

The beauty of English Church life I believe is enwrapped not in the history of its mighty Cathedrals, but in the simple traditions of the small country Churches. The story of this village Church is one of hard struggle by a faithful band of God-fearing folk who were determined in face of many difficulties to worship with freedom of conscience and to rear their children in the ways of their Lord.

In compiling the facts for this short history, much has had to be omitted which would have made very interesting reading. What has been included, it is hoped, will afford the reader with an accurate impression of the wonderful variety of events which took place in this "Chapel" from its early beginnings in the late Eighteenth century down to the beginning of the Second World War.

The history since the time of the "Centenary Celebrations" is not included in this account, because it is obviously awkward to comment upon experiences which are still very fresh in the minds of many. Perhaps someone will someday resume the story of what happened after the War - when three earnest young Ministers took this great little Church with its colourful past and led it into a period of steady advance. The climax at present in this "unwritten chapter" of missionary endeavour in Wheatley, is reached in the ministry of the Rev. and Mrs. John Sturney, who have won new victories in the field for Christ, and have seen the building of a lovely new Manse for the Minister's family.

I should like to present this record as a lasting tribute to the members and friends of the Wheatley Congregational Church, with deep affection and sincere gratitude, for their many kindnesses to me whilst studying at Oxford and serving as their Minister.

Crown Court Church,

London, 1957

MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH

Rev. James H. Hinton (New Road Baptist Church)

Rev. John Howard Hinton (New Road Baptist Church)

Rev. Arthur Smith (George St. Congregational Church)

Rev. Eleizer Jones (George St. Congregational Church)

Rev. C. McCardie Davies

Rev. Thomas Knight

Rev. Charles Hardie Murray-

Rev. James Jefferies

Rev. William Haith

Rev. Edwin Bird

Rev. Alexander W. Ray-

Rev. Albert Ore

Rev. G. John Plommer

Rev. John H. Bell

Rev. William Newton

Rev. Percy A. Rose

Rev. William Pry

Rev. Charles A. Ashelford

Rev. Robert H. Ives

Rev. Sidney Record

Rev. Peter Broad

Rev. William H. Mackintosh

Rev. John B. Sturney

The earliest record concerning the history of the Congregational (or old Independent) Church is found in the old Church Minute Book which dates from the year 1845» However, the Independent and Nonconformist religious tradition in the village of Wheatley date as far back as the 15th century.

In the early 1400s, before the great English Reformation and break with the Roman Catholic Church, the country witnessed the growth and spread of the Lollard Movement under the leadership of John Wycliffe. In 1595 the Lollards presented a petition to the House of Commons, maintaining (1) that the possession of vast temporal wealth by the Clergy was not consistent with the way of Christ, (2) that the belief in Transubstantiation - the actual and visible presence of Christ in the bread and wine of Holy Communion - made men into idolators, (5) that the Roman priesthood had not been instituted by Christ, (4) that the priestly practices such as saying prayers before images, healing confessions of sins, and personally absolving the believer from his sin, had not been ordained by Christ and were marks of superstition. After the appearance of this petition, an Act was passed by Parliament in 1400 which outlawed it as heresy, and rendered those supporting it as heretics to be punished by death at the stake.

On the strength of references in Fox's Book of Martyrs it is quite certain that Lollardry was practised, in and about Wheatley. This same book mentions the case of one Lollard in Wheatley, who was "guilty" of the crime of reading the English (instead of the Latin) Bible". In one sense, the Lollards can be regarded as the forebears of the Puritans, Independents, Nonconformist Dissenters, and the Free Churchmen, During the time of Oliver Cromwell's encounter with the Royalist armies in the Oxford area in the 1640s, religious independency undoubtedly flourished in Wheatley. Cromwell House, where the Lord Protector himself is known to have stayed, stands next to our (the present) Church. The eminent Puritan poet, John Milton, was also familiar with Wheatley, for his first wife, Mary Powell, lived in Forrest Hill, and her Uncle, Abraham Archdale lived in Wheatley itself. Cromwell's troops were billeted in Wheatley at the time of the marriage of his daughter to Milton in the adjoining village of Holton.

In the latter part of the 18th century, the first tangible beginnings of the Wheatley Congregational Church became apparent. In 1790 the Rev. James H. Hinton secured a licence from Bishop Smallwell of Oxford, to open a Nonconformist place of worship at the eastern end of the High Street. Until 1812, when the "Five Mile Act" was repealed, a Nonconformist Clergyman was forbidden to live, or to conduct worship within five miles of his former parish, a corporate town, or a Parliamentary borough. Also until the year 1812, the Nonconformist places of worship (in any area) had to be certified by the Bishop of the Diocese. The Meeting House was called "Wycliffe Chapel", and can be considered the first Protestant Church in the village. Hinton (the father of James E. Hinton, philosopher, and scientist, and John Howard Hinton, Baptist Minister and Philanthropist) was at this time the Minister of the New Road Independent Chapel, Oxford, and later became one of the leading Nonconformist Divines of his day.

The Hinton family owned a house in Wheatley, and helped to keep the Nonconformist conscience alive in the village until 1841, when his friends and interested parties incorporated the work with the Congregational Union of England and Wales as one of its Mission Stations. For the first fifty years after the establishment of a regular Nonconformist mission in Wheatley, the work was under the wing of two Independent Churches of Oxford - first the New Road Church (from 1797 - 1817) and then the George Street Church (from 1857 - 1841). The Rev. James Hinton, assisted by several young laymen from New Road, laboured diligently in the village cause. But in the words of the Minute Book: "In consequence of the degraded condition of the people, whose sabbaths were often employed in bull and badger-baiting, their deeply rooted prejudice, and interference of parochial authority, these efforts appeared to produce little effect". After the failure of the elder Hinton's health, the work was taken up by his son John Howard, "who imbibed the sentiments of Irvin and the Wesleyans". Beginning in 1857, at least four lay preachers from the George Street Church supplied the pulpit. Two years later a permanent congregation was properly formed and a Sabbath School was opened by the

Rev. Eliezer Jones, Minister at George Street. By 1842 a small Independent Chapel at Great Haseley was attached to that of Wheatley as a Home Missionary Station, and both bodies were accepted into the Oxfordshire and West Buckinghamshire Association of the Congregational Union.

The first regular residential ministry in the Wheatley cause was conducted by an energetic Welshman, the Rev. Charles McCardie Davies, who led in the building of a "neat Chapel" in 1842, seating "250 persons without galleries". By 1846, the membership had grown to 25, the Sunday School had gained 85 students with 12 teachers, 2 libraries had been started, and 200 tracts were distributed monthly.

Mr. Davies was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Knight in 1855, who stayed for 9 years. He was followed by the Rev. V. Hardie Murray from Bodborough, Gloucestershire, who removed to Cullen, Banffshire, Scotland in 1866. The ministry continued under the Rev. J. Jefferies from Farnham, Surrey, until 1868, and under the Rev. William Faith of Eccingswell, Hampshire, until 1875* During these years the work was extended by occasional services to the villages of Tetsworth, Great Haseley, Great and Little Milton.

The task of evangelizing in Wheatley itself, however, was still beset with local obstacles and was still far from complete. For example an editorial in the Oxford Times in 1884 described life in Wheatley in 1851 as that of a "semi-barbarous locality": "Thirty-three years ago ... it was the plague spot of the diocese, a lawless place where crime, riot, and every species of immorality abounded. Its main street was a muddy brook; the Church was a sort of compromise between a barn and a dissenting meeting-house; no respectable female dared venture out after dusk; education was practically unknown; the new Vicar was escorted to Church the first Sunday after taking possession of the cure, by a body of police men, and a hundred trees in the Vicarage grounds were cut down in one night."

The concern of the Church to help uplift the social and moral character of the community was reflected in "The Rules Upon Church Discipline" which were drawn up during the pastorate of Mr. Faith. These stated that absence from the Lord's Table for three months successively was to be considered as "self-exclusion unless sufficient reason be assigned". Disagreements between Church members were to be referred to the Pastor, and if he failed in bringing about a reconciliation, the matter was to be dealt with by a deputation of members, and as a last to be taken before the Church Meeting. The Cardinal sins of the flesh were listed as offences involving immediate suspension "until satisfactory evidence is given of unfeigned penitence". During the period of suspension, special prayer and exhortation were to be used as a means of restoring the one at fault to the Church fold. The Scriptural basis for these rules was given as II Thess. 5*14-15; Titus 5* 10-11; Gal. 6:1; and I Cor. 5«

The ministry of the Rev. Edwin Bird, from Stokenchurch lasted, from 1875 to 1887 and was a most eventful one. He inaugurated, a pew-rent scheme in 1876, organized, a "Clothing and Coal Club" to assist needy inhabitants of the village during the economic depression in 1877 and he promoted extensive alterations and improvements in the Church exterior in 1878. He was ordained and officially recognized by the Congregational Union in 1879. During the winter months from 1885 to 1885, he instituted a series of lectures on educational, musical and cultural subjects which were conducted by special speakers from the Oxford area. An Organ belonging to Thame Congregational Church was purchased and installed in 1884 for £20.

The financial accounts kept by the Minister afford an interesting picture of the life of the Church during this period. There were entries in 1885 for no less than 15 separate funds. These include the Radcliffe Infirmary Fund, the Special Lecture Fund, the Sacramental Fund, the Seed Club Fund, the Band of Rope Fund, the Home Mission Fund, and the Monthly Magazine Fund. The Chapel Keeper was paid £5. 8s. Od. annually and the Minister £25. At a Church Meeting in 1887, especially convened for filling in the forms sent by the Church Aid Society, the discussion on Church finances lasted for over four hours !

In 1886, Mr. Bird investigated circumstances relating to certain charities which had been given to the Parish in the form of lands in the time of King James the 1st. Attending a Vestry meeting at the Parish Church that year, Mr. Bird claimed that the rents of lands which were supposed to be devoted to the relief of the poor, had mysteriously disappeared from the Churchwarden's account book. From 1844 to 1886 the rents had apparently been going to "other channels". He had visited the sites in question (at Chalgrove and Ford) and made inquiries of the tenants, but was unable to gain satisfactory explanation on the conveyance of the land. He had heard rumours that under a "new scheme" the rental from the land at Ford went to the Church School, and the rental from the land in Chalgrove was used to apprentice poor children. The confusion on this issue, needless to say, led to sharp reaction among the poor people of the village.

Mr. Bird conducted a series of open-air services in the village centre and private prayer meetings in the outlying homes in 1882. At the Church Anniversary that same year, considerable time was devoted to analysing the worth of past methods and the need for future improvements. Mr. Bird recorded "Many wise suggestions were made, such as more punctual attendance at all services, shorter and more direct prayers, and better quality singing out of doors".

Shortly after this, it was decided that the Trust Deeds should be put in "a safe condition" and that a new set of "laws for our guidance as a Congregational Church" put into practice. (in 1884 George Street Church, Oxford, was requested to appoint new Trustees and "when attending to the "Wheatley Deed to do the same to the Haseley Deed, using the same names as submitted for Trustees". At the outbreak of the second World War the Deeds were deposited in the Safety-vault at the Muniment Room of Memorial Hall - along with those of many other Churches - to avoid, damage or destruction by enemy action.

All during the 1880s, when many in the country were suffering from economic hardship, the members of the Church were especially industrious and anxious to help one another. On one occasion when a Building Committee met to make plans for erecting a platform for the Organ, it was recorded that: "The work was begun the same evening - members of the Committee assisting before leaving the Chapel. It was so far done then as to be ready for the setting up of the Organ". The "Coal and Clothing Club" which the Minister had begun in 1877 for the assistance of needy villagers, continued to flourish during this period. In 1886, 46 members (it had been as high at 96 in 1877) provided tickets to 20 families for clothing and to 26 families for coal.

The winter of 1885-86 was particularly severe and many were out of work. It was then that "a kind gentleman", Colonel Miller of Shotover House, put a sum of money into Mr. Bird's hands to spend as he thought fit for relieving the distress. A portion of it was given away to urgent and deserving cases, and the balance was spent for:

- (1) A Soup Supper attended by 120 children of the poor in the village,
- (2) and a Tea for all men, and their wives, who were without employment. The Minute Book states: "The provisions were plentiful

several were present who had never entered the Chapel before ... songs were sung and a few words spoken.. It was an occasion that will not be easily forgotten".

Increased financial hardship forced Mr. Bird's resignation in 1887. But because he remained in the neighbourhood, a petition was signed a few months afterwards by 277 names, requesting the return of the former Minister to the pastorate of the Church. This move however, encountered considerable opposition in the Church due to the fact that he had formed "a rival fellowship" in his own home, and had refused to give up the Congregational Church Book with its official records. The story of what happened is too long and unedifying to relate in full at this point. In the end, when the members of the Church and congregation failed to reach a satisfactory solution, the case was heard at the Annual Meeting of the

County Union Assembly at Henley on April 1st, 1889, when Mr. Bird withdrew his charges and expressed regret over the split which he had caused.

Dr. James Augustus Murray of George Street Church, Oxford, attended a Church Meeting in March, 1889, and urged the members to exercise "charitable and kindly judgement" in the choice of a new Minister. The ministry of the new pastor, the Rev. Alexander W. Pay, lasted, however, only 12 months. During that year, according to the Schedules for the Congregational Church Aid and Home Missionary Society, the average congregation at Wheatley was 94, at Haseley it was 70, and- the total incomes amounted to £157* Mr. Pay succeeded in obtaining a license for the Church for solemnizing of marriages, and he conducted services in the upper room of the "Merry Bells" coffee house while the Church sanctuary was undergoing repairs. He resigned owing to certain Court proceedings which arose in connection with his son being assaulted in the street outside his residence.

The next Minister, Mr. Albert Ore, was an evangelist of Slough, whose "popular pastorate" lasted 5 years. In September, 1891, one year after beginning his work, Mr. Ore offered his resignation, due to continued financial difficulties of the Church, but withdrew it in response to an urgent request of the members at Wheatley and Great Haseley.

The next few years marked a number of interesting undertakings. In 1892, a body of 15 new Trustees for the Churches at Wheatley and Great Haseley were sanctioned. A series of entertaining and instructive lectures were conducted fortnightly during the winter on such subjects as "Paper Making", and "The Chemistry of the Candle". In the same year the Church observed its Jubilee anniversary by holding a grand Tea at the Merry Bells Coffee House. The speakers on this occasion consisted of several of the leading members of the George Street Church : Mr. Thomas Kinglerlee, Mr. Edward Beaumont, and Mr. George Kempson. By the conclusion of the commemoration it was announced that the debt due on the Renovation of the Chapel had been cleared.

Toward the end of 1892, on the occasion of Mr. Ore's marriage, the Church presented the newlyweds with a mahogany Writing Table and a silver Tea Service. A few months later, the Minister and his wife conducted an eight-day mission in the Church at Great Haseley. As a result of these meetings, the fluctuating cause at Great Haseley -^as considerably bolstered, and it was decided to hold a joint meeting with the Wheatley Chapel once a quarter for "social intercourse". On 12th March, 1895, Mr. Ore resigned to accept the pastorate of Castle Combe District Church, leaving the work at Wheatley in a much happier and healthier state than when he had begun.

The Rev. John Plommer accepted the pastorate late in 1895, and shortly afterwards he put forward plans for the construction of a new Schoolroom adjoining the Church. This building project occupied the major part of his ministry and became the most enterprising undertaking since the founding of the Church. In order to begin to meet the estimated cost of £600, he sent out 500 printed circulars and 100 subscription cards. Within one year (1896-97) £210 had been raised through this means. About this time, several influential friends in the denomination advised the members to build a new Chapel instead, and to convert the old one into a Schoolroom, but the idea was soon afterwards dropped.

Plans now went ahead for a new Schoolroom and a few alterations in the Chapel. Two anonymous friends offered £100 each if Mr. Harris, the Treasurer, could match the sum from other sources. Col. and Mrs. Miller of Shotover Park donated £25. The property site was given by Mr. Iliffe Pike and his sister. The construction was by Mr. C.C. Robinson of Wolvencote, and the designs were drawn up by Mr. Mardon Mowbray of Oxford. The new building was finished in decorated Gothic style, and the foundation stone laid in September, 1898 by Mr. Hugh Ball, B.A., Mr. Edward Beaumont, and Mr. R.R. Alden, all of Oxford. Members of the Church taking part were Mr. Joshua Harris (S.S. Supt. and Church Treasurer), Mr. Iliffe Pike (Church Secretary), and Mr. Cecil Shepherd (Rep. of the Guild).

Addressing the assembled members and friends on this occasion, Mr. Hall dwelt on the fact that Dissenters had been the fearless champions of popular and free education. For 500 years Nonconformists had been the great pioneers of the religious liberty now enjoyed in their country. The new village schoolroom would be most richly blessed in that the children would be taught here the value of religious liberty, of freedom of thought, and of freedom to know and serve God in the way that appealed most to their consciences. At a special service in the evening, the Chairman, Mr. Kingerlee, spoke and stressed that Nonconformity was the surest safeguard against Roman Catholicism in England.

Two months later the Schoolroom was formally opened by Mr. Kingerlee, as the Mayor of Oxford. Although it had been agreed to insert new windows in the front of the Chapel in order that its appearance might more easily correspond with the Schoolroom front, this plan (involving an additional cost of £120) was dropped at the suggestion of Mr. Vernon Bartlett of Mansfield College, Oxford. He advised removing the debt on the Schoolroom first, and avoiding the danger of having the Grant from the Association reduced .because of excessive expenditure. Mr. Plommer left the pastorate at the end of September,1900, and the plan was never revived.

Following the very successful work of Mr. Plommer, the Church experienced some difficulty in finding a successor, and it was not until January 5rd,1905 that a new Minister, The Rev. John H. Bell, was appointed. At the Sunday School Prizegiving and Christmas party that year, Colonel Miller provided both the gifts and the Christmas tree. Also in that year the debt on the Schoolroom was removed, and an additional Grant was made to the Church by the County Association. The Grant was withheld in 1904 however, because Mr. Bell had not fulfilled the pledge which he had made to the Association to enter Nottingham Congregational College. Accordingly, he preached his last sermon on August 15th,1905 and left to take charge of the Church at Brill.

In November, 1905j with the approval of the County Association, the Rev. William Newton was invited to the pastorate and granted a stipend of £70 per annum. During his long and active ministry the Church once again became a thriving centre of religious life in the village. The Sunday School Anniversary in June, 1906 was addressed by Dr. Ivy Williams of Cowley, Oxford, - "the gallery having to be utilized." Mr. Newton decided to adopt the system of using individual communion cups in 1908. He received approval in 1909 for altering the seating arrangement by having one middle aisle instead of two side aisles. In the same year the, interior of the Chapel was renovated at a cost of £20. The Minister's stipend was raised to £75 for the year. Contributions to the L.M.S., the Radcliffe Infirmary, and the County Union Association shewed a marked increase. The Band of Hope and Temperance work in the village were actively supported and encouraged by the Minister. In 1910 four members with their families emigrated to Canada.

The first large-scale Bazaar and Sale of Work, consisting of six stalls, was held on May 29th,1919* The net-result of €25. was considered so good that it was decided to form a Ladies' Sewing Club to plan for another such effort in the near future. In 1920 Mr. Newton succeeded in getting the Church to agree to the formation of a weeknight Men's Meeting. This was to be held in the Schoolroom for males 18 years and upwards, "and if any should desire to smoke, he would not object'.'

The Church suffered a severe loss in 1915 by the death of its beloved and devoted Church Secretary, Mr. Pike. He bequeathed his house (called "Iliffe Cottage") to the Church to be used as a Manse for the Minister. By the terms of his Will, the property was entrusted to 9 Trustees - 5 appointed by himself, 5 by the County Union, and 5 from Church members. The plaque to the right of the Organ in the present Church interior testifies to his faithful service and to the high esteem in which he was held by his friends.

The Cottage Prayer meeters, which had fluctuated in Littleworth since 1890, now became a more regular activity in the life of the Church. In 1916 an ebony, silver-mounted walking

stick was presented to Mr. G. Bartlett in recognition of his fine services as organist for 14 years. In 1917 the Church lost another valued leader and tireless worker in the death of Mr. Joshua Harris, the Sunday School Superintendent and Church Treasurer. No one individual had done more to sustain the finances of the Church, to consolidate its position in the community, and to deepen the happiness and religious welfare of the children, than Mr. Harris.

During the years of the first World War, the Church, like many others encountered severe financial difficulties. In 1917 certain Church musical instruments - among- them a Bass Viol and Cello - were sold to remove the deficit of that year. The year following, special donations for this purpose were received from Mr. Webber and Lord Leverhulme of Oxford. The Anniversary Tea for 1918 was cancelled, due to the prevailing influenza epidemic. Grave concern also was expressed over "the fact that the ventilator had been blown from the top of the School".

With the resignation of Mr. Newton in September, 1921, there began a close association with Temple Cowley Church. Largely because of the shortage of Congregational Ministers, the Minister at Temple Cowley was invited to accept pastoral oversight of Wheatley as well. The Minister at this time the Rev. Percy A. Rose, agreed to conduct two Sunday services a month, also to spend half a day each week visiting members and conducting the required meetings of the Church in Wheatley. Nor this he received a grant from the Chapel funds towards his stipend. By the end of one year he had discontinued the morning school and service, and organized instead an afternoon Sunday School.

On November 12th, 1922, the joint pastorate of Wheatley and Temple Cowley was filled, by the Rev. William Fry. Throughout this ministry of 16 years, he was a man much loved, by the folk of the village, and, in spite of his advanced, years, led the smaller Church in a number of enterprising steps. One of the first of these was the formation of an Executive Committee, comprised, of elected, members from Wheatley and Cowley, acting jointly as an advisory council to the village Church. References to "the Meeting of Church Members and the Executive" occur frequently in the Minutes. The Wheatley Church membership roll was revised, and clarified. - in this case it involved, asking the old members to "re-join" afresh. Negotiations were completed with the Charity Commissioners in May, 1924 for the sale of the manse (the house bequeathed by the late William S. Pike). For some time the Manse had been vacant and it was felt that it would prove more useful to form a Manse Trust Fund from the sale of the property, the interest of which would go toward the Minister's stipend. However, the financial picture at this time was evidently not too gloomy, for two stringed instruments, together with a large drum, were sold, for 10 guineas in January, 1925, and six months later the Church voted to affiliate itself with the Congregational Union of England and Wales by sending 10 pounds to the "Congregational Forward Movement".

In 1924, Miss G.W. Summers, who had attended the Chapel, was dismissed from her post as Village Nurse, and a Churchwoman was assigned to take her place. This had happened only three weeks after she had been appointed, on the grounds that she was a Nonconformist. The indignation which this aroused among Nonconformists in the district moved Mr. John Massie of Mansfield College to conduct an investigation and to make public the full facts of the case in the Oxford Chronicle.

Other Noteworthy events during this period included the revival of the "Coal and Clothing Club" in November, 1925, the use of the Schoolroom by Mr. William Tombs on behalf of the local Liberal Association in 1926, and the adoption of the weekly envelope system in 1927* Also in 1927, the Church decided upon a plan of redecoration, accepting the tender of £500 by the Hinkins and Frewin Company, Oxford, to do the work. Dr. William Selbie, the Principal of Mansfield College, preached at the service marking the re-opening of the Church. In 1930 the interior of the Church underwent another significant change when (after considerable discussion) electric lights were installed ! Four years later the Organ was rebuilt

and enlarged especially to the memory of the late Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Harris. In a letter of condolence from Mr. Thomas Elderfield to Mr. Gilbert Harris on the death of Mrs. Louisa Harris in 1931, he wrote "I can see your Father pedalling away (Note: Mr. Elderfield, while he was a young member at Wheatley had planned to go into Bristol College and enter the Ministry. Lack of money prevented this, and he eventually moved to London where he became an accredited local preacher, for several denominations. He was also a member and chairman of the Tottenham Urban District Council for 25 years, and for 4 years a member of the Middlesex County Council. away at the .American organ in his seat, and. remember what a time of rejoicing it was when the Pipe Organ was installed. It may not have been new, but all the same we were proud.

of it "

Toward, all of these installations and. repair costs, the George Street Trust of Oxford, donated a total of £150. Additional funds were raised that year by means of a Bazaar opened by Mrs. W. Webber and chaired by Mr. Joseph Colegrove, both of Oxford. Special services rededicating the Organ and Chapel were conducted by Mr. Joseph Thornton, the well-known Bookseller of Oxford and Mr. A.G. Smith, the Bursar of Mansfield College.

The Revd. Mr. Fry retired from the Ministry in December, 1958, having served as Minister for the longest period in the history of the Church. The Rev. H. Moxley, the Minister at Summertown Congregational Chapel, and the Rev. J. Harrison Milnes, the Bursar of Mansfield College consulted with the Church concerning the next step. It was decided to appoint the Rev. Charles A Ashelford as temporary Pastor.

Six months later, in June, 1959, it was decided to call the Rev. Robert H. Ives of the Free Church of England or otherwise known as the Independent Evangelical Fellowship of Churches. He accepted, and on July 11th the Rev. H.J. Haggett of Cowley Road Congregational Church was asked to conduct a special "recognition service" and to give Mr. Ives "the right hand of fellowship into Congregationalism".

Mr. Ives set about his work with energetic zeal and great expectations, but this was somewhat overshadowed by the outbreak of World War II in September, 1959* However, one of the first major tasks which he undertook was the revision of the Church Roll and the Church Rules. The list of members was brought up to date with considerable difficulty and eventually numbered 28 adults. He felt that the Rules on Church Discipline, drawn up in 1874, were no longer practicable and unnecessarily strict. He was not in favour of candidates for membership being especially visited and interviewed by certain Deacons as well as by the Minister.

By now the Church was feeling the full effects of the European War. The Black-out regulations for the interior of the Church in the event of Air-raids created considerable difficulty in making arrangements for evening services. Because of the large number of evacuee children from London, the Schoolroom was let to the Oxford Board of Education for £25 per annum. At Christmas in 1940, the Sunday School arranged a combined party for all the local children from Wheatley and all the evacuated children from London.

The event which fittingly concludes this history, was one of the highlights of Mr. Ives' ministry - the 100th Church Anniversary on February 25rd 1941 (This was of course, merely the centenary of its being recognized as a Church of the Congregational Union, for the actual beginning of the Church extended back another fifty years)