual life the Church is strong, the members united, and looking forward to another 100 years of witness to Jesus Christ, the only head of the Church.

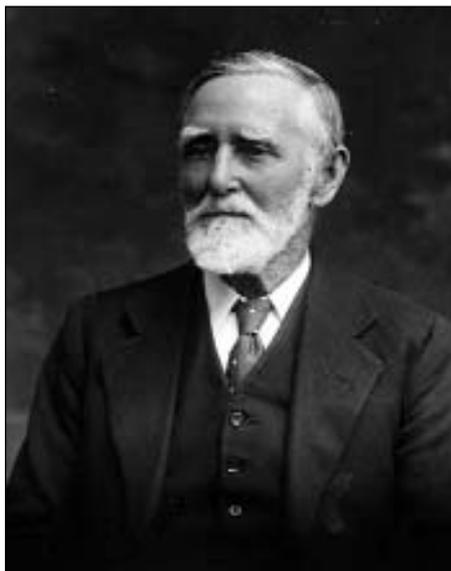
The Ulwell Mission Hall

The Ulwell Mission Hall was built in May 1905, on part of the Bankes Estate, and cost £45. It was designed to hold 50 worshippers. It was originally undenominational, but on October 2, 1912, at a special meeting of Swanage Congregational Church, it was agreed that the Church should take the oversight of the Ulwell Mission, with the Pastor, with the help of lay preachers, being responsible for holding a service each Sunday. There were problems in establishing the Mission, and in 1918 it was threatened with closure, but the Church rallied behind it, and the fellowship began to grow. In 1929 it was agreed it would need to be enlarged, and the original building was extended to accommodate 100, with an ante-room added as well. The enlarged building was dedicated at a Service and Public Meeting on December 4, 1930, conducted by Ernest Dowsett, assisted by Iris Smith, who had been Secretary since 1912. Its financial position was eased when the Swanage Mission Hall, which had for many years been let to the Salvation Army, finally sold them the premises in 1937, and part of the proceeds was given to the Ulwell Hall to initiate a fund for the erection of a permanent Church.

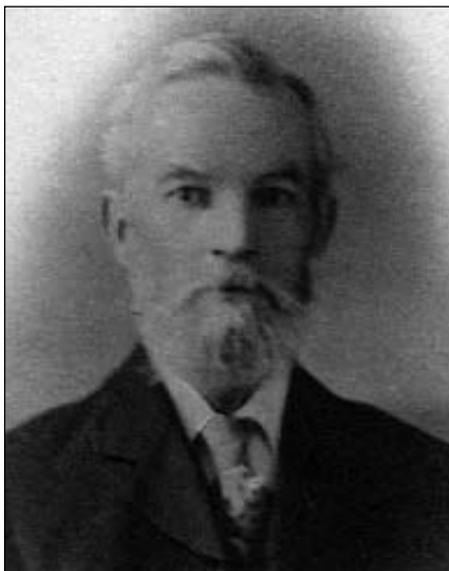
There are many references to the Ulwell Mission in the Church records, and for a time it flourished. Iris Smith led worship, supported by Albert and Fred Masters, and the singing was accompanied by a small band – violin, trumpet, and harmonium; the harmonium was played by Iris Smith's daughter, Jenny (now Jenny Lazenbury), and the violin by Harry Curtis, until his death in 1958. Regular services were held at 3 p.m. in winter and 6 p.m. in summer, and there were also special events. On December 5, 1935, a Service of Song, entitled 'Little Sunbeam' was given there. As late as July 1945 it was evidently thriving. *'The Ulwell Mission Thanksgiving Sunday a few weeks ago saw the small building filled, every inch of the floor space being occupied, and chairs had to be obtained from the cottages to help with the seating.'* However, after the war support declined, a large modern Church, All Saints, was built nearby, and services ceased to be held

The Ulwell Mission Hall

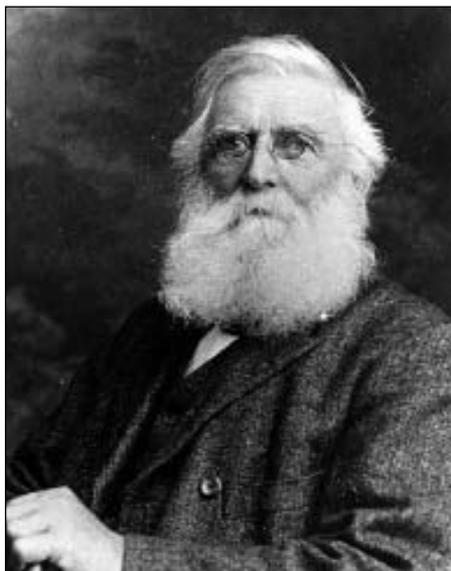




*John Bowley,
Deacon, 1884-1920*



*Keith Pittman,
Deacon, 1884-1914
Secretary 1896-1914*



*W. D. White
Deacon, 1894-1903*



*S. T. S. Tatchell
Deacon, 1903-1913*



Fred Bradford
Deacon, 1903-1918



Percy H Burridge
Deacon, 1912-1914
Secretary, 1914-1924



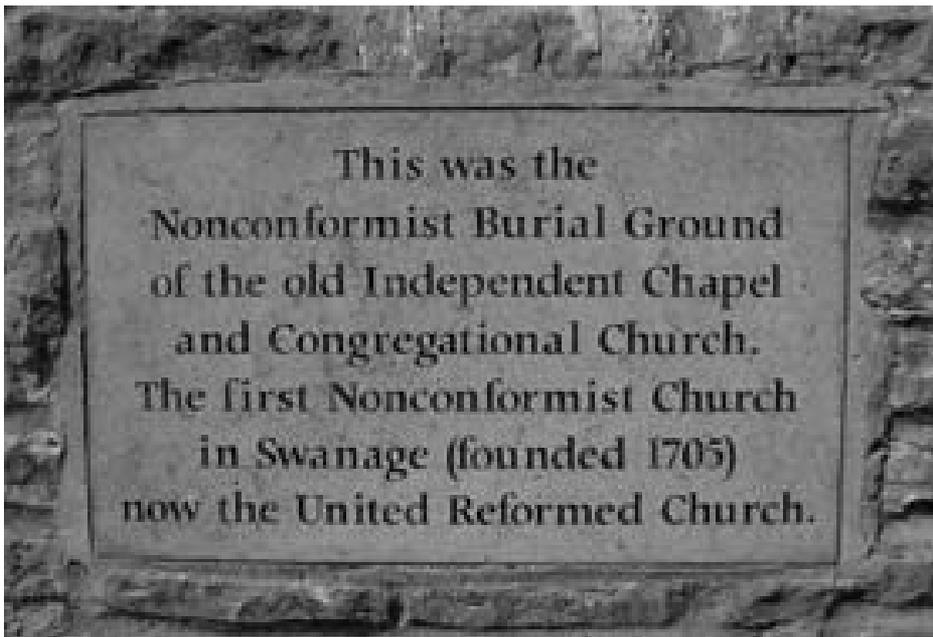
David Rollins (aged 96)
Deacon, 1913-1925,
Elder 1926-1955
Sunday School Treasurer
1905-1946



Albert Jesse Edmonds
Deacon, 1924-1932



Memorial Stone to Samuel Marsh and family



The plaque in Queens Road marking the site of the burial ground

after 1969, though it was not officially closed until after Mrs Lilian Smith's death in 1973.

MINISTERS OF SWANAGE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH 1705 – 2005

1705 – 1708	Jonathan Wheeler
1714 – 1722	Richard Darracott
1723 – 1743	Richard Glanville
1743 – 1750	James Whittaker
1751 – 1752	John Coppleston
1753 – 1757	Matthew Twogood
1757 – 1785	John Morrison
1786 – 1806	William Sedcole
1808 – 1833	John Collins
1832 – 1850	Robert Chamberlain
1850 – 1853	John Collins Fairfax
1854 – 1857	Samuel Thoday Allen
1857 – 1864	Thomas Seavill
1864 – 1871	George Hinds
1872 – 1873	Henri Le Favre
1873 – 1878	Charles Chambers
1878 – 1880	F A Warmington
1880 - 1908	Thomas Steer
1908 – 1920	G H Clothier
1920 – 1930	Thomas Isaiah Dolphin
1930 – 1935	Ernest Dowsett
1936 - 1943	Henry Atkinson
1945 – 1951	Donald Horder
1952 – 1959	Stanley Herbert
1960 – 1967	Denis Lawson
1968 – 1975	David Holley
1976 – 1985	Louise Drake
1985 – 1991	Martin John Nicholls
1993 -	David Harkison

The history of
Swanage United Reformed Church
is an on-going project

If you have any old photographs
of past Ministers, members or friends,
or details of the many social events,
we would be delighted to hear about them