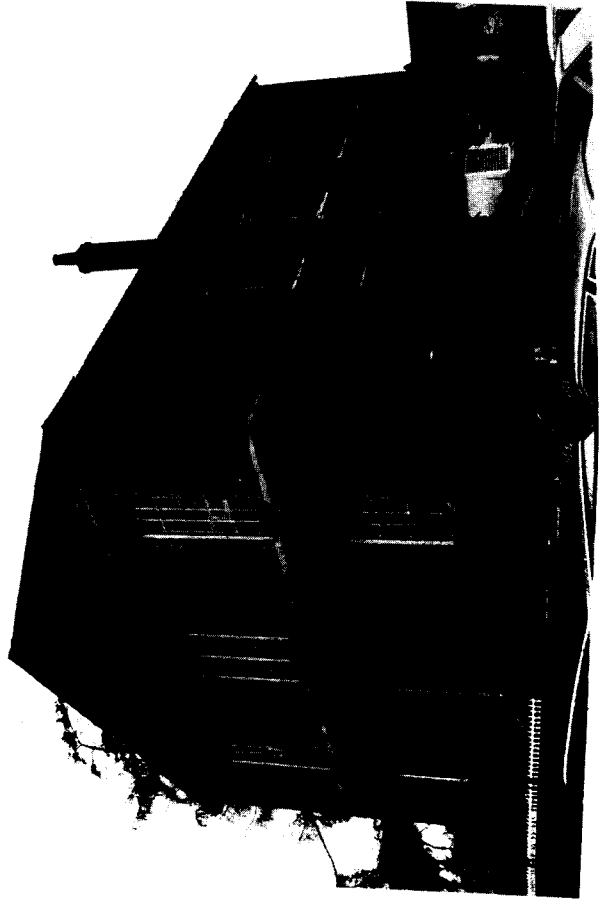


# THE STORY OF CHRIST CHURCH, QUOITING SQUARE, MARLOW

1693 - 1986



## M I N I S T E R S

1693	Meeting of Protestant Dissenters under SAMUEL POMFRET
1703	JOHN GIDLEY <i>House licensed for dissenters to worship</i>
1715 - 1724	JOHN BENSON
1725 -	THOMAS PITKIN/POLKEN <i>(Church temporarily closed)</i>
1770 - 1776	SAMUEL STEVENS
1777 - 1785	JOHN WHEELER
1785 - 1794	ROBERT ALLEN
1794 - 1803	RICHARD FROME
1806 - 1825	GEORGE EDWARDS
1825 - 1863	THOMAS STYLES <i>(Present Church opened July 1st 1840)</i>
1864 - 1866	ANDREW BEARNS
1866 - 1868	JOHN BRIGGS
1868 - 1870	JAMES MOUNTAIN
1871 - 1875	W. J. ROOME
1875 - 1879	D. W. EVANS
1880 - 1882	WILLIAM MORTON MATHER
1882 - 1883	ALEXANDER HENDERSON
1884 - 1892	JOHN FREDERICK MORGAN GLANVILLE
1892 - 1908	FREDERICK TAVENDER, BA, BD
1908 - 1932	GEORGE HENRY JONES
1934 - 1945	ERNEST ELDRED MARKS
1946 - 1950	HUBERT JOHN HAGGETT
1950 - 1965	FRED HORROX, MA
1965 - 1972	GEOFFREY WALKER
1973 - 1980	WINSTON S. REED
1980 - 1986	ARTHUR LEITCH MACARTHUR, OBE, MA, MLITT

## 1. How It All Began

Had you been watching the quoits being thrown in the Square one day in 1693 you might have heard a strident voice, somewhere not far away. Had you sought out the cause you would have found a crowd gathered round a house in the town and a man full of a rather torrid eloquence preaching a stern gospel to the assembled company. This preacher was a remarkable man by the name of Samuel Pomfret and he was in Marlow to give one of the weekly lectures then being organised by the 'Dissenters'. Pomfret, years before, had broken off his studies at Cambridge University on the ground that it was no fit place for one seeking ordination. He completed his training at Islington Academy, one of the Dissenting Academies founded to serve those who were prevented by the laws of the time from membership of the old Universities. Not willing to take on a local ministry he became a chaplain first to a private family and then to a trading vessel. When it encountered Algerian pirates in the Mediterranean the sailors urged him to go below, but he refused, since the pirates were 'just heathen'. Distressed by the language of some of the sailors he gave away £50 worth of hats on condition that they refrained from blasphemy. Hats must have been precious for the swearing stopped. (An Act against swearing was passed in 1698). When the vessel called at Smyrna the consul asked him to conduct the funeral service of his son. Pomfret only agreed on condition that he did not have to use the Order in the Book of Common Prayer. The consul and the 'infidels' present are said to have been deeply moved by the service. On his return he ran into trouble because of his dissenting views and was for a time imprisoned in Dover Castle. After the passing of the Act of Toleration he set up his own church in London where his preaching drew such crowds that the floor collapsed. He fasted on Fridays, went early to bed on Saturdays to be ready for Sunday and was 'sparing of diversions' but keen on fishing.

His visit to Great Marlow was the talk of the town and a few days later another London minister could have been seen walking round the streets with a well known local figure, Owen Buckingham, later to be Lord Mayor of London, a knight and M P for Reading. Buckingham told his friend of the impression Pomfret had created and of how 'he had put the poor people into a terrible fright'. Records go on to say that those who knew his rousing way of preaching and the great wickedness of the place at that time would not marvel much at the impact he had made.

## 2. In Troubled Times

All of that needs to be set against the story of the times. The Reformation had by then affected the life of England for close on a century and a half. Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I presided over a religious pendulum that swung back and forward from reformation to traditional catholicism and back to reform. The Stewart kings had provoked rebellion and Civil War and then, restored to power, their government had led to the repression and persecution of all Dissenters, whether on the catholic right or the protestant left. As that pendulum swung there was suffering and many paid a price for their convictions. No doubt there were some with easy conscience like the fictitious Vicar of Bray who, whatever King did reign, managed to keep their livings. Up to 1662 there was one Church of England. Its shape changed from the pre-reformation pattern with its allegiance to the Pope, through times when its pattern was determined by the Monarch with varying degrees of Protestantism, to the days under the Commonwealth when legally speaking it became Presbyterian and then Congregational. The idea of actual division was until then only latent in the minds of a few who found themselves estranged. What divided the English Church was an Act of Uniformity! That Act, passed at the beginning of the reign of Charles II, required every incumbent of the Church of England to give his assent and consent to the Book of Common Prayer (in a new revision which most of them had had no chance to consider), to acknowledge the government of the Church by bishops, priests and deacons as of divine appointment, to renounce the Covenant Oath and to be re-ordained if their ordination was regarded as defective. If in conscience they could not accept this settlement they were ordered to vacate their parishes by Bartholomew's Day 1662. 2,000 vicars left their charges or were ejected from them and non-conformity became part of the life of the English Church from then on. For the next thirty years those non-conformists were under grave disadvantage. Should they try to preach, they might be thrown into prison and their congregations with them. Many indeed are the sad stories of those years of suffering, both for those who tried to keep to the old Roman faith and those who became known as Protestant Dissenters. Relief came with the accession of William and Mary and the passing of the Act of Toleration. Many had hoped that it would be an Act of Comprehension that would have healed the wounds and made the Church one again, but that was not to be. The result was that Presbyterians and Congregationalists who had had their arguments earlier in the century, who had shared equally in the sufferings of the thirty years of repression, now shared the status of tolerated dissenters.

## 3. The First Stage

In 1676 Archbishop Sheldon sought a report on the state of the Church throughout the country. Marlow with a population of 2,394 is reported to have had 1,137 conformists, 50 Protestant Dissenters and 10 Roman Catholics. Those 50 brave dissenters, whose acknowledgement of their views may well have cost them dear, are the founding fathers of Christ Church. The town itself had not entirely escaped the conflicts of the Civil War, being at one time garrisoned by Cromwellian troops. When Charles I passed through as a prisoner in 1647 the bell ringers were paid five shillings, but whether their peals were meant to express rejoicing or sympathy is not recorded.

However the visit of Samuel Pomfret to Marlow is the first clear hint we have of the way all this affected this town. We know that the long serving vicar of Little Marlow, Heiron Gregory, was one of those ejected in 1662, and another was Daniel Sulton, a lecturer in Great Marlow. In all 47 were ejected in Buckinghamshire alone. Plainly the town was not unaffected. The local court records are full of the names of those presented for recusancy and of others who secured 'Sacrament Certificates' to show that they had attended parish communion and so qualified for public office. The recusants might be either the original Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists or those who retained their allegiance to the Church of Rome. Under a short-lived indulgence Heiron Gregory took out a licence in 1672 to use his house for dissenting meetings. Plainly the weekly lectures, of which Pomfret's was one, must have had good support for their organisers to have brought so notable a man out from London, presumably on horseback. His coming must have been well-advertised and his visit certainly gave life to the movement. Sir Owen Buckingham gave it such support that it is reasonable to date the cause that survives in the continuing witness of Christ Church to his being 'at great charge for many years after to support a Godly Ministry in the town by which much good has been done in that town and neighbourhood'. (Buckingham, who died in 1712, was himself a character, born in Colnbrook the son of a poultterer, he was married six times and it is recorded that of the six wives four were widows and five were heiresses. He was admitted to the Salters' Company in 1681 and was Lord Mayor of London in 1703).

The cause prospered and by 1715 it was supported by 250 hearers of whom 41 were county voters, that is folk of some substance. We do not know where they met, but we know there was a Dissenting Meeting House in those early days for in 1726 when it was decided to build a new chapel, the instructions issued to Richard Webb, the builder, required him to take the pulpit with stairs and sounding board and the table pew from the old building to the new.

There is one possible clue, though it does not identify the site. Amongst those

ejected in 1662 was a shy scholar of Exeter College, Oxford. He had been episcopally ordained and was living in the city of Exeter when the moment of decision came. It was said that he was so shy he was afraid to say grace in public and could only with great difficulty be prevailed upon to preach, but that when he did he won great acceptance. This man, John Gidley, came to live in Marlow before the end of the century and his house was registered as a Dissenting Meeting House in 1703. Whether that was the only meeting place we cannot say, but it may have been. Even that quiet, shy scholar had suffered for his faith and his influence was surely part of the original impulse that set the cause going.

## 4. Strength and Decay

Up to that point the largest group of Dissenters was Presbyterian and Gidley had taken out a licence as a Presbyterian under the Indulgence of 1672. The minister who served the 250 in 1715 was John Benson, the grandson of a minister ejected in East Anglia, and he received £7 a year from the Presbyterian Fund. He left almost as the new chapel was opened in 1726. That chapel was at the south end of our present site near to Quoting Square. Benson was succeeded by a minister called Thomas Pitken (or perhaps Polken). Of him little is known except that he was present at a famous gathering in the Salters Hall in London in 1719. That gathering of dissenting ministers was called to consider what advice to give to ministers in Exeter who had been disturbed by controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity. The Salters Hall meeting found the same division amongst those who gathered there. Some agreed to sign a declaration of their faith in terms of the Trinitarian articles of the Church of England. Others refused to sign, not necessarily because they did not believe what was there asserted, but because they felt that a stand upon the authority of the Bible was sufficient. It is said that the 'Bible' won by five votes. That stormy meeting spread its divisive influence among the dissenters. The 'subscribers' on that occasion tended then or later to be of the Congregational way and the 'non-subscribers' Presbyterian. Pitken was a non-subscriber. There is thus circumstantial evidence that the origins of Christ Church were on the Presbyterian side of things. That evidence is strengthened by what followed. Pitken disappeared from the story and the chapel eventually fell into disuse. If it is true that it had leant in the Presbyterian direction up to that point, then its collapse is typical of what happened in many such Churches in the middle years of the eighteenth century. Several can be found in different parts of the country with the name Presbyterian somewhere in the stonework

but now belonging to the Unitarian Church body. Rationalism was rife and affected all the churches at that time. One man offered the Archbishopric of Canterbury refused on the ground that he did not wish to preside over a dying institution. Presbyterians who had hoped that the Act of Toleration would have been wide enough to bring them back into the national Church felt lost in the new situation and were particularly vulnerable to the rationalism and 'new theology' of the time. Somewhere in that web of controversy lies the reason for the decline of the cause at Marlow from the days of the 250 hearers to the unknown day when the doors closed and the building remained derelict for a number of years.

## 5. The New Beginning

About the year 1770 a small group of enthusiasts got the use of the building and were led by Mr Samuel Stevens who acted as Pastor for the next seven years. The small group was formed into a Church in 1777 under the ministry of the Revd John Wheeler. A Covenant was drawn up and signed by eleven stated members and four occasional members. John Wheeler and his wife, Sarah, are amongst the eleven signatories, some of whom were obviously unable to write and made their mark. Parts of the Covenant are worth noting. It is called a Solemn Agreement and is dated 1/10/1777.

We whose names are hereunto subscribed believing that all the ordinances of the benevolent Jesus were designed to answer some useful and important end (and having been for a considerable time in this place deprived of one of them especially) think it our duty if possible to walk in all the Statutes and Ordinances of the Redeemer would therefore by voluntary subscription to this instrument bind ourselves to God and to one another to travel thro' this wilderness in a Body and as a Church of Christ, to communicate together at our Lord's Table, when stated or occasional opportunities present themselves for that purpose designing also—to attend Church Meetings and exercise Reproof, Exhortation, Sympathy and Forbearance towards one another as occasion may require.

(One wonders which of the four qualities was most exercised).

They hoped for an increase in numbers and agreed to receive into Church Fellowship persons of either sex who in the judgment of Scripture charity shall be found upon Examination, free from Scandal in their outward common walk, renewed in heart and sound in the Faith.

Such new members were required to pass a credal test and to declare their assent to the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. This is the Catechism prepared

by the Westminster Assembly during the Civil War. The object of this test is said to be 'for harmony amongst ourselves'. Admission to the Lord's Table was conditional upon this profession of faith. There are several names recorded as having been received into membership in the next few years. Princes Risborough and Chesham are two of the places from which they had come. They were examined, approved and then taken into Church Fellowship. One member at least was set aside by ye voice of the Church for Irregular Walke'. Susannah Restall, the lady in question, was however restored two years later and her mark is on both this document and on the revised agreement of the year 1794.

## 6. A Day of Small Things

Mr Wheeler's ministry continued until his death in 1785. During his ministry there were 37 baptisms. Six were the children of Stephen Annon and five of William Lee. There were 21 burials between August 1777 and March 1785. The burials included the Revd John Wheeler himself who was buried in the Meeting House by the Revd Mr Cook on the 17th of November 1785, aged 67. In the next month a girl of 13, Sarah Field, was also buried within the chapel. This practice continued and some fifteen were recorded before 1806, though probably most were in the graveyard. However, there is a record of the 27th October 1826 when 'Mr John Ralph was interred in the family vault within the walls of the independent Chapel Great Marlow'. Baptisms were also continuing with 51 names recorded between Mr Wheeler's death and 1824, at least one of these being that of an adult believer.

After Mr Wheeler's death there were two ministries each of about nine years. There was some doctrinal argument during these years and the second of these ministers, Richard Frome, was suspected of unorthodoxy. The arguments no doubt accounted for the revision of the Solemn Agreement on 1st January 1794. The general terms remain the same. The reference to the Catechism is dropped, but new members must 'be fully persuaded of the Fundamentals and Essential Principles and Doctrines of Religion'. The new factor now incorporated suggests that members were being recruited from those of Baptist persuasion. The agreement goes on: 'We also agree to receive into Community persons who we may have sufficient ground to Believe are partakers of Divine Grace and sound in the Faith tho' differing from us in the mode or form of Baptism'. The table was to be opened to occasional Communicants - 'provided that the Minister is satisfied that they are

real members of another church'.

The change in doctrinal stance did not affect the ordering of Church affairs. In this they stayed with the statement made in 1777 which has one or two curious notes in it.

'We also agree that everything relating to the Church and Congregation shall be determined by the Majority of Votes, and that every member shall have a vote and that when the Voters are equal the Pastor or in his absence the Elder or in the absence of both the Senior Deacon shall have the determining vote'. No other reference to the Elder has been found in the Minutes, and the mention of him here suggests a somewhat unusual polity, though Elders were certainly found in Congregational Churches which Marlow had now clearly become.

It was still a day of small things and the doctrinal troubles had taken their toll. Only nine signatures were attached to the 1794 document. Of the eleven who signed as full members in 1777 only two are on the later list, though one occasional member in 1777 signs as a full member in 1794. He, George Curling, is mentioned as a Deacon and when his death is recorded in 1815 he is immediately replaced. In 1806 things seem to have taken a turn for the better when George Edwards, one of the first ordinands from Hackney College was ordained at Marlow. The meeting house was enlarged, a residence was purchased for the minister and church activities developed, with a small place of worship opened at Bisham. The silence of the minute books of the time about the titanic struggle in which the nation was then involved - 1805 was the year of Trafalgar and Austerlitz - provokes questions. Was Marlow such a quiet retreat that the scars of war passed her by, was it the nature of church life to continue as if uninvolved in the conflict or is it that minutes of church meetings confine themselves to the routines of elections of officials and the problems of church finance? What we do know is that Marlow was beginning to grow. By 1801 there were 643 houses in the town and the population had risen to 3,236, 1,436 of them male and 1,800 female.

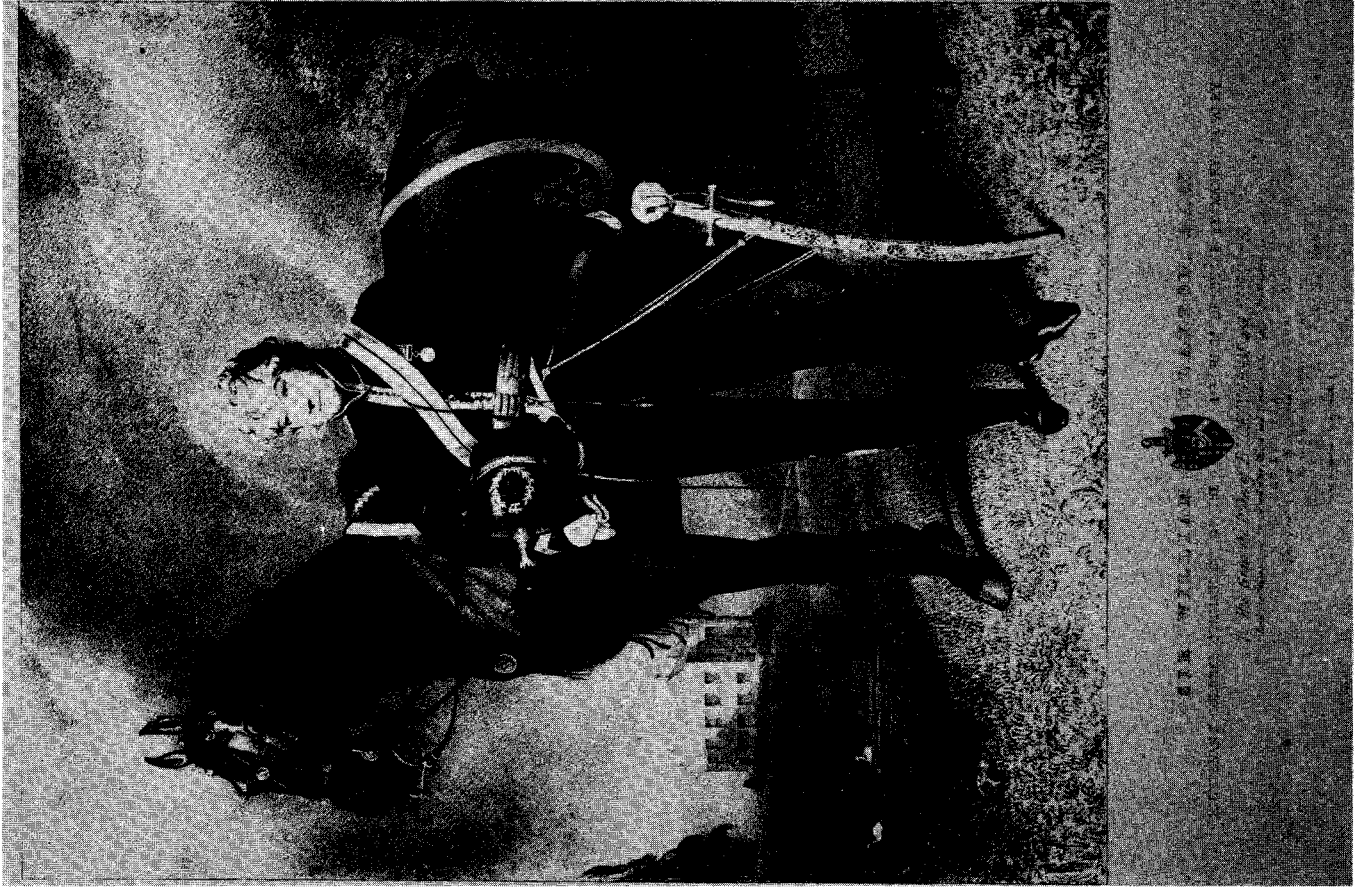
## 7. The 'New' Church

Mr Edwards resigned in 1825 but he was succeeded by another product of a Dissenting Academy, Thomas Styles. He, too, was ordained at Marlow, ministers from surrounding churches sharing in the service. Again those interested in the development of church order will be intrigued by a minute of July 27th 1837 which is headed in large letters 'Ordination of Deacons'.

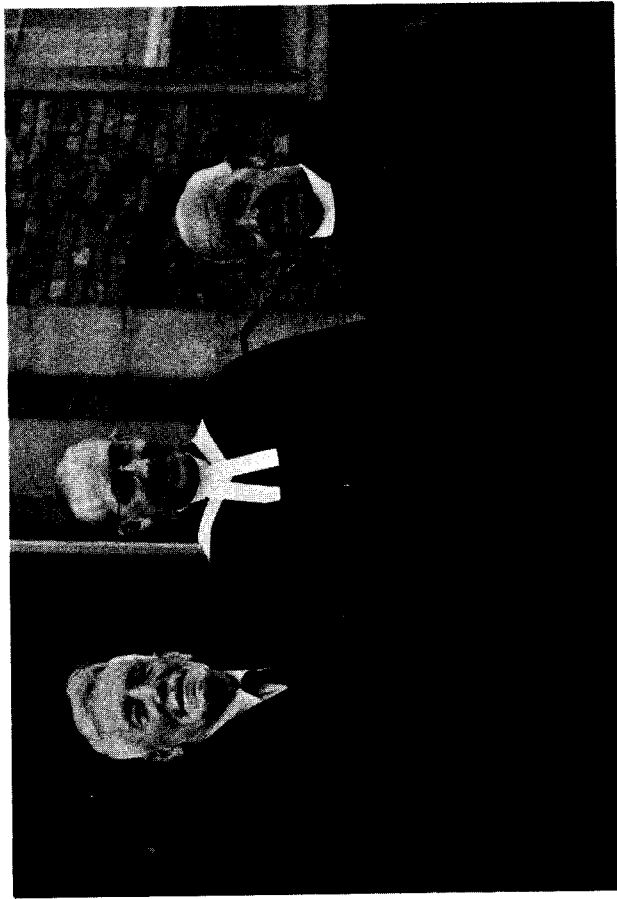
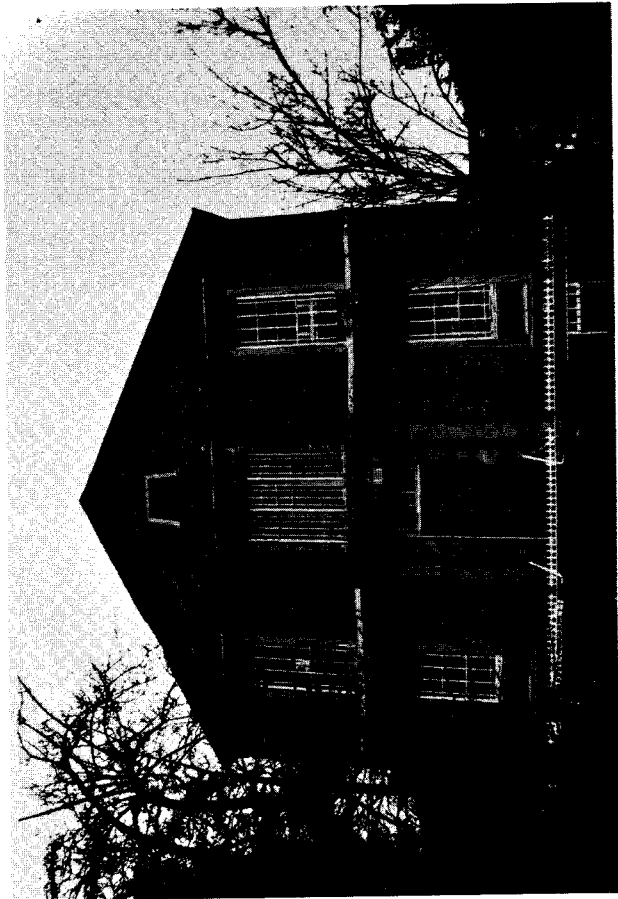
Three names follow and these three were addressed by the Revd Mr Rowland of Henley, and Mr Styles 'affectionately dedicated the newly elected Deacons to God by Solemn Prayer and the extension of the right hand of fellowship'. Thomas Styles' long ministry was marked by the move into the present building. In 1838 the leaders of the fellowship had the old chapel thoroughly examined and took action as a result of the report they received. The minute recording the process has a certain fascination. The leaders met on the second of February 1838 and summoned a church meeting for four days later. Communication was evidently faster then than now and reliance must have been placed on the grape vine as it worked through the shops and businesses of the small town. A lot of ground work had been done by someone, for the report to the church meeting contained the following facts. Examination of the old building had shown it to be 'in too feeble and dilapidated a condition to justify such an outlay of money as would put the building in substantial repair'. The comment is made that this should occasion no surprise since it was erected (with the exception of the end) in 1726 and was now 112 years old. No enlargement was deemed possible and it would therefore be better to build an entire new chapel. Six hundred pounds was already promised. A site has been selected on the meadow belonging to Sir William Clayton with whom interviews had already taken place. The result was 'the pleasing intelligence that Sir William with great liberality and kindness has agreed to give us all we ask for, on two very easy conditions'. One was to allow him to use the pathway to the chapel in common with the members to give him access to his cottages. The other was to put up a tablet in some conspicuous part of the new chapel commemorating the gift. The inscription of the memorial devised by Sir William's advisers records his esteem for the members at that time. It reads:

The ground for the erection of this chapel  
 was presented by  
 Colonel Sir William Robert Clayton Bt.  
 M.P for Marlow  
 in token of his sincere respect and  
 regard for the founders and members  
 Hic  
 Gratus Pignus Amoris  
 an: Salutis MDCCCXXXVIII

Plans had been drawn up by an architect named Fenton, estimated to cost seven hundred and ninety pounds. Mr Spicer, the Attorney, had undertaken to draw up the Conveyance and Trust Deed free of charge. The church meet-



SIR WILLIAM CLAYTON



RUPERT  
BATTING

Revd WILLIAM J COGGAN  
Moderator  
West Midlands Province  
1954 - 1969

Revd FRED HORROX  
Minister 1951 - 1965

ing confronted with all this agreed, and a committee was appointed to carry out the work. A women's committee was shortly after appointed 'to collect the donations!'

The Trust Deed vested the chapel for the worship of 'Protestant Dissenters of the Independent Denomination holding tenets agreeable to the Assemblies Catechism'. So while the reference to the Catechism had 'dropped out in 1794, here it is again. No doubt the members knew the answer to the question as to the chief end of man with which that Catechism so nobly begins. 'To glorify God and enjoy Him for ever'. The chapel was to be called Salem Chapel, and so it remained for many years to come.

The proposal to build was made known to tradesmen in the town and the plans were on display at Mr Groom's, the linen draper's shop. Two tenders were received and it is clear that the committee strongly preferred the builder whose estimate was the higher. Negotiation followed and the favoured Mr Bond got the contract to build the chapel for a sum of £1,050. Donations were sought and began to come in. Modern minds may wonder at a congratulatory note to the children who had contributed £1.11.4d. but that represented 376 pennies or 1,504 farthings, and no doubt involved a great deal of effort and the sacrifice of some desired treats.

The foundation stone was laid on July 9th 1839, eighteen months after the decision to build and the building was opened a year later on July 1st 1840, joining two other contemporary new churches. All Saints Parish Church had been rebuilt a few years earlier and Pugin's Catholic Church in St Peter Street was opened a year or two after Christ Church. Again one wonders how this urge to new church building related to Corn Laws and Chartists, not to mention the Penny Post. The church lives against the background of contemporary events, but both rightly and wrongly can manifest its independence of them. The foundation stone was laid with great acclaim, but the weather broke during the ceremony and the large company retired to a tent to hear the rest of the memorable sermon preached by the Revd John Burnet of Camberwell.

The last committee meeting concerning the building was held in the old church vestry on June 6th 1840 when it was agreed to sell the old chapel to Mr Bond for £90. Like Mr Webb in 1726, Mr Bond was instructed to transfer numerous articles from the old chapel to the new. It is difficult to be sure whether any of those transferred items are still in Christ Church, but some may be. From things said about our tables, some might infer that they were the 'deal tables' included in Mr Bond's instructions! The building was designed to seat 500 and its cost was defrayed by generous subscription.

## 8. A Domestic Problem

All this happened during the near forty years ministry of Thomas Styles. He spent the whole of his ministerial life in Marlow and lived on in the town until his death in 1881 at the age of 86. Ten years after the new church was opened there are signs of trouble. Thomas was unmarried for the first thirty years of his ministry here, but about 1854 he showed signs of repenting of his condition. If all tales be true the lady in question was his cook. She was 28 and he 56. Classless society though the Church may be, some took exception either to the person or the status of his intended. A letter signed by some of the leaders of the church required him to make a choice between the marriage or his ministry. The letter, written on August 11th 1851, read as follows:

To the Revd T. Styles  
Revd and Dear Sir,

Having been informed that you are about to form a matrimonial alliance which we consider would be imprudent and disreputable, and, believing that such a step would be highly injurious to the sacred cause with which we are officially connected;

we venture to expostulate with you, hoping our remonstrance will lead you to forego such a purpose, if it be formed, for the honour of God and the peace of the Church.

If, however, you should determine otherwise we should recommend you to resign the pastorate over us.

Praying that you may be guided to a wise decision,

We are, Revd and dear Sir,

Yours truly

William Gregory  
Joseph Wright.

Gregory and Wright were leading office bearers and had been chief instruments in the steps that led to the building of the church in 1840. Their action was not prompted by the church as a whole and indeed they were rebuked by those who remained loyal to Thomas in his dilemma. He stood by the lady and the controversy raged. Ministers from the area and members took his side in the dispute. A testimonial was presented to the 'happy couple' and a cheque for £30 given them as a wedding present. He was evidently sore and uncertain afterwards, for there is one curious minute in his hand: 'A list of persons admitted to the church a little more than a year after my marriage'. The nine names include Mrs Thomas Styles. The couple lived to celebrate their silver wedding in Marlow.

Even after his retirement in 1863 there was some controversy which caused

him to be visited by some of the deacons. It would be interesting to know how a communion flagon still in use in the church fits into the story. It was given by the Joseph Wright of the letter and is dated 1865. Perhaps Styles had stayed too long. If so, his successors took the hint. His ministry was followed by a succession of seven men who between them served for twenty years, and that takes no account of periods of vacancy that occurred within that twenty year stretch.

## 9. Fluctuating Fortunes

The life of the church during the nineteenth century can be followed both in the minute books and in the registers of baptisms, marriages and deaths. These reflect waxing and waning interest in the cause, periods of carelessness and times of renewed effort. When Thomas Styles came to the town he wrote a letter seeking the support of the neighbouring churches. One sentence read: 'Let not the responsive prayer of Christian Churches for this once declining but now reviving interest be withheld'.

The baptismal records go back to 1774. Records of burials are more sporadic. In both cases entries concern the taxes that had to be paid. For long periods they were paid to a Mr Ellis at the rate of 3d. per entry. The earliest reference to a name still current amongst us is in 1830 when Ann Maria, daughter of James and Jane Coster was baptised on the 30th of August. It was not until 1872 that it became customary to include the father's occupation in the baptismal records. Every trade seems to have been represented including watchmakers and coopers, grocers and chairmakers. The new age shows itself with James Cox whose daughter was baptised in 1901. He is described as an electrician.

The burial entries tell of the cause of death. Consumption, apoplexy, syncope and dropsy are among troubles of which thankfully we hear little today. One or two are listed as 'worn out', one of them a washerwoman aged 58. A commentary perhaps on the struggles of the 'decent poor' in those hard times! One of the ministers, John Briggs, lost two little children under a month old, one in 1867 and the other in 1868. Large families may sometimes have been a sort of insurance against the high rate of infant mortality. On the 21st of November 1869 the new minister, James Mountain, must have had a busy morning, for three girls and five boys, all of the Morgan family, were baptised together. Five of the children of the Carter family were also baptised together a little later.

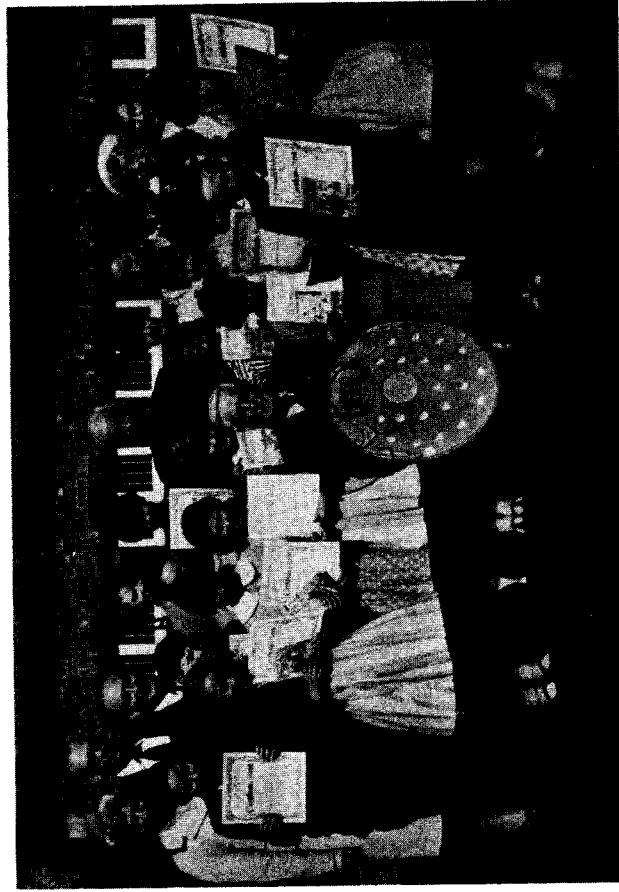
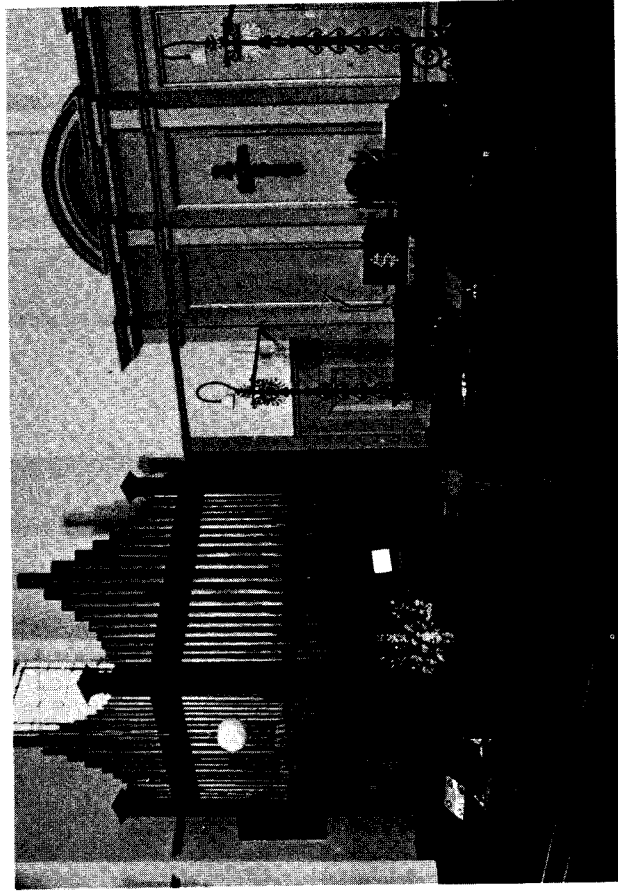


Regulations drawn up to control the use of the burial ground reflect both the often-visible anxiety about finance and the change in money values since those days. In 1867 it was agreed that all graves should be public unless a certain sum be paid. Use was to be limited to members, their partners and their children. The charge fixed was 2s.6d. per superficial foot. The sexton was to be paid 1s.0d. per foot down to six feet and 1s.6d. after that. The minister was to charge a fee of 10s.0d. for a morning funeral, but only 2s.6d. in the afternoon. Class distinction? A sad and curious note records that a certain William Reading having been prepared for membership, was found drowned on Christmas Day 1869. After discussion it was decided that he might be buried in the graveyard even though not yet a member.

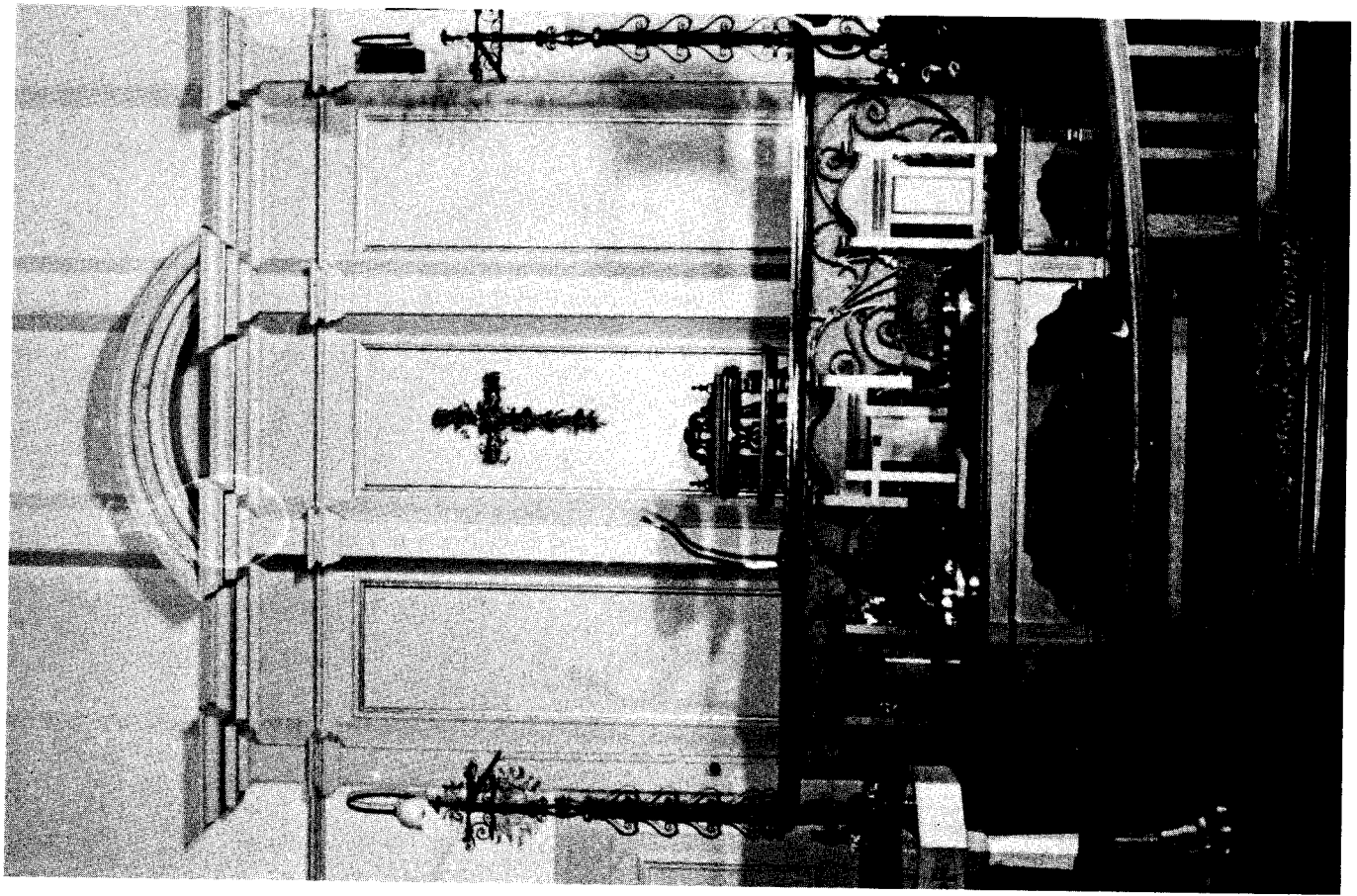
By the end of Mr Styles' long ministry it seems things had drifted a little and attempts to restore good order are evident. In February 1867 it was decided that any who were absent from the Lord's Supper for a period of six months would forfeit their membership. By the end of the year, however, the use of communion tickets was abandoned as they had failed to answer their purpose. This problem of discipline and standards of membership must have remained a problem, for by 1870 communion tickets were again in use. None was to be admitted to communion unless a member of some church. Mrs Footit, whose memorial is in the church, was excepted from this rule because she had established her right by long practice. A wistful note goes on to hope that she may change her ways and become a member. Pew rents were in operation, but places so reserved were to be made available to strangers if they were not occupied by three minutes before the service was due to begin. The attempt to renew the fellowship must have had a measure of success for twenty-six new members were received in 1867. Spiritual energy may have waned at times, but the church gave two recruits to the ministry early in the nineteenth century. The Revd J.J. Freeway ministered at Thatcham and the Revd A. Ore became minister of Highworth in Wiltshire.

Human factors had their place and one has sympathy with the church secretary, Mr Groome, who in 1796 signed a minute adding 'past 11 o'clock in the evening'. The church sometimes requires the midnight ink of its weary servants.

Not much is recorded to show patterns of worship, but there is one cryptic entry regarding the use of the psalms. The pastor appears to have been reading them and a vote in 1870 encouraged him to continue the practice, but the hope was expressed that chanting would be introduced as soon as possible. A year earlier special mission services had resulted in several professions of faith. United Prayer Meetings were planned in the town in 1871 and the question arose as to whether those presently held in the chapel should cease in order to let the members support the united ones. In the end it was agreed to change the night of the chapel meetings so that members could share in both.



*Revd Fred Hortox with Sunday School children and teachers*



Despite these efforts at renewal, not all went well, in 1873 the then minister offered his resignation because he was 'much discouraged by want of sympathy, unwillingness on the part of many members of the church to co-operate in its general works and to bear the responsibilities of its services'. All the trustees were found to have died and the secretary and treasurer who had been doing their bit, sought proper authorisation and a proper election of deacons. In 1880 things must have been very difficult for there was not only a special appeal, but the list of subscribers with the amounts they had given was read out to the church meeting.

Mr Roome, the minister who resigned in 1873, was succeeded by D.W. Evans, who in turn resigned six years later due to blindness. Considerable care was taken concerning the credentials of the next minister, Mr Mather. Enquiries were made as to why he had left the ministry of the church at Wandsworth Road and as to whether the folk there thought him fit to be the minister of a church 'that has had difficulties'. It transpired that he had left because there was not enough strength to support a ministry at Wandsworth Road and he was now serving as travelling secretary of the Turkish Mission and as chaplain at Tooting Cemetery. He was duly called and asked the congregation to put the past behind them. Alas five months after he came to Marlow his health began to fail and a communion service due to be held in November was postponed as he was unwell. He carried on for just over a year, but died early in 1882.

By now the congregation was anxious about its future. They took the view that they could not support a family man and turned towards the idea of a bachelor student. Since there was now no deacon an interim committee was formed. It bravely resolved that 'all gas burners should be lit' and set up an Incidental Fund urging people to donate a penny a week to it, in addition to their normal giving. Advised by Andrew Mearns who had ministered in Marlow in the sixties and who was now in a position of influence in London, they went to great lengths in their search for a minister. After failure to agree between two possible candidates, a third, Alexander Henderson, a student from New College was called. No stipend was agreed, but he was promised whatever might be in the stipend fund. Payment by results! The call was supported by 33 members, 19 subscribers and 15 regular attenders. The first recorded payment from the stipend fund was £2.15s.1d. However by the end of the first year he received £100. Admission to the induction tea was 8d. for adults and 6d. for scholars. 94 of the scholars had supported the call to Mr Henderson. A new classroom was created and dedicated, but whether it was the room now used as a vestry or the lean-to buildings on the east side of the church is not clear. The average attendance at morning Sunday School rose to 150 in 1883, and to 185 in the afternoon. Quite a crowd for the size of the buildings. Mr Henderson must have been keen on music because a singing class was set going and he was authorised to buy a Modulation to help them.

There are references at the same period to the Harmoniumist! Tuning fork and organist are more familiar ways of putting it.

The chapel keeper was instructed to keep the front of the church clear of loiterers and there was trouble with boys getting into the chapel. Alas, despite all the care in calling him and the promising beginning, the ministry of Alexander Henderson did not last long. He resigned in 1883 in the September after barely a year in Marlow. Mr Glanville followed and stayed rather longer to be succeeded by the Revd Frederick Tavender. It was under his ministry that an annual sale was set going. In most years the income was in the neighbourhood of twenty pounds, though in 1901 it rose to £71. Details are worth quoting for the sake of comparison. In 1893 things looked like this:

Needlework	£9.7s.2d.	Shooting Gallery	10s.2d.
Odds and ends	£3.3s.3½d.	Magnetic Battery	7s.7d.
Refreshments	£3.1s.1½d.	Post Office	8s.2d.
Fruit and Veg.	£1.4s.4d.	Fine Art and Museum	4s.6d.
Fish Pond	£1.2s.4d.	Door	19s.6d.

During this period services were held at Bovingdon Green for the 'workers' there. The Band of Hope established in 1882 proved very successful. Members were required to undertake:

#### THE PLEDGE OF GREAT MARLOW EXCELSIOR BAND OF HOPE

I the undersigned promise by divine assistance to abstain from all intoxicating liquors as a beverage and to discountenance their use in others. Lord, help me for Jesus sake.

Its membership rose to more than a hundred and amongst early names were Coster, Price, Gill and Burton. Chemical apparatus and a football and posts were among the early purchases. Children were given practical instruction in reading and speaking. There was some tension between the Band of Hope and the Sunday School over who should be allowed to enter a competition. The mention of the word 'beverage' in the pledge recalls a true story of a well-known Principal of New College, a deeply convinced and vocal teetotaler, who defended his obvious enjoyment of a sherry-laced trifle on the ground that it was not a beverage.

The Morgan family played a great part in all these years. Mr Morgan who lived in the Old Parsonage died in 1903. The Home Messenger carried the following account of his funeral:

It is not within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Marlow when the town bore a more solemn and sympathetic appearance. Business premises closed from two to four. Every sect and creed was represented at his funeral. The business man, the working man, the nobility and gentry, the vicar and the staff of Borlaise School were all present.

As the century drew to a close the idea of installing an organ began to be bruited. After much discussion the present instrument was acquired from the classic organ building firm of Willis. It was dedicated on the 24th of May 1899 when the contributions amounted to £5.18s.1d. The organ itself, now acknowledged to be a splendid example of Father Willis' work, cost £400.

A quarter of that sum was given by Miss Patrickson who is still remembered by the older members. Indeed from here on names begin to occur with frequency in the minutes which are familiar and continue amongst the present day congregation.

Sadly the minute books for the first twenty years of this century seem to have vanished and this leaves a gap in the story which even older memories cannot fill.

## 10. The Latest Period

Coming to the period between the wars, three names occur very frequently, especially with regard to property and the acquisition and disposal of land. Cottages in Hayes Place, Quoting Square and Oxford Road came on the market, often in dilapidated condition, and deals were done which resulted in the present possibilities. It is not easy to follow the details for the actual purchases were made by the three individuals, the Revd G.H. Jones, Messrs J. Gray and W.J. Morgan, the property coming to the church at a later date. Ten, or it may be thirteen, houses appear to have been bought by Mr Morgan, the Church Treasurer, for £965. He challenged the church to raise £796 in three years. The difference seems to have been covered by a legacy fund left by Miss Patrickson who had helped with the purchase of the organ. Two years later the six houses down Hayes Place were sold which suggests that the church was unable to raise enough to acquire the whole of Mr Morgan's purchase. The area concerned is now occupied by Platt's Garage. A piece of land at the junction of York Road and Cambridge Road which had been yielding a rent of £1 per annum had its rent doubled in 1932 and was subsequently sold to the tenant, Miss Wellicome, for £125. No record has been discovered of when that land was acquired. Could it have been the site of John Gidley's house and of the original chapel replaced in 1726? That speculation has no foundation, but the various Deeds and Documents recording sales and acquisitions back to 1714 provide ample scope for research into the ownership of large areas of the west end of Marlow, including as they do the supporting evidence for the good title of the land given by Sir William Clayton.

The ministry of Mr Jones lasted for twenty-four years from 1908 to 1932. Having by then celebrated his Jubilee as minister, he retired, but lived on in the town in which he had had great influence, serving as Chairman of the Council and living on as a respected and trusted adviser, both of church and community. His retirement in 1932 marked the end of an era, for the powerful Mr W. J. Morgan retired as treasurer at the same time. He had served in that capacity for thirty years, continuing a leadership that had earlier been given by his distinguished father, whose funeral on April 7th 1903 had literally stopped the town.

Mr Jones had had his difficulties, including some eye trouble, and two years before his retirement he called a meeting to discuss his future in view of the indifference he was experiencing. The meeting voted by 45 votes to 1 in favour of his continuing and agreed to set up a Mutual Improvement Society and to hold a Christmas morning service and a Watchnight social and service. These continued as features of the church life for many years, the Christmas morning service still being held. For a short time in 1929 the church employed a Deaconess, Sister Adeline. Numbers in the Sunday School were still large with 114 girls and 104 boys on the roll. The average attendance was less than that, but the numbers of old Marlovians who speak of contact with the 'Cong's' of those days shows that a considerable impact was being made on the young life of the town. At times the Sunday School met both in the morning and the afternoon. Teachers were forthcoming. One, Mr Simpson, served for over 70 years. Amongst his long-serving colleagues and successors were Rupert Batting and Mrs Roberts. She was appointed Secretary in 1928 and played a leading part in its life for over half a century. Her reports to the Annual Meeting were obviously a striking feature year by year.

There are numerous references to the old building conveyed to the church in 1914 and best known these days as the 'Saw Doctor's'. Apart from periods when it was let it served as a Drill Hall and as a Canteen and Club Room, both for the people of the town and for the social needs of men in the Services billeted in the neighbourhood, including Canadians. One Church Meeting in 1940 was poorly attended because the Canadians were processing through the streets. It is not clear whether the procession served as an obstruction or as a counter attraction.

Various activities flourished at different times. There was some embarrassment at a time when the Band of Hope was 100 strong and the Brewery offered a grant to help the church. A Girls' Social Club, a long running Pleasant Tuesday Afternoon and a Slate Club with 236 members were features. Mrs Arnold led the PTA for 41 years. As the modern world with its technology began to affect things, new boilers, heating systems and electric lighting were installed by voluntary labour under the direction of Mr Arthur Coventry, nobly assisted even then by Roy Isaac, whose daily care of the now outworn heating

system still ensures the comfort of the congregation. Other familiar names begin to occur in the records. In the early months of 1939 Miss Hilda Coster became Treasurer, an office she only relinquished in 1965 when Mrs Johnson relieved her of the dual role of Secretary and Treasurer which she had had to fulfil for a number of years. She continued as Secretary for many years more. An annual tea for the primary children at her home was another of those good works in which she still continues, a blessing to the fellowship and a friend to all.

Cyril Burton's is another name that occurs again and again, especially in presenting the auditors report year by year. His memory is still green, for his concern for the fellowship over the whole of his long life was marked by an outgoing spirit. Like Miss Coster he was ready to step in whenever needed, serving in many parts, including one short period as Church Secretary. Both he and Miss Coster were made Life Elders following the footsteps of Mr Price before them.

It would be invidious to try to pick out names amongst those who today carry the work forward. They are many and they bring a great variety of gifts to the service of Christ whether serving as elders, in teaching the young, leading our worship, looking after the property or the money that is always a necessary tool of the Christian mission. One of the marks of the fellowship is the readiness with which tasks are undertaken and needs noticed. The Eldership is still a new aspect of the life of Christ Church and indeed of the United Reformed Church in general, but it already has grown to be a means of mutual pastoral caring.

## 11. Today and Tomorrow

A glance at our current baptismal register provides a glimpse of the life of the church since 1934. Baptisms are attested by five different ministers: E. E. Marks, H. J. Haggatt, F. Horrox, Geoffrey Walker and W. S. Reed, each of whom have left memories and traditions that still affect and enrich the life of the fellowship today. Names of those baptised include many that are familiar still. In order of appearance there are: Burton, Price, Tugwood, Harris, Isaac, Johnson, Coster, Gill, Rockell, Wright, Keen, Boyt, Newsam, Kyte. The marriage registers tell the same story of a fellowship built up in love and maintained in faith. The last three of the ministers are still household names and two of them, Geoffrey Walker and Winston Reed, are still alive and have visited the church in recent times to meet their old friends whose lives they influenced

and to lead worship in the sanctuary they loved. Fred Horrox, the longest serving of them, has left many marks upon the life of the town as well as in Christ Church. His daughter happily is still one of the stalwarts.

These more recent years belong to the 'ecumenical age'. The Minutes record the development of the local Council of Churches and the part played in its life by the ministers and members. Church unity was in the air. Proposals for the union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists were being made just after the last war and were the subject of long discussion in 1948. Those proposals ended in a national covenant between the two denominations and joint activity increased all over the country. New discussions begun in 1962 began to affect the church. The issues of authority and the place of the Eldership had airings in Church Meetings, but when the final decision was called for in 1971 a positive answer was sent from Marlow Church and in 1972 Salem Chapel or Marlow Congregational Church became part of the United Reformed Church, the union of those two strands of churchmanship that had each been part of its early history. The issues on which there was strong feeling caused deep anxieties of conscience amongst some of the most devoted members, but patience, personal loyalty and affection and the grace of God have brought the fellowship through in a spirit of unity and mutual commitment. Asked later to assent to some changes, particularly regarding baptismal practice and doctrine so that the Reformed Association of the Churches of Christ could join the newly united Church, Marlow was able to say 'Yes', as it did too in response to proposals for a wider Covenant of unity. These last fell down nationally and the consequences of that failure are still being absorbed. The long saga here recounted is only part of the story of the church in Marlow and the ecumenical movement of our time has left us aware that the various churches of the town are each part of the One Church, Holy Catholic and Apostolic. What that means for common work and witness and mutual support is still to be worked out. It has to be acknowledged that while there is much mutual goodwill there is perhaps less direct co-operation than there was when the Council of Churches first came into being.

Buildings are not the Church, but they are its most visible presence. Christ Church inherits the building in Quoting Square on the site given by Sir William Clayton. That building is now nearly 150 years old and the congregation has been facing the problem of its future for at least twenty years. It is in grave need of a complete face lift. It suffers from the disadvantage of being on two floors, one up and one down, a problem for those for whom steps are less easy than once they were. Advised by professionals and, we believe, guided by the Spirit, the Church was led to look for more radical solutions and a plan for total redevelopment was mooted as early as the 1960's. This story of its past is meant to appear at the same time as that development is under way. We look back to see whence we came, now we must look forward to see how the new buildings, the fourth physical home of the fellowship, can remain a

place where worship is a real experience, where the springs of Christian life and action are constantly renewed, where the needs of the people of the town and of its young folk are met and where matching the newer images of life in the developing community, this part of the Church can play its continued role rehearsed, renewed in confidence, but dedicated to the service of the same Lord in whom is the hope, not only of Christ Church, but of the world.

