

**Christ Church, Lewes
United Reformed and Methodist**

The Tabernacle 1829-1864

Cliff Geering



**200th Anniversary of the Tabernacle congregation
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This booklet has been derived from the notes and research papers left by Cliff Geering, who died in 1993 and was Church secretary from 1972 to 1977. They were given to the Church by his daughter Dorothy. Further booklets describe later years of the Tabernacle, and one gives an account of the Cliffe Chapel, the first Congregational Church in Lewes. They are published as part of the celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the founding of the Tabernacle congregation in 1816.

The original sources used in the booklets are the minute and vestry books of the church, surviving letters and legal documents, and pieces published in the local press. These form part of the East Sussex Record Office collection deposited in The Keep, Woollards Way, Brighton, BN1 9BP. [thekeep@eastsussex.gov.uk]

The call of the first minister, Revd Evan Jones 1829-1864

After the opening of the Tabernacle twelve years were to pass before it had a minister of its own. The apparent delay may have simply been due to the difficulty of finding a man of the right calibre willing to come to Lewes. Whether or not this was so, it appears that Rowland Hill (1744-1833), whose annual preaching tours brought him into contact with ministers all over the country, had a hand in the final settlement. Although he came to Lewes on only a few occasions, the managers of the Tabernacle corresponded with him in almost every year from 1822 until 1829.

During a tour of Kent and Sussex in the spring of 1827, Rowland Hill made a brief visit to Lewes to preach at an evening meeting at the Tabernacle on 8 April. Towards the end of the same year he travelled to South Wales. Through the efforts of Howell Harris and others the revival in Wales had flourished. In 1773 the Countess of Huntingdon had written: 'Wales is blossoming like a rose, in all the English parts, as well as great blessings in our Welsh labours.' More recently at Newport in Monmouthshire the successful ministry of a Calvinistic Methodist minister, Evan Jones, had led to the opening of a new chapel there in 1822. One of the preachers at the opening was Rowland Hill's assistant at Wotton-under-Edge, Theophilus Jones.

It can hardly have been a coincidence that in 1828, the year following Rowland Hill's tour of South Wales, the managers of the Lewes Tabernacle took preliminary steps towards the execution of a trust deed, which among other things gave the trustees power to appoint a minister. Theophilus Jones and Evan Jones both visited Lewes, the first to conduct a single Sunday morning service on 5 October, and the second to serve for two weeks in December.

Arrangements were made for Evan Jones to come to Lewes again for three weeks in May 1829. At this time Charles Wille Jnr was living at Rider's Well, just outside Lewes, formerly the home of his father-in-law. In his diary he notes that the Teachers' Annual Tea Party was held there 'in the garden in a commodious booth erected for the purpose. The Rev E Jones presided.' He adds 'I trust I have felt more of the spirit of my office as a Sabbath school teacher since.'

It is clear that Evan Jones had made a good impression and on 28 May 1829, while he was still in Lewes, the trustees recorded their first decision in the Vestry Book: 'The propriety of engaging a permanent Minister being considered. It is unanimously resolved that a permanent Minister be engaged and that the office be offered to the Reverend Evan Jones of Newport South Wales who has occasionally served this Tabernacle.' It seems certain that when Evan Jones returned to Wales at the beginning of June the terms of his settlement were already agreed; but although the Trustees had the authority to appoint a minister they were careful to obtain the approval of the church members at a meeting on 5 June and of the whole congregation at a public meeting on 17 June. With the unanimous approval of both meetings Charles Wille Snr travelled to Newport to offer the pastorate to Evan Jones; and on 9 July the result of his mission was recorded in the Vestry Book:

'Mr Charles Wille Snr reports to the Trustees of this Chapel that he has waited on the Reverend Evan Jones at Newport South Wales, and that the said Evan Jones has accepted the Invitation.'

Evan Jones, the Tabernacle's minister elect was born on 7 August 1790, at a farm near Cefn-coed-y-cymmer, on the northern edge of Merthyr Tydfil. The eldest of five children, he was only nine years old when his father died and it was remarked that he grew up more than usually steady and thoughtful for a boy of his age. While still a youth he accompanied his stepfather to a meeting of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. As they stood with others outside the open window of a cottage where a meeting was being held, the young man was stirred by the words of the simple preacher within. In 1807, he joined Pontmorlais Chapel in Merthyr. Merthyr Tydfil was an ugly, sprawling town dominated by the mass and din of the great Cynfarthfa Iron Works. Already the largest town in Wales, it stood at the centre of the important iron- and steel-producing district that extended some 18 miles from Monmouthshire in the east to Carmarthenshire in the west; and the beautiful hills and valleys were increasingly scarred by the waste from furnace and pit. From Merthyr a canal descending through 40 locks carried its products the 26 miles to Cardiff for shipment.

At Merthyr the young Evan Jones prepared himself for the ministry. It seems unlikely that he had any academic training apart from the kind of help and

encouragement that a promising young man might expect to receive from his local minister. Apart from this there was opportunity for self-improvement in the reading societies, the philosophical society that met in the town and in the bookshop, which had weekly communication with London. He was in his 20th year when he first spoke in public. The occasion has a ritual quality, which seems to signify the completion of his apprenticeship. 'Having gone to the house of a friend to hear a sermon, he was requested to open the service with reading and prayer. He did so, but, on turning to come away the minister put his arm around him, and, catching hold of the desk, said: "You must not go until you have spoken a few words to the people." On his leaving the pulpit the brethren said: "You have put your hand to the plough, and cannot turn back." So he became an itinerant preacher for the Welsh Calvinist Methodists.

After some years he was asked by the Connexion to settle in Monmouthshire and moved to Llanmartin, a few miles east of the growing port of Newport, to take charge of the work in the surrounding area. At that time the congregation in Newport was meeting in a room in the Old Castle, but by 1821, through the efforts of Evan Jones, this had become too small. In 1822 a new chapel was built in the centre of the town and Evan Jones gave up his itinerant ministry to become its permanent minister. He was 'a charming preacher' and his fluency in Welsh and English drew congregations of both nationalities to the new Tabernacle.

It was probably about this time that he first came to the notice of Rowland Hill, who visited Newport in September 1823, during a tour of the west country. He impressed him sufficiently to be invited on a number of occasions to preach at Wotton-under-Edge and (a greater mark of esteem) at Hill's own church, the Surrey Chapel in London. Evan Jones' connection with Rowland Hill and his circle is confirmed by Wille's diary. On 11 April 1833, shortly before a planned visit to Brighton, Rowland Hill died, and on 19 April was buried beneath the pulpit of Surrey Chapel, his nephew Lord Hill being the chief mourner. The vast congregation attending the funeral was admitted by ticket. Wille records that Evan Jones travelled to London on the day before the funeral and returned to Lewes the day after; and also that he went to Wotton-under-Edge a few weeks later for the funeral of Theophilus Jones, who died on 4 May from an attack of influenza aggravated by his journey to London for the funeral of Rowland Hill.

As a young man Evan Jones had seen some of the dire effects of the post-war slump upon the working people and could not fail to be aware of the growing sense of social injustice amongst those who were more articulate. About the time he settled in Newport, the contentious John Frost, a disciple of William Cobbett, began to publish his pamphlets in the town. Yet we can safely say of Evan Jones, as of other Calvinistic Methodists, that belief in predestination made political reform seem irrelevant. As David Williams put it in *John Frost: A Study in Chartism* (1939): 'Social inequalities to them were merely a means provided for the development of character and political reform they were not concerned with. They were therefore conservative in politics.' In this they differed from some of the older Independents and from later generations of nonconformists in Lewes and elsewhere actively concerned with social and political reform. It was said of Evan Jones that 'his principal characteristic was reliance upon God in everything, not only for direction in and deliverance from spiritual but earthly troubles as well.'

It may be of interest to examine the terms on which the Tabernacle's first minister was appointed.

Mr Jones was to return to Lewes to serve as a supply from 1 November until 25 December 1829, at the usual stipend, becoming permanent minister from 25 December. This arrangement allowed him to give proper notice to his chapel at Newport and to find a house in Lewes.

His stipend was to be £250 per annum, with an additional £35 per annum towards the rent and taxes of a dwelling house, both payable quarterly in arrears and he would receive £25 towards his removal expenses. The amount of the stipend gives some measure of Evan Jones's standing. The average stipend of a Congregational minister about his time was £100 per annum, although in London some ministers might get £300 or even £700. When Israel Soule accepted the pastorate of the Eastgate Baptist Church in Lewes in 1829, his stipend was £70 per annum, increasing by £5 to £10 a year until it reached at least £100. For a Welsh pastor the average was only £50 and some lived in grinding poverty. No doubt in a town like Newport Evan Jones received more than the average; but his stipend there is unlikely to have matched the offer from Lewes.

In the Church of England 47% of the livings were valued at £200 or less (the valuations were not necessarily the same as the actual values), although it was common for an incumbent to hold more than one living. Of the Anglican livings in Lewes only St John-sub-Castro produced as much as £250 a year; John Lupton, rector of St Peter Westout and St Thomas in the Cliffe, received £320 from the two livings; John Scobell received £303 from the combined livings of All Saints and St John the Baptist, Southover. The rectors of these churches were university graduates. Curates, of course, had to make do with much less.

There was no provision for an annual holiday; but Evan Jones would be permitted to preach outside Lewes for six Sabbath days in each year, preferably not more than three weeks successively. This seems to follow a general practice. He would be responsible for the stipends paid to the supplies during his absence and it was stipulated that 'The Trustees of this Chapel or the Acting Managers thereof for the time being with the said Evan Jones should approve of such occasional Minister or Ministers so supplying during Evan Jones' absence so as to make it agreeable and pleasant to each other.'

Finally the new minister was recommended to take out an assurance on his life for £1000 at his own expense. At a time when relief was limited the position of a minister's widow could be precarious. It could also be an embarrassment to his congregation. If there were young children the situation would be worse. When Thomas Aquila Dale, rector of All Saints and St Thomas in the Cliffe, died at the age of 46 in 1807 a public subscription had been launched for the relief of his widow.

The first trustees

When the managers decided to set up a trust to administer the Tabernacle they did not mean to withdraw from the leadership of the chapel; they intended to become trustees themselves. There was however a difficulty, for persons having an interest in trust property cannot be trustees.

Although the cost of the site had been the founder's gift to the future church, the cost of the building etc. (advanced by the Willes and Nehemiah Wimble) was regarded as a loan. Before the trust deed could be executed, therefore, it was necessary to establish the joint ownership of the Tabernacle property, of

which Charles Wille was still the legal owner; and then for the joint owners to divest themselves of their interest in the property. The first was easily accomplished; the second was more complicated, because both Charles Wille (who had inherited his father's interest) and Nehemiah Wimble wished to leave the sums owing to them at the disposal of the chapel. The matter was arranged in a series of transactions. In July 1828 the managers, acting as joint owners of the Tabernacle, borrowed £1800 for one year on the security of the chapel from Thomas Dicker the banker to repay the loans. In the following May they executed the trust deed by which the chapel was conveyed to the trustees subject to the mortgage to Thomas Dicker; and in July the trustees redeemed the mortgage with money borrowed from James Kidder and William Attwood to whom they simultaneously transferred the mortgage. It was noted that £1200 of the money belonged to Charles Wille and £600 to Nehemiah Wimble for whom James Kidder and William Atwood were the respective trustees. Thus the original position was effectively restored.

The purpose of the trust deed was to ensure that the Tabernacle would continue to be used for the objects for which it was erected; to give it a legal identity; to appoint trustees to conduct its affairs and to define their powers. Trust deeds, as experience showed, could be a source of trouble. This could arise from faults in drafting; from the way in which the trustees exercised or failed to exercise their powers; and from changes in doctrinal emphasis which in a time of social and religious ferment could easily occur to modify a church's understanding of what the powers of its trustees should be.

Two local examples illustrate this. In 1787 the Particular Baptists in Lewes insisted that the trustees of their Meeting House in Foundry Lane 'were entirely subject to the Church in their office and they ought not to do anything without the approbation of the Church.' At Heathfield the trust deed of the Independent Chapel founded by George Gilbert gave the church no say in the appointment of ministers. This was the prerogative of the trustees. Such a situation was clearly unacceptable, for in 1834 a new trust deed was executed which restricted the right to choose and dismiss ministers to the church members. Only if a minister departed from the terms of the Westminster Confession could the trustees dismiss him with or without the consent of the Church Meeting.

It is against such a background that the trust deed of the Tabernacle needs to be seen. There ministers must be nominated and approved by the trustees, who reserved to themselves the right to remove exclude or suspend a minister 'without assigning a reason.' Although, as we have seen in the case of Evan Jones, both the church and the congregation were consulted about the appointment, the church members were not completely free to choose whom they would. As at Heathfield, new trustees could be appointed by surviving trustees. The Tabernacle trust deed provided that new trustees, who must be members of the Tabernacle congregation, could be appointed by the surviving trustees to replace trustees dying, becoming disqualified ,or unwilling or unable to act, or to add to the number of trustees. Since the first trustees were appointed by name only, without reference to qualifications, it is not clear how they could become disqualified even if they ceased to be members of the congregation; or how it could be determined that a trustee who failed to attend the meetings of the trustees was unwilling or unable to act, unless specific evidence was forthcoming. In general the trustees of the Tabernacle had absolute powers in the management of its affairs.

The first trustees were a closely-knit group; they were

Charles Wille

Nehemiah Wimble, brother in law of Charles Wille

George Adams

Charles Wille Jnr, son of Charles Wille and nephew by marriage of N Wimble

Arthur Morris

John Adams, son of George Adams

James Berry, son in law of Charles Wille

John Harvey

Thomas Weeden.

During the whole of October 1829, while Evan Jones was winding up his ministry in Newport, Theophilus Jones was in Lewes as if preparing the way for the new pastor. On 31 October, the *Monmouthshire Merlin* paid tribute to the departing minister:

'On Sunday evening last, the Revd Evan Jones, who had been for many years minister of the Welsh Methodists, delivered his farewell address to his congregation from the pulpit of the Tabernacle. It must have been gratifying to the most apathetic bosom, but particularly to him who had for so many years

lived in the hearts of the people, to view assembled so numerous an audience. The chapel was crowded to excess and numbers must have gone away unable to obtain admittance. His address was fraught with that beautiful simplicity for which he will long be held in grateful and pleasing remembrance by those who are capable of estimating his worth.'

On 1 November, as arranged, Evan Jones began his ministry in Lewes, returning to Newport just before Christmas to bring his family to the house he had taken in Albion Street. On 31 December [He moved to High Street in 1841 and Lansdown Place 1851], Charles Wille Jnr. noted in this diary: 'Our worthy friend and Pastor is returned to us with all his family, 12 in number. Yesterday they left Newport (Wales) and this evening arrived at Lewes (about 200 miles). May the Lord smile on him and us, that the union may prove a benefit to our souls and be for the reviving of personal godliness in our midst.'

The new year 1830 had an unhappy beginning for Evan Jones and his family. Two days after their arrival in Lewes his five-month old daughter died. 'In which dispensation,' commented Charles Wille. Jnr., 'though painful, yet a great deal of mercy appeared.' Ann Jones was the first to be laid in a vault at the Tabernacle. At the end of January Evan Jones himself seems to have been taken ill. The services on the 31st were obviously arranged in haste. In the morning Charles Wille Snr. read a sermon by William Romaine, the celebrated eighteenth-century Calvinist evangelical preacher; in the evening the Baptist minister, Israel Soule, preached. The lecture on the following Wednesday was given by Samuel Franklin of Cliffe Chapel. The response to the emergency throws revealing light on the relations between the denominations in Lewes.

Evan Jones was able to preach on the first Sunday in February but did not preach again until the evening of Good Friday 9 April. During his absence the pulpit was supplied by ministers from London or by other ministers from the vicinity, including George Betts of Alfriston and J N Goulty of Brighton. At Easter W F Platt, a veteran preacher of the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion, assisted at the Tabernacle until its minister was able to resume his full duties at the beginning of May. On 13 June he preached at the Sunday School Anniversary for the first time. On 3 July Charles Wille Jnr recorded that 'The Church is still increasing at the Tabernacle. The labours of our worthy pastor appear to have been much blessed - sinners have been converted.'

On Saturday 26 June 1830 King George IV died. On 15 July Gideon Mantell rather sourly noted in his journal: 'The shops closed and the bells tolling on account of the funeral of the King George the fourth, who but for this ceremony would have been forgotten already; the sycophants (curse them) being too much engaged in finding out the long dormant virtues of William IV to think of their dead master.' For his funeral sermon at the Tabernacle that Thursday morning Evan Jones took a text that would have been well understood by his congregation: 'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart (Ecclesiastes 7:2).'

The arrival of their majesties in Brighton on 30 August had aroused hopes that they would visit the county town. These hopes were delicately suggested in loyal addresses to the King and Queen unanimously approved at a town meeting called for the purpose on 8 September. The address to the King begs leave 'most humbly and respectfully to approach your Majesty with our dutiful and heartfelt congratulations on your Majesty's accession to the Throne of these Realms, and on your having chosen this our Loyal County for your Majesty's Royal Residence.' The Queen is assured 'that although we have not been honoured with your Majesty's august presence, yet our sentiments of a dutiful and affectionate attachment to your Majesty are not exceeded by any Class of his Majesty's subjects.' These addresses were duly acknowledged but, despite a number of rumours, there was no sign of a royal intention to visit the town. It appears they had no such intention. Eventually, in the words of Gideon Mantell: 'The anxiety which prevailed on this subject among all classes induced some gentlemen of the town to communicate to Mr Kemp, one of the representatives of the borough in Parliament, the anxious wishes of his constituents....'

Who these gentlemen were and when their communications was made is not stated; but on 4 October George Adams was appointed Senior Constable of the Borough. He had seconded Kemp's nomination at the General Election in July 1830. Both he and Nehemiah Wimble were influential supporters of Kemp, who would only be too willing to gratify them if it lay in his power. It would not be surprising if they were responsible for the approach to Kemp. Apart from his standing as a member of Parliament, Kemp was now living in Brighton and was a

leading personage in the locality both as a landowner and as the developer of Kemptown. He was thus well placed for access to the Court. On 24 September he and his children attended the Grand Juvenile Fete at the Pavilion given by their majesties for 'the juvenile branches of the nobility and gentry'. It was no doubt because of Kemp's representations that he and Sir George Shiffner (who had been MP for Lewes from 1812 to 1836) were among the guests at a small dinner party given by the King and Queen on 19 October, which also included the liberal peer Lord Suffield [Edward Harbord, 3rd Baron 1781-1835] and Lord Chichester. Later that night Kemp dispatched a note to George Adams informing him and his colleague, George Grantham Jnr, the Junior Constable, of the royal intention to visit Lewes on the following Friday 22 October.



G Adams N Wimble Queen Adelaide

King Wm IV

Evan Jones

The events of the day have been fully recorded elsewhere. The special significance of the occasion for the Tabernacle is clearly shown in Archibald Archer's painting, now in the Town Hall. This is, first of all, a record of a historic event in Lewes, the first visit of a reigning monarch to the town for nearly 600 years. It shows the royal party arriving at the Friars. Around the forecourt are grouped the gentry and notable inhabitants of the town. The eye is immediately drawn to the Queen, attended by her ladies, and is led easily to the left by the faces of a group of gentlemen towards the King, who is climbing the steps to the

entrance of the mansion, where he is awaited by the representatives and chief officers of the Borough.

For people familiar with the town and aware of the religious climate of the time the picture would have another meaning. Only since May 1828 had dissenters had the legal right to hold office under the Crown (whatever might have been tolerated in practice). They were still subject to a number of disabilities and to widespread prejudice. Now the Senior Constable of Lewes, George Adams, and the proprietor of the Friars, Nehemiah Wimble, both of them dissenters and trustees of the Tabernacle, are in the group welcoming the King and Queen. Other leading dissenters associated with the Tabernacle are among the spectators, and standing prominently at the foot of the steps of the mansion is the gowned figure of the minister of the Tabernacle, Revd Evan Jones, gazing respectfully at the King. It is noticeable too that the four Anglican clergy present are slightly withdrawn from the focal point of the picture. So at this second level the picture demonstrates the loyalty of dissenters to the Crown and the royal acknowledgement of their status in the realm; it also gives the accolade of respectability to the Tabernacle.

The effect of Evan Jones' ministry was seen in the immediate increase in the congregation and the number of church members. Since the church was formed at the Tabernacle in 1817, 78 people had become members. The death or departure of some of these had reduced the total to about 55 by the time Mr Jones arrived in November 1829. By the end of 1830, 40 new members had been added; 24 joined in 1831 and thereafter until the end of 1839 there were on average ten new members a year. A number of those who joined in 1830 and 1831 were already attending the Tabernacle when he came. Amongst these were: Thomas Dicker, the banker, who, although at heart a Baptist, had been a subscriber at the Tabernacle from its early days; William Boys, the proprietor of a school 'for twenty young gentlemen' in Castle Gate Street; William Pockney, shoemaker or carpenter of Ringmer [He sold the site of Ringmer Chapel to the trustees of the Congregational Church]; the bookseller and stationer Reuben Lower, whose shop in the High Street provided a circulating library and a depository for the Bible Society. Two members of the Berry family, which for many years had been connected with the Cliffe Chapel and then with Jireh Chapel, joined the Tabernacle at this time. James Berry, the architect and

builder, who had married Charles Wille's daughter Mary was one of the trustees of the Tabernacle; his cousin, Thomas Berry, who joined in 1832, was a brewer.

This growth was reflected in the chapel's income, which increased sharply (as it needed to do to support its minister). The income from subscriptions rose to a peak in 1835 and then declined slightly, while that from the quarterly collections after an initial rise remained fairly stable until 1834, when they also fell. These facts together suggest that the Tabernacle had a greater appeal to the more affluent members of the community. The records of the female branch of the Sunday School (the only records to survive from this period) seem to confirm this. The number of scholars, which stood at 127 in January 1830, doubled by the end of 1832, after which it began to fall.



The popularity of the new minister, helped no doubt by the avowed position of its managers on the question of reform, soon made it necessary to enlarge the chapel. In 1832 the length of the building was increased by about a third by an extension at the south end. Side galleries were installed and a new schoolroom was built, probably adjoining the vestry on

the east side. A portico in the fashionable classical style was added. This 'neat ionic front' is noted in Parry's *Coast of Sussex*, published in 1833, and a drawing in Mark Antony Lower's *A Handbook for Lewes* shows the front of the chapel as it then appeared. Inside, the ionic portico was matched by mouldings around the two large south windows and the arched recess in the wall between them, immediately behind the pulpit. Since the necessary skills could be found among the trustees, it is probable that the work was carried out under their direction. The imposing neoclassical style was characteristic of increasingly prosperous Dissent at this period, different from both the often very humble dissenting chapels of the previous century and the Gothic architecture favoured by the builders of Anglican churches. The alterations increased the capacity of the chapel from 800 to 1200, space which 'was soon filled'. The cost of the work, nearly £1000, was raised within three years.



Interior, looking south



Interior, looking north

Developments in Worship

It soon became clear that Evan Jones was not satisfied with congregational singing in Tabernacle worship. In 1833 *A collection of Hymns designed as a supplement to Dr Watt's Psalms and Hymns for the use of the Congregation assembling at the Tabernacle, Lewes'* compiled by Evan Jones, was published by R. W. Lower. It came into use at the chapel at the beginning of 1834. The new hymn book included the work of William Cooper, Philip Doddridge, John Newton, Augustus Toplady and Charles Wesley. It also introduced a greater variety of metre. In his preface Mr Jones was careful to point out that no sentiment had been introduced 'which does not harmonise with those of the *Psalms and Hymns* of Dr Watts now in use.' 'Singing the praises of God', he says, 'is a delightful part of divine worship, and the glorious employment of the spirits of just men made perfect who are now before the throne'.....'seldom have we noticed a revival in religion and a delight in sacred music separated.' More than a new hymn book is needed to improve the singing: 'May the compiler be permitted to remind his fellow worshippers of the exhortation addressed by the zealous Levites to the congregation of Israel [Nehemiah 9:5].

'Stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever. Sitting is the usual posture of mourning and silence [Lamentations 2:10] and it would perhaps be difficult to find many *congregations* who indulge this unsuitable attitude who are not either too silent or dull in the delightful work of Praise: he speaks not of those few individual exceptions who, on account of age, corporeal infirmities, or great fatigue, cannot accomplish their own wishes. Sitting congregations generally resign that part of the divine worship which is nearest *akin to heaven* to the singers: and he cannot expect to witness a general and considerable improvement in this branch of our public solemnities, till our people *stand up to bless the Lord the God!*'

In 1835 (soon after Charles Wille Jnr had acquired a Seraphin - an early form of reed organ) the possibility of putting an organ in the chapel was discussed. It is not clear whether anything of the sort was installed at that time; Cliffe Chapel had an organ in 1832, so it is likely that the Tabernacle followed suit. Such instruments were still a novelty in the town. By 1829 only one of the seven parish churches possessed an organ; but in that year both St Anne's and St John's Southover, installed an organ, that at Southover being a psalmodic barrel organ presented by Mrs Newton of the Grange.

Of the two congregations, that in the morning seems to have been the more representative: this is probably why the monthly communion, which all church members were expected to attend, was held in the morning. After their morning service the children of the Sunday School remained in the chapel for the service, sitting in the gallery facing the pulpit. Their teachers (apart from any who sat with them to keep order) seem to have sat in their family pews. It is noticeable that a sermon 'addressed more particularly to the aged' was preached in the morning and that the evening service, attended by servants and others engaged during the day, was the appropriate occasion for remarks 'addressed more particularly to the young'!

Before 1836 weddings were not allowed in dissenting chapels. Burial services, if the burial was in a parish graveyard (usually the only one available) were conducted by the clergyman or someone appointed by him. The part that dissenters could formally take at a burial depended on the clergyman, e.g. in 1841 the Tabernacle choir sang at the graveside at the burial of a member of the chapel in St John's churchyard.

In 1836, under a new law, it became possible for dissenters to marry in dissenting chapels that had been licensed for his purpose. In Lewes the first marriage under the new law took place at the Baptist church on 12 October 1837. 'Owing to the novelty of the event a considerable number of respectable members of the congregation were assembled with their friends.' The license for the Tabernacle was issued on 3 February 1838. Evan Jones conducted this first marriage service on Wednesday 29 August 1838 at 8 o'clock in the morning. The bride Martha Hook was a member of the Tabernacle and the bridegroom John Earl later joined the church.

Work in villages

It was not long before the influence of the Tabernacle began to be felt in the outlying villages, where Evan Jones often preached in the evening during the week. This influence was extended by an association with the Manington family. A branch of this old Sussex family had settled at Horeham Place, in Waldron parish, in 1720 and had continued to farm in the area ever since. The present tenant of Horeham was William Manington, a member of the church George Gilbert had founded at Heathfield. About the time Evan Jones came to Lewes

William Manington took a house in Lansdown Place, leaving his son Isaac at Horeham. Another son, Peter, farmed at Isfield Place and a nephew Matthew (the son of the Matthew Hanington in whose farmhouse Thomas Dicker's father had preached in 1789) carried on his father's work at Ripe. Although William's daughter, Hannah joined the Tabernacle in 1831, he and his wife maintained their connection with Heathfield, of which William became a deacon and trustee. It was not until 1835 that they became occasional members of the Tabernacle and after the death of his wife in 1836, William went to live at Heathfield. Through Peter and Matthew Manington, however, came the opportunity for Evan Jones to visit Isfield and Ripe.

Hebron Chapel, Ripe, was entered in the Chichester Diocese Register of Dissenting Meeting Places in December 1830. The entry does not give the names of the applicants so it is not possible to say whether the Tabernacle had any part in its opening; but on Thursday 29 January 1831 Evan Jones baptised the children of two families at Ripe in the presence of Matthew Manington. As this was the first baptism to be performed at Ripe by Mr Jones the coincidence of dates suggests a connection between Hebron Chapel and Matthew Manington. Thereafter Evan Jones seems to have visited Ripe about once a month on Thursday evenings.

A reference to Evan Jones' preaching at Isfield in November 1833 'for the first time this season' shows that it was not an unusual event. In the previous January the opening of a new Sunday School at Isfield was attended by representatives from Lewes. A fortnight later some of the teachers at the Tabernacle School exasperated their Superintendent by going to the Isfield school instead of their own without asking his approval. Where the services and the school at Isfield were held at this time is not known (A likely place is the School House, which was registered as a place of worship in 1815. A cottage was let to the Tabernacle at a nominal rent).

The earliest mention of a visit to Ringmer by Evan Jones refers to his preaching at the Broyle in 1833. In view of the Tabernacle's close links with Ringmer it is unlikely that this was his first visit. In the spring of 1835 a piece of land was acquired near Ringmer Green on which a new chapel was erected. This was registered in May by Evan Jones, Charles Wille Snr, Nehemiah Wimble, James Berry and George Adams. The continuing association of the Berry family with

the site suggests that the new chapel was built on or near the site of a meeting house registered in 1789 by Jenkin Jenkins, then minister of Cliffe Chapel. The cost of the new chapel seems to have been met by private contributions, as with the Tabernacle, and it remained private property for some years.

One consequence of Evan Jones' ministry outside Lewes was an increase in the number of baptisms of village children recorded in the Tabernacle's baptism register. Some of these children were baptised in their own homes, in a farmhouse or cottage. From 1832 Evan Jones visited Michelham every two years or so to baptise six children of Thomas Child, breeder of the famous 'Sussex Red' cattle. Kenneth Child, in his history of the family, tells how his great-grandfather was 'influenced by Lady Huntingdon's People' at Alfriston. His first four children had been baptised by their minister, Revd George Betts. After the notorious 'battle of the dissenters' in the Alfriston chapel, near the Tye, which arose from a dispute between the minister and Charles Brooker, one of the trustees, Thomas Child ceased to attend and in 1832 Betts himself was asked to leave.

Some of these journeys Evan Jones had to make on horseback; but sometimes, especially if he was going to preach at one of the village chapels, he would be taken by chaise by someone like Charles Wille Jnr with two or three others from the Tabernacle congregation. On 20 November 1834 Charles Wille Jnr noted in his diary 'Went to Ripe with Rev E Jones in the evening. Mrs Payne and Fanny with us. Some snow fell on our return.'

The end of an era

About Easter 1839 complaints about some of the children of the minister were made in the Sunday School and these developed into an attack on Mr Jones himself. Attempts were made to force him to resign. The trustees were divided. The Wille family and their friends, who probably knew Mr Jones as well as anyone, thought the charges vexatious. The others, including George Adams, Arthur Morris and Nehemiah Wimble, wanted his resignation. Whatever the ostensible reasons for the division in the church it is probable that the true reasons were connected with the different interests of the two factions. There was bound to be tension between those whose interest lay in the evangelical mission of the church and others who were more influenced by social, political

and business considerations. This tension was implicit from the opening of the chapel. Although we do not know very much about Evan Jones' political views, we do know that the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists opposed the Chartists who were active in Wales at that time. For them, it has been written, 'social inequalities were merely a means provided for the development of character, and political reform they were not concerned with.'

Put another way, the issue was: did the trustees or the congregation control the chapel? In the end, Evan Jones remained as minister of the Tabernacle and the critics left, some joining or rejoining the Cliffe Chapel from which the original Tabernacle congregation had seceded. During the damaging year the chapel lost about a fifth of its congregation, possibly 80-100 in number. The subscribers were the more affluent members of the congregation and the main source of the chapel's income. Between 1838 and 1840 the income from subscribers fell by 40%, showing that the seceders were those with the greatest wealth and social standing. It is probable that the loss of members from this part of the congregation was reflected among the poorer part, who made their contributions by way of the quarterly collections. These collections also fell between 1838 and 1840, but it is difficult to draw conclusions from the figures, particularly in view of the general conditions affecting working people at that time. By the end of 1840 the Tabernacle had lost a significant part of its total congregation, about a fifth of its 100 or so church members, one of its deacons, five of its trustees and a large part of its income.

The shadow of these events was to hang over the Tabernacle and its minister for years to come.

Among those who left the Tabernacle at this time were five of its eight trustees: George Adams, John Adams, John Harvey, Arthur Morris and Nehemiah Wimble. According to the trust deed, decisions had to be taken with the approval of all or a majority of the trustees. What was the position of the seceding trustees in relation to the trust? Was it possible for them to continue as trustees after ceasing to attend? Although the trust deed stipulated that future trustees should be members of the congregation of the Tabernacle, this qualification was not mentioned in connection with the appointment of the original trustees, who were already members of the congregation. So it would appear that failure to attend the Tabernacle did not of itself disqualify them from being trustees. The

deed permitted the appointment of new trustees in place of any who 'shall die or become unwilling or unable to act in the trust.' But unless there was evidence that the seceding trustees were unwilling or unable to act, it appears that they might retain their powers. So far as it is possible to gauge from the meagre evidence, it seems to have been assumed that in law all trustees continue to hold office. In practice, the situation was different. The vestry book in which the transactions of the trustees were supposed to be recorded, contains no entries between 1838 and 1857. Although this is not conclusive evidence (it is clear that even before 1839 not all matters dealt with by the trustees were recorded in the vestry book), it strongly suggests that after the departure of five of the eight trustees still residing in the neighbourhood (Thomas Weedon had moved away before 1839) the trustees had ceased to function as the managing body of the Tabernacle except in name. The trust deed gave no clear answer regarding the legal position of the seceding trustees.

The major body of the congregation remained loyal to the minister and the spirit of confidence and determination that this aroused was expressed in a number of ways. On the Sunday before Christmas 1839 Mr Jones was presented with a new bible. In the following year 22 new members were added to the church, compared with only 9 in 1839 (a figure well below average during Evan Jones' ministry up to that time). At the Annual Meeting of the Congregational Society on 9 December 1840 nearly 100 of the younger members of the congregation presented Charles Wille Snr with a silver cup and a small leather-bound book containing their names and the following dedication:

'The Youth of both sexes assembling to Worship at the Tabernacle under the Ministry of their beloved Pastor the Revd Evan Jones, feeling deeply sensible of the Instrumentality of their venerable Deacon Mr Chas Wille Senr raised by the Providence of God to protect the privileges of a large Congregation and to Shield the Character and Usefulness of their respected Minister (To that Being who overruleth the Wills Affections and Machinations of Men for the furtherance of His Glorious designs do we attribute this Mercy) that feeling it our duty towards Mr Wille to acknowledge with much respect his able instrumentality coupled with that of his family in Dissipating those dark clouds which hung over the House of God. We whose names accompany this do pledge ourselves to support his Hands and as a token of our sincerity that we shall by the Grace of God continue to Pray for his being long spared to be amongst us we do present this Silver Cup requesting it may be commonly used and descend to his Son our valuable and much esteemed Friend Mr Chas Wille Jnr.' NB Responded to without any solicitation.

The Congregational Society just mentioned had been formed in November 1839 in an attempt to restore the finances of the chapel by means already used by the auxiliaries of the LMS, viz the use of collecting cards to encourage the regular giving of small sums by those who could not afford annual subscriptions. The committee of this Society included names that were to become well known in the town in later years.

Secretary: William Knight; Treasurer: William Haywood

Committee: Peter Manington, John Latter Parsons, Charles Boore, Henry Attwood Thompson, George Cooke

During the decade that followed, a period of national depression and hardship, the Society made a significant contribution to the Tabernacle's income. It was assisted for some years by a Ladies Sale of Needlework of which a glimpse is given in this paragraph from the Sussex Express for 28 December 1844.

On Friday last a Fancy Fair was held at the Mechanics Institute, in aid of the funds of the Lewes Tabernacle Congregational Society, which realised such an addition to the funds of the Society as exceeded the expectations of the promoters of the Fair. The articles submitted were highly creditable to the fair hands from which they sprang - displaying, as they did, skill, neatness, and in some cases, great elegance.

On the spiritual side the picture was at first encouraging During the 5 years 1840-1844, 67 new members were added to the church roll, compared with 54 during the previous 5 years. In 1842 nearly 400 attended a large tea party. Thereafter, however there was a steady decline in the number of new members: 1845-49, 39; 1850-54, 31; 1855-59, 25.

In spite of these efforts, which the general economic situation did nothing to help, the annual accounts showed an increasing deficit, which could only be remedied by a progressive reduction in the minister's stipend, the amounts of which give a clear index of the Tabernacle's declining social standing. By 1843 Mr Jones' annual stipend had fallen from £285 to £245, at which level it remained until 1849, when it fell to £213. In 1852, the last year for which a record exists, it was only £163.3.5. At some time after 1841 Mr Jones seems to have given up his house in the High St (St Anne's) and found accommodation outside Lewes, returning (if an entry in Wille's diary can be so interpreted) to

Lewes in September 1846. By 1855 he was living at Dial House [now Waterstones], where his daughter Mary had opened a school by 1839. In 1843 three of the seceding trustees died: first John Adams, then his father and finally Nehemiah Wimble, who had the custody of the Tabernacle deeds. The death of Mr Wimble was followed by a claim by his executors for the repayment of the £600 he had contributed towards the building of the chapel. Although he had enjoyed considerable prestige in Lewes, becoming Junior Constable in 1835 and Senior Constable in 1840, his business affairs had deteriorated. To pay his debts his executors were forced to sell his property. The home of the Wimbles, the Friars, was sold to the Railway Company and pulled down. Mrs Wimble went to live with her niece, Mrs Arthur Morris.

Believing that none of the founders had intended to claim the repayment of their loans, the representatives of the Tabernacle resisted the claim. In 1849 Charles Wille Snr died and his son inherited a two-thirds share of the debt. When it at last became clear that the claim against the Tabernacle was valid the surviving trustees put the matter before the congregation.: Mr Wille would waive his share of the debt if the congregation would undertake to discharge the remainder.

At great cost to the Tabernacle an important question had been decided, to which the trust deed did not give an answer: whether the control of the chapel lay in the hands of the trustees or of the church and congregation. The outcome was received with satisfaction by the major body of the congregation. On 20 August 1858 a public meeting was called to give thanks for the clearance of the debt. The chapel deeds were recovered and stored in the vestry in an iron chest with three locks. In spite of problems the Tabernacle persevered in its main ask. So far as it is possible to tell there was little change in the services except those brought by the installation of gas lighting in 1840, hot water heating in 1850 and a new organ, which was first played on 19 June 1853.

At Isfield, where a Sunday School had been started in 1833, a new chapel was registered in 1841 under the auspices of the Tabernacle. Associated with this was Peter Manington, who farmed at Isfield Place. In the following year it was involved in the formation of a Home Mission Society in Brighton. In 1848 it helped to form the Lewes and District Sunday School Union, which in turn started the Ragged School in 1855. The Ragged School was later developed with

outstanding success under the leadership of Isaac Vinall of Jireh Chapel, with a pool of teachers drawn from the various chapels [in 1844 at the first meeting of the congregational Tea Party 400 sat down]

In 1849 wider issues were brought to mind by National Days of Humiliation or Thanksgiving, observed at the Tabernacle as elsewhere, that reflected fears from cholera, famine and war; or gratitude for recovery, abundant harvest and peace.

In September 1850 a storm blew up when the Pope, faced with a large increase in the number of Catholics in England, decreed by Letters Apostolic that the administration of the Roman Catholic Church in England should once again be delegated to a hierarchy consisting of an archbishop and bishops with territorial titles and the same kind of responsibility for specific parts of the country as Anglican bishops, rather provocatively dismissed in the decree as representative of the 'Anglican Schism.' Although the Queen and her Prime Minister saw nothing to worry about, the plan was interpreted as 'Papal Aggression', an attack on the Protestant church (or churches). In November the Anglicans and dissenters of Lewes met together at County Hall to protest. Evan Jones seconded a motion proposed by Revd John Scobell of All Saints:

'That this meeting having read with sorrow and indignation the Papal Bull etc...solemnly protest against this act of aggression on the part of the Pope of Rome, who they say neither rightfully hath nor ought to have, any jurisdiction or power superiority or authority over this realm.'

This, with other resolutions, was passed unanimously and an indignant address was sent to the Queen.

These outbursts led to the Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851, attempting (unsuccessfully) to ban territorial titles for the new Catholic bishoprics. This was the last Act to be passed by a British Government with the intention of discriminating between religious denominations. It was repealed twenty years later.

In 1852 and 1853 the passing of the Burials Acts made possible the opening of cemeteries throughout the country where dissenters could be buried according to their own rites.

Mr Jones completes his ministry

Revd Evan Jones completed his fiftieth year in the ministry in December 1861. He had been at the Tabernacle for 32 years. The occasion was celebrated by a tea, followed by a public meeting at which he was presented with a silver cup and a purse containing 50 sovereigns. Accompanying these gifts was an address which referred to the doubling of the number of church members at the Tabernacle during his ministry.

His health began to fail and in midsummer 1862 he decided to retire. In the next year, when he was ill himself, he was asked to visit a dying friend. On going out, he collapsed before reaching the house and had to be taken home. He died on 20 January 1864 and was buried in the churchyard behind the east end of All Saints Church, where the burial service was read by the rector of All Saints and Southover, Revd John Scobell, before a large congregation. On the following Sunday the funeral sermon was preached by Revd John Lawrence, who had been minister at Eastgate Baptist Church from 1847 until 1854.

The Tabernacle awaited a leader who would speak to a new generation.

The London Missionary Society

Exactly a year after the Tabernacle was opened, on 6 November 1817, an auxiliary to what was then known as The Missionary Society, was formed. It was not until 1818 that 'London' was officially added to the name of the society.

The story of the foundation of the Missionary Society well illustrates the outlook of the worshippers at the Tabernacle. The interest in foreign missions that followed the Evangelical Revival led to the formation in 1792 of the Baptist Missionary Society. In the same year Revd David Bogue preached at Salters Hall on the world mission of the church. Bogue was born in Berwickshire in 1750 and educated at Edinburgh University. He came to England in 1780 and became a minister of the Independent Chapel and head of the Theological Academy at Gosport for training independent ministers, particularly those intending to serve as missionaries overseas. In July 1794 while visiting Bristol he was one of a group of ministers and laymen who heard John Ryland, President of the Baptist College, read a letter he had received from William Carey, describing his first six

weeks in Bengal. This letter, wrote Norman Goodall, 'provided the spark for the tinder.' In the following September the *Evangelical Magazine* published an address by Bogue 'to the evangelical ministers who practice infant baptism' urging them to accept their responsibility for the conversion of the heathen. The *Evangelical Magazine* had been founded in 1792 by an Anglican clergyman John Eyre and the minister of Moorfields Tabernacle Matthew Wilks, a friend of the Tabernacle from its foundation, for the benefit of evangelicals of various denominations: Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians, so Bogue's appeal met with a strong response. After a series of consultations, representatives were able on 21 September 1795 to consider a plan and constitution submitted by John Eyre for a new missionary society. This was formally accepted amid great emotion at a crowded meeting at the Countess of Huntingdon's chapel at Spa Fields the following day. This meeting also appointed the first Board of Directors of the Missionary Society. It consisted of 20 ministers and 14 laymen and included Revd David Bogue of Gosport, Revd W F Platt of Holywell Mount, Revd George Burder of Coventry (who as a young student had attended the opening of Cliffe Chapel Lewes in 1775), and two future friends of the Lewes Tabernacle, Revd Rowland Hill of Surrey Chapel, and Revd Matthew Wilks of the London Tabernacle at Moorfields, who had given the project his energetic support from the outset.

The constitution of the Missionary Society contained the following Fundamental Principle:

As the union of Christians of various denominations in carrying on this great work is a most desirable Object, so, to prevent, if possible, any cause of future Dissension, it is declared to be a Fundamental Principle of the Missionary Society that its design is not to send Presbyterians, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government (about which there may be difference of Opinion among serious Persons), but the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God, to the Heathen, and that it shall be left (as it ought to be left) to the minds of the Persons whom God may call into the Fellowship of his Son, from among them to assume for themselves such form of Church Government as to them shall appear most agreeable to the Word of God.'

The effect of this declaration was diminished after 1799, when the evangelicals of the Church of England formed the Church Missionary Society, and gradually the Missionary Society came to depend almost entirely on the churches of the Congregational order.

Stirred by the accounts of the voyage of Captain Cook, the Directors decided that their first missionaries should go to Tahiti in the South Seas. By 1817, despite setbacks and the hardships suffered by inexperienced men trying to support themselves and their wives in strange and difficult surroundings, despite problems of language and custom and the hostility of the natives, not only was there progress to report in the Pacific, but also missions had begun in South Africa, Malaya, China, India and the West Indies.

In its early years the Society relied for the support of its ambitious programme on the gifts and subscriptions of the more affluent members of the congregation, but in 1806 the newly formed Home Committee devised a plan to enable people with smaller incomes to contribute to the work. The idea was to form local auxiliary missionary societies whose members would collect a penny a week from members of their congregations.

The Baptists had a similar concern. In May 1812 the Particular Baptists in Foundry Lane Lewes informed the Kent and Sussex Association that 'during the past year a Society has been formed called the Sussex Baptist Society, the design of which is to introduce the Gospel into the villages in the county and to assist the Baptist Mission in the East Indies. The county of Sussex hitherto has not made any united effort to encourage the Baptist Mission in the East Indies, but our brethren are now cordially cooperating with the parent society.'

The Lewes Tabernacle Juvenile Missionary Society, as the auxiliary was named, appears to have been the first such auxiliary in Sussex. It had two branches, one for ladies and the other for gentlemen, each branch having its own treasurer, secretary and committee of collectors. As the name indicates these were all younger members of the more comfortably-off Tabernacle families. Each collector was responsible for a list of subscribers whose weekly penny could be paid in monthly or quarterly amounts if desired. A meeting of each committee was held after the Prayer Meeting on the first Monday of each month, the collectors presiding in rotation. At this meeting the money collected was handed to the treasurer, who sent it to the parent society at six-monthly intervals. The original committee consisted of 23 ladies and 17 gentlemen, most of whom were also teachers in the Sunday School.

The annual meeting of the auxiliary became an important occasion in the life of the Tabernacle. Apart from its regular business, the annual report, the accounts, and the election of officers and committees, it was an opportunity to spread news of the achievements, difficulties and hopes of the Missionary Society and to stimulate interest in its work. Although the Directors and leading ministers visited local churches to speak on behalf of the Society, in the early days much depended on the enthusiasm of local ministers. Thus in the autumn of 1815 the words of Matthew Wilks at the annual meeting of the auxiliary at his own chapel in London set the nineteen-year-old John Williams on the road that was to lead to his ordination as a missionary at Rowland Hill's Surrey Chapel on 30 September 1816 and the work that followed his arrival in Tahiti with his young wife and a party of other missionaries in November 1817.

The *Sussex Advertiser* gives a glimpse of the third anniversary of the Lewes Tabernacle Auxiliary in November 1820. Probably by design the minister supporting the Tabernacle for four weeks including the anniversary was Revd W F Platt, one of the founder Directors of the LMS. He was supported by Dr Styles, the distinguished minister of Union Street Chapel Brighton.

The common interest of the evangelical churches in foreign missions is shown by the presence at this meeting of representatives of other denominations, including Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists. During the year, the crowded meeting was informed, £50.18.4 had been sent to the Society and £33.16.9 was in the hands of the treasurer: large sums in those days.

In the following week the formidable Jabez Bunting, elected in that year President of Conference, spoke at the second anniversary of the Lewes Branch of the Wesleyan Missionary Society at the chapel in St Mary's Lane [now Station Street].

As its work extended in the early nineteenth century into South Africa and the West Indies, the LMS inevitably became involved in the problem of slavery. The slave owners disliked what they regarded as the interference of the missionaries and were suspicious of their attempts to give instruction to the slaves. In this sensitive situation the missionaries were instructed by the Directors to say nothing that might make the slaves dissatisfied with their masters or with their own position. Although the efforts of Wilberforce and his associates had in 1807

brought an end to the slave trade in the British dominions, slavery as an institution continued. It was seen as the one significant blot on the landscape amidst the euphoria and religious expectations of a brave new world, with which dissenters and churchmen had greeted the end of the long European war in 1815. In 1821 the campaign against slavery itself began. In May 1823 Thomas Buxton moved a resolution in the House of Commons calling for specific action but was persuaded by George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, to withdraw it in favour of a weaker Government motion. This motion, which was adopted unanimously, looked for a gradual improvement in the condition of the slave population of the colonies that would lead eventually to their freedom. The guiding considerations were the well-being of the slaves, the safety of the colonies and a fair and equitable view of the interests of all the parties concerned. The motion had been prepared in consultation with the West India Committee of planters and merchants in London. Its adoption was followed by an Order in Council forbidding the whipping of slaves while at work, the flogging of female slaves at any time and the limiting of the daily period of labour to nine hours. It permitted religious instruction and encouraged slaves to marry. In certain cases the evidence of slaves was to be admitted in the law courts and manumission was made easier to obtain. These measures met with angry opposition from the planters. Uncertainty and rumour led to disturbances among slaves that were harshly suppressed.

It was in such a situation that the LMS missionary John Smith found himself in Demerara [British Guiana], where there were some 13000 slaves. When he first arrived in 1817 the governor, Major General John Murray, had threatened him with banishment if he taught the negroes to read but as he had been approved by the British Government he was eventually allowed to preach. By 1823 he had gathered a congregation of some 600 people. When the Order in Council reached Demerara in July 1823 the governor delayed its publication with the result that false rumours spread among the slaves. In spite of Smith's efforts to pacify them riots broke out and martial law was proclaimed. Smith refused to take arms against the slaves and on 21 August he was arrested and sent with his wife to prison charged with inciting the slaves to riot. He was tried by court martial in October and on 24 November was found guilty and sentenced to death, with a recommendation to mercy. He was already a sick man and, while his case was being considered, was confined in a common jail in foul conditions,

with stagnant water beneath his cell. His health deteriorated until, when it was seen that he was dying, he was moved to another cell.

At home the Directors of the LMS published their documents on the case and protested to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, who recalled the governor. After considering his report, the British Government formally remitted the death sentence imposed on Smith and ordered him to leave the colony. These instructions reached Demerara on 9 February 1824, but Smith had died of tuberculosis three days before. In Lewes there was strong support for abolition. Smith's death was reported in the *Advertiser* on 22 March. A month before copies of a petition urging the government to follow up the resolutions of 1823 were gathering signatures at the Bear and Star inns. The indignation aroused by this unsavoury affair and particularly the slur on the character of the dead missionary implied in the refusal to rescind the verdict of the court martial, was expressed in public meetings all over the country and in numerous petitions to Parliament. On 20 May the Sussex Association of Congregational Ministers and Churches, meeting in Arundel on 29 May 1824, followed the example of other county associations in sending a petition of its own. Despite this pressure, Henry Brougham's motion in support of the petition was defeated by 193 votes to 145 after a debate in the Commons on 1 June; but, according to Richard Lovett, the historian of the LMS, the debate killed slavery in the British dominions.

These matters can hardly have been ignored on 20 October 1825 when the Tabernacle received what seems to have been its first deputation from the Society. It was led by the veteran David Bogue, now in his 76th year. At the request of the LMS Directors, Bogue had in 1820 added to his responsibilities at Gosport the task of training young men for missionary service. In 1815 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of divinity by the Senatus Academicus of Yale College Connecticut. He came to Lewes with two of his former students. One, William Reeve, had joined another of Bogue's students, Revd John Hands, at Bellary, west of Madras, in 1816. He had come back to England in 1824 and after his return to India in 1827 he prepared the first Canarese/English dictionary. The other missionary in the party was William Ellis, who had arrived in the South Seas a few months before John Williams. His wife had become ill and he was forced to bring her back to England to save her life. They had returned by way of America, having reached there on the American whaler *Russell* and had arrived in England only two months before. Ellis later became

Foreign Secretary of the LMS. The chairman at the anniversary meeting of the Tabernacle Auxiliary was T R Kemp [developer of Kemp Town, Brighton] who was then seeking election as one of the members of Parliament for Lewes. The sequel must have fixed the occasion firmly in the minds of those present. Dr Bogue was to have attended the meetings of the Sussex Auxiliary at Brighton, but on the morning of the 25th he died at the house of the secretary Revd John Nelson Goulty of Union Street Chapel Brighton. It happened that William Behnes the sculptor was in Brighton at the time and he was immediately commissioned to execute a bust of Bogue, of whose features, it was reported, he took an admirable cast.

Meanwhile the opponents of slavery, who included men of differing religious opinions, were becoming impatient at the slow progress towards emancipation. In January 1826 they called for a Town Meeting. Among those who signed the requisition were John Baxter, William Crosskey, Gideon Mantell, and several members of the Tabernacle, including John Adams, William Boys and Nehemiah Wimble. The Senior Constable, Mr J Elliott, presided over the Public Meeting held at the County Hall on 1 February, when resolutions were unanimously adopted and embodied in petitions to both Houses of Parliament. The petitions urged the early implementation of the resolutions of May 1823 and criticised the Government's sugar policy, which tended 'greatly to prolong the existence and aggravate the evils of slavery.' Two of the motions were proposed by Kemp and Alexander Donovan, candidates in the forthcoming election. Others were moved by Revd John Kerby (Cliffe Chapel) Revd Joshiah Denham (Particular Baptist Chapel, Eastgate) and Revd Thomas Walker Horsfield (Westgate Chapel). The seconders included John Adams, James Donovan, William Crosskey, and John Martin. A letter in support of the petitions was received from Sir John Shelly MP.

It is safe to assume that the Tabernacle congregation was involved in other local efforts in support of the campaign. In 1829 another petition received strong support in the town. In the following year, after the Anti-Slavery Society had demanded a specific date for emancipation, a Ladies Anti-Slavery Association was formed in Lewes. In February 1831 Joseph Phillip and George Pilkington addressed an Anti-Slavery meeting at the Star.

An insurrection of slaves in Jamaica in the early part of 1832 was savagely put down and the missionaries on the island were accused of incitement. In face of harassment and threats the Baptist William Knibb returned for a time to England, where at numerous public meetings he recounted his experiences with great effect. In July 1833 the Abolition of Slavery Act was passed, to take effect from 1 August 1834. All children under six years old or born afterwards were free. Other slaves were to be bound as apprentices to their former masters for six years. Up to £20 was to be paid in compensation to owners. The task of implementing this Act was left to the colonial governors.

In May 1834 Revd Evan Jones went to London to attend the Annual Meeting of the London Missionary Society at Exeter Hall. It may be significant that he did not go in time to attend the meetings of the newly formed Congregational Union held earlier in the same week. The needs of the people of the West Indies led the Society to send 14 new missionaries to the area. On Tuesday 23 May 1834 a meeting was held at the Star Inn chaired by Thomas Dicker in connection with the British and Foreign Antislavery Society, which had been recently formed in London. The meeting was addressed by George William Alexander, the secretary of the Society, who reported 'in time' on the state of emancipated negroes in the British colonies and on the extent of slavery attributable to the African slave trade in other colonies. The Society was working for the total abolition of the slave trade. An auxiliary society was then formed in Lewes.

Until 1836 a Missionary Society deputation to the Tabernacle was exceptional but from then on it became an annual event.

In February 1836 the superintendent of the Society's South African mission Dr John Philip, returned to England. The first representative of the Society in the Cape, the Dutchman John Theodore Vanderkamp, had died in 1811. Since then the work had declined. In 1820 Philip, who, with John Campbell, had been sent to investigate the situation, was appointed superintendent and entered into his work with great energy and courage. His great interest in education made him indignant at what he saw as the oppression of the native races by the settlers and he became an outspoken critic of the Cape Government. From 1826 to 1830, while in England to put the case of the Hottentots and Kaffirs [These terms are now considered to be derogatory], he published his book *Researches in Africa* which set out his views. Although it was deeply resented in South

Africa the book led the British Government to issue Order in Council no 50: *An ordinance for improving the condition of the Hottentots and other free persons of Colour*, and helped to prepare the way for the emancipation of slaves in Cape Colony in 1834. In 1835 a treaty with the chiefs arranged by the Governor Sir Benjamin d'Urban set up a Protectorate in the Transkei. This was opposed by Philip and his friends in London and repudiated by the British Government. The black Africans were allowed to reoccupy the territory evacuated by them under the treaty. Dissatisfied with British policy, the Boer farmers began to move from the Colony into the interior.

Dr Philip came to England in 1836 (in the words of the *History of Congregationalism*) 'to show the impolicy and peril of the *commando system*, [a voluntary, part-time militia, often under the authority of the police. It was founded in the 1770s and phased out 2003-2008]. On the pretext of recovering property taken by the natives, this had depopulated extensive districts and created a dreary waste where peaceful settlement might have been established for the advancement of Christian civilisation and all its attendant benefits, securing the confidence of the African tribes instead of provoking hostility and exciting the spirit of revenge.' Accompanied by two African Christians, Jan Tzatzoe, a Xhosa, and Adrian Stoffles, a coloured South African, and an interpreter, he appeared before a Select Committee of the House of Commons set up to investigate the question of the Government's attitude to native populations in the colonies and on their frontiers. He also gave lectures and undertook deputation work.

On the morning of Sunday 9 October 1836, Charles Wille Jnr drove to Brighton to bring Dr Philip to Lewes, where he was to preach in the evening at the Tabernacle. Despite wet and stormy weather there was a large congregation and £11 was collected for the missionary cause. The anniversary of the LMS Auxiliary on the following evening drew visitors from other parts of the county to hear Dr Philip, Jan Tzatzoe and a missionary from India George Gogerly, who had gone to Calcutta in 1819 to superintend the printing press. At this meeting the collection was £30.

This deputation stimulated a flurry of local missionary activity. On 10 October it was decided to form a Fancy Fair Society at the Tabernacle, presumably in support of the LMS. On 11 October Charles Wille spent the day at the Auxiliary

Meetings in Brighton, 'much delighted.' 'In all the meetings the Kaffir chief spoke, evidently manifesting a strong mind, truly enlightened by the Gospel, and yet sensible of the kindness of the English, which was seen when acknowledging his thanks after drinking his health, in which he felt so keenly as not to be able to express himself, but sat down and wept. This chief was a few years ago a savage and knew not that he had a soul or that God existed. What can I do?' On 14 October Evan Jones, with Mr Gogerly and Charles Wille went to Alfriston 'to revive the spirit for missionaries'; and on 17 October Charles Wille, John Jones, John Smith and Henry Hilton went to Newhaven to from a missionary society there. On 22 October a parcel of clothes for Africa was sent from the Tabernacle by carrier to the Mission House in London.

The report of the Commons Committee (written by Sir Thomas Buxton and John Philip, was published in 1837 and led to the replacement of the Governor of the Cape Colony, D'Urban, by Major General Napier, to whom Dr Philip became unofficial adviser. The policy was to form alliances with the chiefs, setting up a belt of native states to the north and west of the colony. The process of colonisation was inconsistent with a policy of conciliation, which was brought to an end by the Kaffir War of 1846. The appointment of a new governor in 1847 brought Philip's political influence to an end.

While Dr Philip was campaigning on behalf of the Africans, John Williams, who had returned to England with his wife in 1834, was trying to obtain support for a number of projects in the South Seas. He put before the Directors plans for a theological college in Raratonga and for a normal school for training native schoolmasters in Tahiti; and submitted his Raratongan New Testament to the British and Foreign Bible Society. In April 1837 he published *A narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands, with Remarks on the Natural History of the Islands, Origin, Languages, Traditions and Usages of the Inhabitants.* This contained a colour portrait by George Baxter, who in 1827 had moved from Lewes to London, where he obtained work from the Religious Tract Society and the LMS (His new process of printing in colour had been patented in 1836). A major purpose of John Williams' journey to England was to raise money for a missionary ship to work among the South Sea Islands. In this he was successful: the Common Council of London voted him £500 and altogether he raised some £4000 to fit out the *Camden*. He came to the Tabernacle for the 20th anniversary of the missionary auxiliary in company with another

distinguished missionary, Richard Knill, who, after service in India, had since 1820 been minister of a small English congregation at St Petersburg. During the previous twelve months, it was reported, the Tabernacle had subscribed the remarkable sum of £115.15.9 for the work of the LMS. A few months later, on 11 April 1838, Williams with 16 other missionaries sailed in the *Camden* from Gravesend. Eighteen months later he was dead - killed by natives when attempting to land at Dillon Bay, Eromanga. Some of his bones were recovered by Captain Croker of *HMS Favourite* and buried at Apia. The monument erected by Captain Croker bore the words: 'Sacred to the memory of the late Rev John Williams, father of the Samoan and other missions, who was killed by the cruel natives of Eromagna, on the 20th November 1839, while attempting to plant the Gospel of peace on the shores.'

In the West Indies the new status of slaves afforded by the Abolition of Slavery Act brought many problems. It had been drawn in broad terms and compensation to the planters was conditional on the passing of appropriate local laws. In such circumstances the temptation to discriminate against former slaves was hard to resist and serious abuses were contrived within the shelter of the law. At home, a campaign for immediate emancipation gathered strong support throughout the country. In Lewes in August 1837 members of the Ladies Anti-slavery Society distributed leaflets and a petition was addressed to the Queen. In the following January Charles Wille attended an Anti-Slavery meeting at County Hall.

Among the planters there were fears that emancipation would lead to a shortage of labour; to avoid this they encouraged immigration from Europe. In November 1835 several families, 21 people in all, from Kingston, Iford and Seaford sailed from Gravesend under contract to work for five years on the estates of a Mr Lemonius in Jamaica. Many such immigrants were paupers and quite unsuited to the work they were expected to do. Often the hardships that awaited them were worse than those they left behind.

The Abolition Amendment Act, which became law in 1838, gave the colonial governors power to regulate the working of the apprenticeship system with a view to removing abuses and effectively brought forward both the date of emancipation and the problems arising from it, concerning, for example, the settlement of former slaves in free communities, their civil and social rights,

education and wage rates. The missionary view on such matters was heard when William Knibb arrived in England in May 1840, with two former slaves who were deacons of his church in Jamaica. He came to represent his fellow missionaries at the Anti-Slavery Convention to be held in London in June and to urge the Baptist Missionary Society to strengthen its mission in Jamaica and to support a plan to send Christians from Jamaica as missionaries to Africa. The BMS, already in debt, agreed and sent Knibb round the country to raise funds for the new effort. On 1 August he addressed a crowded meeting at County Hall Lewes, which represented all denominations. He was accompanied by a Mr Beckford, a black Christian, and Revd Joseph Angus, one of the secretaries of the BMS. So great was his success that when he returned to Jamaica in November he took with him fifteen new recruits, 'missionary recruits and women teachers', instead of the ten he hoped for. In the following year Phoebe Davey of Eastgate Baptist Church left to take charge of a school in Jamaica.

In 1842 the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to examine the state of the West Indies. In the same year Joseph Freeman, who had been appointed joint Foreign Secretary of the LMS with Arthur Tidman in 1841, was sent by the Directors to investigate the situation in the West Indies on behalf of the Society. He returned to England in 1843 and in September of that year he came once again to Lewes with Revd Samuel Hayward, who had gone as a missionary to Guiana in 1834. In 1846 Freeman succeeded John Arundel as Home Secretary of the LMS.

About this time a crisis was developing in the South Seas, where the LMS had worked since 1797. The progress of Protestant missions had not passed unnoticed in Rome and in 1833 the French Congregation of Picpus was entrusted with the task of bringing the islands of the Pacific into the Roman Catholic fold. A 'Vicar Apostolic to Easter Oceania' was appointed and sailed from France with six companions towards the end of 1834. Two priests who landed in Tahiti in 1826 were expelled by Queen Pomare and her council, who did not wish rival doctrines to be taught on the island; whereupon the French sent a frigate to demand an apology from the Queen and to force her to agree to admit and protect French residents. An appeal by the Queen to the British Government brought only the offer of its good offices and the appointment of a British Consul. After a series of incidents the French admiral Abel Albert Dupetit Thouars formally annexed Tahiti in the name of the French in November 1843

and the British Consul was expelled. These events caused considerable anger in Britain. In February 1844 the Protestant Dissenting Deputies offered their support to the LMS and petitions were addressed to Parliament. In face of British protests the French government at last disavowed the actions taken by its Admiral in the Pacific. It was in the shadow of these events that a special prayer meeting for Tahiti was held at the Tabernacle on 5 August 1844. Although a respite had been won French influence eventually prevailed. In 1880 Tahiti became a French colony and the LMS handed its work over to the Protestant Paris Missionary Society.

A notable member of the deputations to the Tabernacle in 1838, 1839, 1840 and 1843 was Revd Joseph John Freeman. After ministries in Dawlish and Kidderminster he had joined the LMS and in 1826 sailed to Madagascar. The LMS had begun work on the island in 1818 with the patronage of the dominant chieftain, who wished to develop good trading relations with the Europeans. Schools were opened, the Bible and a hymnbook were translated and printed and numbers of the inhabitants were baptised. Apart from a period of two years in Mauritius and Cape Town, Freeman spent nine years working in Madagascar. The accession of the usurper Queen Rànalàvanà, who resented foreign influences, led to the persecution of native Christians and to the withdrawal in 1836 of the remaining missionaries. Some of the Malagasy Christians went into hiding and were rescued by a vessel sent to their aid with Freeman as interpreter. Some of these refugees visited the churches, where their story recalled the experiences of the early Christians. Charles Wille, when Freeman accompanied the refugee David on a visit to the Tabernacle in 1839, was obviously moved when he noted that David ‘...sat in my armchair’ at ‘most interesting and most crowded’ meeting.

David Livingstone had left England in December 1840 to work in Africa for the LMS. He returned in December 1856 amid public acclaim, convinced that in future his task should be to open Africa to ‘Commerce and Christianity’ and to put down the slave trade. His plans received the support of the Government and to obtain freedom of action he resigned from the LMS, which in due course appointed Holloway Helmore as his successor. Helmore had served at Likhatlong, a mission station on the Vaal River, southeast of Kuruman [South Africa], since 1840. In 1856 he returned to England with his family for health reasons and came on a deputation to the Tabernacle on 22 October, when it

was remarked that he preached for one hour. This visit was later to have more poignant associations.

The Helmores and their four children returned to Africa in 1858, intending, on the advice of Livingstone, to open a mission among the Makololo a tribe whose chief Sekeletu was on good terms with Livingstone. On 8 July 1859 the Helmore family, accompanied by Roger Price, his wife and their two children, left Kuruman on their journey to the north. After travelling across the Kalahari desert, where they suffered terrible distress, they arrived at Linyanti [Botswana] on 14 February 1860, expecting to meet Livingstone there. Livingstone, however, had not arrived and the chief Sekeletu, loyal as he might be to Livingstone himself, showed no friendship to the newcomers. Instead of leading them to the healthy Batanga highlands to which Livingstone had recommended them to go, he kept them in the malarial swamps. While the missionaries waited their stores were raided and one by one the members of the party fell sick with fever. Of the four adults and six young children only Roger Price and two of the Helmore children survived and managed to return to Kuruman.

In the month that followed Mr Helmore's visit to the Tabernacle a young man joined the church. His name was Joseph Pearce. He worked at the Tabernacle as a Sunday School teacher and as a local preacher, but in March 1858 his membership was transferred to the Poultry Chapel, London. After studying at New College, he was ordained at Poultry in May 1863 and in June sailed for Madagascar, where he worked for the LMS until he retired in 1904. He was one of the best linguists that the Madagascar Mission has known. The Tabernacle's connections with the London Missionary Society continued into the twentieth century. Revd Samuel Cowdy, minister from 1912 to 1916, went on to become London District Secretary of the LMS. One of the last ministers before the building of the new church in Prince Edward's Road, now known as Christ Church, was Revd Leslie Artingstall, who had worked for the LMS for much of his ministry, becoming Organising Secretary in 1936-1937

Revd John Webb 1864-1867

From Calvinism to Congregationalism: Engagement with Society

John Webb began his ministry at the Tabernacle on 2 October 1864. He was 37, two years younger than Evan Jones was when he came to Lewes 35 years earlier. He was accompanied by his wife Mary and their three children. He was born at Dulcote in Somerset, a neighbourhood that afforded a splendid view of the cathedral at Wells only a mile away. He was a studious boy and, had he favoured the established church, a friendly clergyman would have sent him to Oxford. Instead he chose to join the Independent Chapel at Wells. At the age of 17 as a lay preacher he preached his first sermon in a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and at 20 became a student at Western College. Before coming to Lewes he had held pastorates at two other country towns, Castle Cary and Shepton Mallet. His ministry brought significant changes to the life of the Tabernacle. It marked an unacknowledged shift from the austerity of Calvinistic Methodism, with its emphasis on the spiritual life and separation from worldly pleasures, towards the more liberal views of mainstream Congregationalism, which found a Christian role in the secular world. In 1853 Thomas Binney, minister of the King's Weigh House Chapel [a notable Congregational church in London], had published a widely read work for young men with the challenging title *Is it possible to make the best of both worlds?*, a question which he answered affirmatively. Such an opinion would have found much support in Lewes.

The effect of the new ministry can be seen in the church roll. During the three years it continued as many were added to the church as during the last 16 years of the ministry of his predecessor. This comparison does not do justice to Evan Jones, who also had had his successes, but it shows that in his later years his preaching had lost its appeal. He was, it seems, 'out of touch' with the new generation. The Tabernacle now began to draw large congregations and John Webb soon gained a reputation as a preacher. His sermons were simple and earnest, yet able to hold the attention of the more thoughtful members of his congregation. His manner was modest and agreeable. His reading, it was said, was extensive amongst the best writers and thinkers of the day. It was perhaps his own love of books that led him to support the cause of 'Self Improvement.'

The idea of self-improvement had crystallised in Lewes in 1825 with the opening of the Mechanics Institute, where evening classes had been introduced in 1843.

Later Mutual Improvement Societies sprang up in the town. At Cliffe Chapel the Irish Presbyterian minister John Dunlop in 1852 gave a series of popular lectures to a Working Men's Educational Union on 'Christianity the only religion for mankind.' In 1853 at the Mechanics Institute he spoke of 'Popular Prejudices'. To a Calvinist who believed in the total depravity of fallen mankind 'self-improvement' of the masses was nonsense. There is no sign that Evan Jones at the Tabernacle showed any interest in it; the sort of improvement that he looked for came from the lives of men and women changed by the Gospel.

John Webb was not lacking in evangelical zeal, but soon after his arrival he name appeared in the prospectus of the Mechanics Institute where in 1865 he was to lecture on *Mind over Matter*. In the next year he spoke on *George Stephenson*. In 1865 he also introduced a variation to the Wednesday evening devotional lecture at the Tabernacle, perhaps as an experiment, when he spoke about *John Bunyan*. It was evidently appreciated because in the following year he gave a series of lectures on *A Pilgrim's Progress*. 'His explanation of Bunyan's great work,' it was reported, 'is masterly and complete.'

In 1866 an attempt to form a branch of the Young Women's Christian Association was followed by the announcement that a Young Men's and Young Women's Association would meet at the Tabernacle every Friday evening during the winter months. Its aim was to improve young people in religious and secular knowledge. At the first meeting John Webb gave a lecture on *Study*.

The Young Men's Christian Association had been started in 1844 by George Williams, another Somerset man, then an employee of a drapery firm near St Paul's London, with the idea of spreading its activities among other drapery houses. In fact it spread more widely and in 1855 a World Alliance of YMCAs was formed in Paris. The movement among women began in the 1850s. George Williams was a prominent member of the King's Weigh House Chapel. It is not clear what relation the meetings at the Tabernacle had to the wider organisations. It is possible, but by no means certain, that YMCA and YWCA meetings reported at Cliffe Chapel in 1868 were a relocation due to changed circumstances of meetings previously held at the Tabernacle.

At the beginning of 1867 the Tabernacle Reading Society was formed. In return for a subscription of one shilling a quarter (which it was hoped would be paid in

advance) members could suggest titles for purchase. After circulation among the members the books were sold within the society at half price or less. There were 28 members in the first year, including some of the senior members of the chapel. A sample of the titles chosen in 1867 shows the range of interests:

Faith and Victory by the late Mrs Mullins
Life of Sherman by Allen
Memoir of Henry Craik
Autobiography of Revd Dr Carlyle of Inveresk
The Rise and Progress of Religious Life in England Money A popular exposition
The Golden Treasury by Palgrave

The society was still in existence 30 years later.

The village chapel at Ringmer appears to have been in a flourishing state at this time. In 1865 the Sunday School numbered 145, although this was not maintained in later years. John Webb and others from the Tabernacle usually attended anniversaries and other special occasions. It will be remembered that the ownership of the chapel had been acquired in 1856 by William Pockney. In 1866 he reached his 65th birthday. In that year it was agreed that he ownership should be vested in trustees, all of whom must be members of the church or congregation at the Tabernacle. In return William Pockney would received the value of the property, £155. The trust deed was signed on 28 March 1866. The chapel was to be used for public worship in accordance with a doctrinal basis expressed in the same terms as those in the Tabernacle trust deed of 1829. There were ten trustees:

Charles Wille, Gent.	Charles Parsons, stonemason
John Latter Parsons, stonemason	Edward Stevens, cabinetmaker
Samuel Lintott, photographer	Charles Pockney (son of William)
Henry Card the younger, builder	William Smith, accountant
Richard Wisdom, solicitor's clerk	James Richards, bookseller and stationer

The trustees were to hold their meetings in the vestry room of the Tabernacle.

The Ringmer trust deed was an improvement on that for the Tabernacle in that it provided for the replacement of trustees (including the original trustees) who ceased to act for reasons other than death. Evidently past experience had not been wasted.

The trustees were empowered to borrow to raise the purchase price of the chapel and to reimburse themselves from its income. A receipt survives from 1870 recording the payment of interest on an outstanding loan of £100 and the repayment of £50 of the capital. It is signed by a Miss Charity Bennett. The borrowers were the trustees of the Ringmer Congregational Chapel. Was this a part repayment of the purchase price? The last £50 was discharged in 1875.

In May 1866 a Tea Meeting and Bazaar was held at Ringmer Chapel to raise money for repairs and improvements to the premises, including a new floor, costing nearly £25. There were 90 at tea, and John Webb gave an address in the chapel in the evening.

There is no mention of Isfield Chapel at this time, although it was still an outstation of the Tabernacle. Two new outstations were attached to the Tabernacle by the end of 1866 but by 1868 they are lost sight of.

As an evangelical chapel the Tabernacle could not be indifferent to the long-running debate on the literal truth of the Bible, in particular, of the Old Testament. When John Webb arrived in Lewes the case of Bishop John Colenso of Natal was approaching its climax. In 1852-3 Colenso had published a book - *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* - in which he had questioned the authenticity of parts of the Pentateuch. As a result he had been deposed by a synod of South African bishops. Colenso appealed to the Privy Council on the grounds that the synod acted beyond its powers. On 29 March 1865 the Privy Council ruled in his favour on the legal aspect of the case. It did not comment on the spiritual aspect. That was not the end of a matter that had caused widespread concern among ordinary Christians; although many would have approved the dry comment of the *Christian World* leader of 8 April: 'We may justly say, however, that we think it possible that the authority of the house of Moses will survive the prolonged criticism of the African Missionary Bishop.'

It was in the shadow of this controversy that emphasis was laid upon the work of Sunday School teachers in the report presented at the Tabernacle Sunday School anniversary in June 1865:

‘The importance of their work in these days when so fierce a conflict is raging between truth and error, between God’s word and man’s word, reveals itself more and more. Their prayer is that in training the young entrusted to them to become true followers of Jesus, well instructed in the Scriptures and blessings to their fellow men, so that the influence of Sabbath School instruction may long be felt when the teachers shall have passed away into eternity.’

The defence of the scriptures could be approached in another way: by examining the geography and customs of the lands in which its narratives were set. The first half of the 19th century saw the first attempts at scientific exploration of the Holy Land. In 1817-18 the Englishmen C L Irby and James Mangles made valuable archaeological observations; but in 1838 the Americans Edward Robinson (a theologian) and Eli Smith (a former missionary in Beirut) used new methods which enabled them to identify many biblical sites for the first time. The findings of these and other travellers were by 1850 embodied in text books intended for use by school teachers. In 1865 Queen Victoria gave her patronage to the newly instituted ‘Palestine Exploration Fund.’ It is the desire to illustrate and to verify the biblical narrative that gives significance to a lecture given by Revd W Woods at the Tabernacle on 2 February 1867: *A tour thorough Palestine* illustrated with dissolving views lit by oxy-hydrogen limelight. ‘It was’, noted Charles Wille ‘very good.’

In the winter of 1865-6 a severe sickness (foot and mouth disease?) affected many counties throughout the country, including Yorkshire, Cheshire, Essex and Sussex. The movement of cattle was forbidden. On 12 March, instead of the usual Monday prayer meeting John Webb conducted a special service ‘to implore divine aid to exterminate the present fearful scourge among cattle.’ There was a large attendance. The sickness had not run its course in May, when the Lewes cattle fair had to be cancelled.

Early in 1866 Parliament was debating a bill to relieve Roman Catholic members of the House of Commons of the obligation to take the oath to maintain the Church of England and to profess their loyalty, as required by the Emancipation Act. This provoked yet another anti-Catholic reaction in Lewes, led as usual by Jireh Chapel, though other churches including the Tabernacle were associated with the process. At a public meeting at the Corn Exchange the Jireh minister Revd Matthew Welland moved a resolution, seconded by Mr A Funnell, opposing the bill. This was carried unanimously. It was agreed to form a

Protestant Association in the town and that tracts would be distributed. At the end of the year a series of lectures on Protestantism was held at County Hall. Local ministers, including John Webb, presided.

A printed leaflet dated 1886 and the Tabernacle Year Book for 1890 gives information about a Benevolent Society for the Relief of the Poor of the Congregation said to be established in 1866. Such dates are not always correct, although there is some evidence for this one. The old Lewes Benevolent Society had long been in decline. As far as one can see the Tabernacle ceased to be involved in the 1840s, and Cliffe Chapel in the 1850s, with the result that by the 1860s it had become solely a Baptist activity. It would be consistent with John Webb's broad outlook for him to encourage work of this kind. The object of the Benevolent Society given in 1890 'is to unite Christian instruction and sympathy with temporal aid to the needy and sick of the congregation, as far as funds of the Society will allow, who are not relieved from similar institutions.' Membership was obtained by a subscription of not less than one penny a week or five shillings a year. Twelve members were chosen each year to serve as visitors and the visitors together with the President (the minister), treasurer and secretary, formed the committee of management for the year. It followed the same lines as the original society so was not likely to be very different in 1866.

A short item in the *East Sussex News* in November 1867 enables the introduction of elders at the Tabernacle to be dated to the time of John Webb's ministry. They were already in existence when Charles Wille attended an elders' meeting on 28 September 1868. Why were they needed? What was their function? How were they elected? No certain answers can be given to these questions but an analysis of somewhat sketchy information given in minutes of Deacons' and Church Meetings in 1876 suggests some possible answers.

The first concerns the change of identity of the Tabernacle from a Calvinistic Methodist to a Congregational chapel (confirmed by the reference to the trustees of the Ringmer Congregational Chapel on Charity Bennett's receipt). We have seen that the Tabernacle was originally a private chapel where services were held in accordance with the beliefs of the managers and where a Sunday school and later a church and an auxiliary of the LMS were established. Although in practice these were not mutually exclusive, they were separate bodies each with its own organisation, operating with the consent of the

managers. The Trust Deed of 1829 formally transferred the powers of the managers to the trustees. Although, for example, the trustees might consult the Church Meeting and the congregation as a whole about the choice of a minister, they had the last word. The church meeting seems to have been concerned only with matters of membership, discipline and the election of deacons. In short, the constitution of the Tabernacle did not conform to the Congregational conception, which saw all the affairs of the church as controlled by Christ acting through the Church Meeting. Although the trustees were members of either the church or congregation at the Tabernacle, their views might not agree with those of the church, as the events of 1839-40 had shown.

In 1876 there were three deacons and seven elders. All the deacons were trustees and although this was not true of the elders, the deacons and elders together included a majority of the trustees, both of the Tabernacle and of Ringmer Chapel. The same was true after the appointment of new trustees for the Tabernacle in 1877. Both deacons and elders were appointed by the Church Meeting and were answerable to it; whereas the trustees were a self-perpetuating body (surviving trustees had the power to appoint new trustees). The effect of the innovation was to bring the trustees under the control of the Church Meeting. It might be asked why it was necessary to create elders. Would it not have been sufficient to increase the number of deacons?

The office of deacon (in Congregational churches the deacons were the only officers apart from the minister) was a particularly responsible one. The deacons were concerned with matters of membership (e.g. admission, discipline); the distribution of the common fund (the collection taken at communion) amongst the poor and needy members of the church and congregation; the visiting of members who failed to attend communion regularly. They also considered matters affecting the worship of the church and probably had some part in some of the services. There had never been more than three deacons at the Tabernacle and they were all highly respected men (deacons were then appointed for life). To have increased their number threefold would have been to devalue the office. It is not easy to discern the basis on which the elders were selected. They were clearly men of some standing in the church who, if not already trustees, were regarded as fit to hold responsible positions. In 1876 it was decided to increase the number of deacons to four; one had died, so two elders were elected as deacons. Later we find

elders unwilling to serve as deacons. Amongst the elders was the superintendent of the Sunday School. It is possible that other organisations of the church were represented. Some elders assisted the deacons with their visiting. The deacons seem to have met with the elders to discuss matters of worship or organisation which might subsequently be brought before the church meeting and then if necessary referred to the trustees. It is clear that with a growing membership the deacons needed some practical support.

The offices of elder and deacon were among those recognised by John Calvin. In the Presbyterian churches elders were responsible for discipline and oversight while the lower order of deacons looked after the care of the poor and the benevolent work of the church. At the Tabernacle the responsibilities, so far as they are comparable, were reversed: the deacon being the senior and the elder the junior role. It is questionable whether the elders at the Tabernacle were strictly officers at all. The name may simply have been a New Testament term adapted to local needs.

John Webb's activities spread beyond the Tabernacle itself. In July 1865 he preached at the stonelaying of the new Congregational chapel at Uckfield, which was later to take over the Tabernacle outstation at Isfield. We have a glimpse of a treat at the Ragged School in October: 'The scholars, most of whom presented a clean and tidy appearance, assembled at five o'clock. After tea, Revd John Webb gave a short address. Hymns were sung and lanternslides were shown.' Later in the same month we find him speaking at a Tea Meeting at Porched House in Southover on behalf of the Lewes Town Mission. He was also involved with the local Sunday School Union and the branch of the Bible Society: and, like his predecessor, he appeared on the platforms for special events at chapels of other dissenting denominations, with which he seems to have had especially good relations. With the founders of the London Missionary Society he believed differences of church order to be of secondary importance compared with the furtherance of the gospel.

There were some exceptions. An entry in the diary of Matthew Welland, minister of Jireh Chapel, shows that John Webb's more liberal theology was not acceptable to the hyper-Calvinists. It appears that both ministers were invited to preach at the anniversary of Broad Oak Chapel Chiddingly on 6 June 1866. The entry for that day reads: 'I conscientiously objected to preaching with Revd J

Webb of the Tabernacle Lewes because of his opposition to the truth of God. O Lord, bring him by thy grace to love it and to preach it too.'

On 31 December 1866 the first Watch Night service was held at the Tabernacle. Such services had their origin in a form of Covenant Service - a corporate renewal of dedication - instituted by John Wesley to regularise spontaneous meetings of prayer, praise and thanksgiving held through the night by Methodists at Kingswood near Bristol. In the 19th century the service was restricted to the New Year. In 1866 the *East Sussex News* reported Watch Night services at the Tabernacle and Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. The time was spent in prayer and hymn singing until just before midnight, when the congregation knelt in prayer until a few minutes past the hour, when a final hymn was sung. 'The effect was very solemn.' The practice was later adopted by some of the Anglican churches in the town.

On 6 November 1866 Charles Wille noted in his diary: 'Took tea with the church at the Tabernacle in commemoration of its being the 50th anniversary.' This is the only reference to what must have been the church's private celebration. It was not until the Friday of the following week that the public meetings were held in which representatives of other churches and congregations joined.

At the afternoon meeting in the Tabernacle the Revd Dr George Smith, the principal secretary of the Congregational Union, preached appropriately on Deuteronomy 31:12: 'Gather the people together, men, women and children, and the stranger within thy gates, that they may hear, that they may learn and fear the Lord your God.' Tea at the Assembly Rooms, County Hall, was followed by an evening meeting in the chapel, at which John Webb presided. The programme is set out so that points of interest can be noted.

Programme of Evening Meeting

Prayer	Revd J B Figgis MA
Welcome by the Chairman	Revd John Webb
Congratulatory Address	Revd George Smith
Address	On the Jubilee on earth and the Jubilee in Heaven Revd J B Figgis MA
Report	A short history of the Tabernacles Mr Charles Wille

Address	Independent Principles Revd R Vaughan Price MA LLB
Address	Ritualism Revd Paxton Hood

This somewhat heavy diet was enlivened by observations from the chairman and the singing of hymns.

Dr George Smith was in all respects the senior of the visiting preachers. Ordained in 1827, he had since 1842 been the pastor of Trinity Chapel Poplar; in 1852 he became principal secretary of the Congregational Union. The Irish-born John Benjamin Figgis had been ordained at the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in Brighton in 1861. He was not yet 30 years old, but was already building up a reputation as a preacher. He was described as having a dark complexion and black hair, with a high shrill voice, recalling Paxton Hood. 'By the aid of vivid words, passionate appeals and abundant gesture, he held the complete attention of his audience.' By his presence the Tabernacle can be seen acknowledging its roots in the mission promoted by the Countess of Huntingdon. The presence of Dr Smith suggests a greater interest in the Congregational Union than had hitherto appeared at the Tabernacle. The chapel had been listed in the Congregational Yearbook since its first publication in 1846. It was not however a member of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, founded in 1831, either directly or through membership of the Sussex Association formed in 1849. Its inclusion in the Year Book may have been due to its involvement in the Sussex Home Mission since it began in 1842. The evangelistic purpose of this body would have found an immediate response at the Tabernacle.

Revd R Vaughan Price was the minister of the old Union Street Chapel Brighton, where he followed Dr John Styles, a visiting preacher at the Tabernacle in its early days, and J N Goulty. His subject was essentially contentious, and his address setting out the scriptural basis for independency also argued that a state church and an episcopal church were both contrary to scripture. However moderately expressed it repeated the old Congregational criticism of the established church. A report of the Anglican Ruridiaconal (Rural Deans) Association for April 1866 explained that it had been formed: 'in consequence of the absolute necessity which was felt to exist for the thorough and hearty

cooperation between the clergy and the laity for the purpose of Church defence and Church extension. An organisation of parishes was accordingly formed to resist the once insidious, and now openly avowed, attacks on the Church of England as the National Church. To abolish Church rates, to make the churches public property, to allow ministers of all persuasions to officiate in our church yards, are among the measures by which the enemies of our Church are labouring with untiring energy to attack and undermine her foundations.....'

Edwin Paxton Hood was the author of many popular books on various subjects, including the English poets. Two of his hymns, *Jesus lives and Jesus reigns* and *God who hath made the daisies*, were included in *Congregational Praise*. For some years he was editor of *The Eclectic and Congregational Review*. He had been a minister at Queen's Square Congregational Church in Brighton since 1862. His allotted subject, *Ritualism* had an immediate topicality. Earlier in the year a Roman Catholic Mission had been established in Southover. More recently an architect from London had come to Lewes to examine the possibility of building a Roman Catholic church in the town. This and the Puseyite goings on at St Michael's provided a splendid opportunity for the denunciation of Popish practices. Paxton Hood was no stranger to the subject: at the Tabernacle missionary meeting in the previous month he had warned of the influence of Tractarians and Puseyites on the mission field. On this occasion he tactfully avoided it. He had written and spoken about it so much that he was glad to talk about something else. So beginning with his personal memories of some of the 'great and good men' who had preached at the Tabernacle in days gone by 'with even unusual eloquence in the latter part of this speech gave words of counsel and holy suggestion, particularly with regard to the need for the divine influence of the Holy Spirit, "without whom nothing is good, nothing is holy".'

The Tabernacle Jubilee celebrations took place in the shadow of John Webb's failing health. Within six months of his arrival in Lewes his 14 year-old daughter had died of consumption - the 'severe domestic affliction' that explained his absence from the annual Tea Meeting at Ringmer. Later his own health began to fail and he was ordered to rest. After spending August 1866 in Jersey and other resorts he seemed much better. In the following year he became ill again and was forced to go away during May and June. He preached for the last time on 27 October 1867 and died on 7 November. On 11 November Charles Wille 'went to see Revd John Webb in his coffin.' More than 1000 people gathered for the

burial service at St Michael's cemetery, where a personal friend, Revd Frederick Perry, gave the address at the graveside. In the evening Revd W Spencer Edwards, who was to succeed Webb as minister the following year, preached in the Tabernacle and on the following Sunday evening Mr Perry preached the funeral sermon from Acts 13:36 'For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption. But he whom God raised up saw no corruption.' After the sermon the eminent Quaker lawyer and preacher John Hodgkin, who had settled in Lewes in 1848 and frequently visited Mr Webb during his illness, paid his own tribute to his influence in the town. 'As iron, which was naturally obstinate, was fused by fire, so were differences between sects often dissipated by such a loss as had fallen upon them.'

On Wednesday 20 November a meeting of deacons, elders and members of the church and congregation of the Tabernacle opened a fund for Mrs Webb and her two sons and a committee was appointed to raise subscriptions. The Lewes photographer Edward Reeves advertised *carte de visite* portraits of John Webb at a shilling each, the profits of which were to be devoted to 'a charitable object.'

In 1871 Mary Webb, a teacher at the British School, was living at an address in Friar's Walk. She continued to play an active part in the life of the Tabernacle.

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