

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONS

WHICH HAVE EXISTED SINCE 1800

Compiled by Alan Ruston

In this bibliography I have attempted to list, with references, the Unitarian (or considered to be Unitarian) congregations in England, Wales and Scotland which have had a period of existence sometime in the last two centuries. Some were Presbyterian in origin with seventeenth century buildings while others met in hired rooms for just a few years before going out of existence. However if any group has been mentioned in a significant Unitarian publication that has come to my notice then they have been included.

It has been a long term project, commencing in 1966 with a card system in alpha order which has been added to as my researches have developed. Realising in 2004 that the assembled material needed to be placed on a database I started to input it into a computer while at the same time making an effort to supply missing information for particular congregations. In such a large collection of references which has all been transcribed more than once, errors will have been made. As a consequence references contained here should always be checked if they are used as the basis for research. As with my other indexes and compilations they are offered to users as a finding tool, and more than this is not claimed for what appears here. It is also work in progress and is the stage reached in 2012 when a line had to be drawn. More research will make the bibliography of greater value, and it is not in any way comprehensive. I would like to add more to the database and will welcome input to correct and add to it.

The compilation is based on the following principles:

1. Only published printed sources are included; no references to manuscripts and the like have been included. Copies of publications from which the extractions have been made are in public libraries or repositories; these are chiefly Dr Williams's Library, Harris Manchester College Oxford Library, John Rylands University Library of Manchester and the British Library. The catalogues of these repositories, some on-line, will provide more sources on particular congregations. The titles of works cited are included in the body of the database. Where acronyms or abbreviations have been used a key to these is provided at the end of this introduction.
2. Some of the congregations listed are obscure, others well known with an extensive recorded history. There are numerous reports in the denominational press of missionary efforts made in towns throughout the country which did not lead to the setting up of a recognised congregation; some are included but the majority are not. The large significant mainly city congregations could have had more references added, but a line was drawn especially where much detail can be found in published histories. Dates of new buildings and closure where known have been given and congregations still operating are shown as 'Continuing'. The majority of continuing congregations have a website which should be consulted as it often provides a history; there are also area Unitarian websites covering Britain which often give the history of causes, past and

present, in that area. The Victoria County Histories can be a useful source particularly on buildings.

3. The town or village where the congregation is, or was, located is shown in the first column, with the county name as it is today added. The addresses where the congregation have met are at the second column, together with the particular name or area by which it is known. The third column gives the date of origination, details of the various buildings used, together with whether or not it is continuing or if closed with the date when known. The fourth column lists the published books, accounts or lists where the congregation is mentioned. The last column shows the references in denominational journals that record the congregations' story and life. What is included in this last column is selective. For example references to the induction or leaving of ministers, member's obituaries or content of sermons and addresses are not included except where a history of the cause is given as well. It is therefore a partial, and not necessarily balanced, extraction concentrating on accounts of the history of the congregation or key events. I have tried to be consistent but this has not always been possible. When different sources show a clash of dates or places, the one which seems to most reasonable has been used. Not all quoted sources are necessarily correct. The extraction from the *Inquirer* for the last fifty years has concentrated on major events. The full title of the publications for which acronyms or abbreviations appear in columns four and five is given after this introduction. Where contemporary indexes exist the dates covered have been shown. Many of the works cited can be seen in full on websites, in particular unitarian.org.uk/document library.

If users have additions, corrections or amendments to make to the bibliography they would be welcomed at alanruston@btinternet.com. Changes to the database will be made at a subsequent date. Detail with a reference about little known congregations would be particularly valuable. The more data that can be included the better and the more useful will be the bibliography.

My thanks go to the librarians, archivists and historians who have helped with my researches over the last forty-six years. They are too numerous to mention individually, even if I was capable of doing so, but I'm grateful to them all nonetheless. However my researches have mainly been carried out at Dr Williams's Library and Harris Manchester College Oxford so my particular appreciation must be extended to them.

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

NOTE: Christopher Stell, of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, and English Heritage, in his massive and detailed *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in England*, 4 vols, provides bibliographic information on many

Unitarian congregations. References to congregations covered in these volumes are not separately shown in the bibliography unless they add specific detail. Not only are there numerous photographs but also references to original printed sources in each volume as well as extracts from monumental inscriptions. Most of the older congregations where buildings or burial grounds remain are covered. Researchers are recommended to examine them. The volumes are as follows:

Volume 1 *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in Central England*, HMSO, 1986. (references shown as **Stell C**)

Volume 2 *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in South-West England*, HMSO, 1991. (references shown as **Stell SW**)

Volume 3 *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in the North of England*, HMSO, 1994. (references shown as **Stell N**)

Volume 4 *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in Eastern England*, English Heritage, 2002. (references shown as **Stell E**) This volume covers not only Bedfordshire and Huntingdon but also all the southern counties including London, Sussex and Kent.

The Chapels Society published Christopher Stell's, *Nonconformist Plate and Other Vessels*, as its Occasional Publications No 4 in 2008 (ISBN 978-0-9545061-2-4) which lists the major plate, vessels and communion tokens that are still in existence. Excellent photographs and full descriptions are included. There are numerous Unitarian holdings in the inventory which is fully indexed. Separate references covering communion plate have not been included in the bibliography; issues of the TUHS up to the late 1930s contain numerous descriptions mainly from George Eyre Evans.

B&FUA – Annual printed reports of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association from the 1820s to 1928 give in the Home Reports or Missionary Department sections progress or otherwise of the churches or groups to which financial or other support was given. Often they cover the smaller congregations or places where expansion or missionary work was taking place that needed financial help to start or keep going. Over time nearly every congregation big or small is mentioned. The bibliography does not include all the references to a congregation or new group mentioned in the reports. Where missionary work was underway this may be the only source to give a yearly account from people based in the locality of what was happening. The coverage of Scotland is consistent and extensive. Reports are particularly long and detailed in the 1870s and 1880s, and can be less detailed in the 20th century reports. A complete set of the Annual Reports is available at Dr Williams's Library; elsewhere holdings can be partial.

Beard Unitarianism - John Rely Beard, *Unitarianism Exhibited in its Actual Condition*, London, 1846. This is the first comprehensive published listing of anti-trinitarian/Unitarian congregations. It shows those known to Beard to be Unitarian but it is not comprehensive. It is not clear why certain known Unitarian congregations do not appear in the list.

Bolam – CG Bolam, *Three Hundred Years 1662-1962, The Story of the Churches Forming the North Midland Presbyterian and Unitarian Association*, 1962.

Browne Cong Norfolk/Suffolk – John Browne, *History of Congregationalism and Memorials of the Churches in Norfolk and Suffolk*, London, 1877.

CF – *Christian Freeman*, monthly 1856- 1890s. An engraving of profiled congregations is generally included.

CL – *Christian Life*, weekly 1876-1928, when it was incorporated into *The Inquirer*. From 1876 to 1886 and from 1900 to 1926 indexes were published which are included in some of the bound runs of the journal at the front or at the back; indexes in early years reflect the pagination which start a new volume in July each year. In the section of the index shown as Denominational News or Intelligence, the page references of reports of individual congregations are given. Accounts of the same event before about 1900 generally differ from that appearing in the *Inquirer*; both sources should be examined. During the editorship of Robert Spears (1876-1899) there was a concentration on reporting the life of London and South East congregations in its news columns; it was these chapels that Spears knew best. It continued to some extent in the new century. Reports of the annual meetings of District Associations, particularly before 1914, can include detailed information on individual congregations.

Continuing – The congregation continues to function (2012) as a Unitarian community.

CP – *Christian Pioneer* 1826-1845, Glasgow. A later monthly journal called *The Free Christian Pioneer and Unitarian Chronicle*, also designated **CP**, appeared in the 1880s.

CR – *Christian Reformer*, monthly 1815-1863. A different Unitarian journal appeared during 1886-1887 with the same title.

Davis, They Thought – D Elwyn Davies, *They Thought for Themselves, the story of Unitarianism in Wales etc.*, printed Gomer Press Llandysul, 1982.

DWL – Dr Williams's Library, 16 Gordon Square, London, WC1H OAR.

EH – Essex Hall (1-6, Essex Street, London, WC2R 3HY destroyed by bombing 1944 and rebuilt 1958) is the headquarters building of the B&FUA from late 19th century, and its successor the General Assembly. Only recent written records are held there; the large historic remainder have been transferred to Dr Williams's Library in batches after 2000.

EHYB – *Essex Hall Year Book* (produced by the B&FUA) yearly 1890-1928.

GAYB /Dir – *General Assembly Year Book*, yearly from 1929, became *General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Directory* in 1980s.

GBA – General Baptist Assembly, formed in the 1640s, continues to represent those Unitarian churches who are General Baptist in origin. Its records are at DWL

Hargrove – *Unitarian Chapels of Yorkshire*, edited by Rev Charles Hargrove, Grand County Bazaar volume, circa 1903, paper cover but many copies in libraries have been bound.. The work consists of a brief history of each chapel with a list of its ministers. There is a good quality photograph of each chapel at least ten inches long, either of the inside or out, taken for the occasion. There are no page numbers.

Harris List – George Harris, *Unitarianism the only religion that can become universal*, a discourse, Liverpool, published 1819, congregations are listed in an appendix. The first published listing of Unitarian congregations. The list, without the names of ministers, is repeated in the *Christian Life* 6 January 1894, pages 8/9.

Herford & Evans NE Lancs – RT Herford & EDP Evans, *Historical Sketch of the North and East Lancashire Unitarian Mission 1859-1909*, Bury, 1909.

I or Inq – *The Inquirer*, weekly from 1842, which in 1970 became a fortnightly. The only published indexes to this newspaper cover the years from 1896 to 1901 and are in a similar format to that of the *CL*. They are bound in the front or back of the yearly volumes. Accounts of the same event before about 1900 generally differ from that appearing in the *CL*; both sources should be examined. In the late 19th century and up to 1914 there was an over concentration on reporting the life of London and South East congregations, but not as marked as with the *CL*. WG Tarrant was for a long period the editor of the *Inquirer* whose ministerial involvement was in London. Reports of the annual meetings of District Associations, particularly before 1914, can include detailed information on individual congregations.

Jones, Gardens – J Eric Jones, *Gardens of Faith, Unitarian Heritage Sites in Wales*, Unitarian Welsh Department (GA), 2006.

Jones, Good Ground – J Eric Jones, *The Good Ground, Unitarian Places of Worship in Wales*, Aberdare, 2009.

Marr Reg – List of Chapels and Meeting-Houses generally accounted Unitarian, registered for the solemnization of Marriage etc from the passing of the Act to 15th December 1837, contained in the *Christian Reformer*, December 1838 Vol V No LX, pages 805-807. This listing while not covering all known Unitarian congregations, apart from sketchy Harris list of 1819, is amongst the earliest known, a significant source which has hitherto been neglected. It describes the location of the 79 congregations in precise terms. The list is apparently in order of registration as the first chapel shown is the General Baptist Chapel Horsham which is now the oldest surviving building registered for marriages in England and Wales of any denomination (see *TUHS* April 1990, page 273).

Miall Yorks - JG Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire: A Chapter of Modern Church History*, London, 1868.

Midland Churches – G Eyre Evans, *Midland Churches: a history of the Congregations on the Roll of the Midland Christian Union*, Dudley, 1899.

MR – *Monthly Repository* 1806-1838, but only of Unitarian interest to 1832. The text of each issue from 1806 can be found on a website, with a form of indexing available.

Mudie-Smith – R Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London*, London, 1904.

Murch – Jerom Murch, *A History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England etc*, London, 1835.

Nightingale Lancs – Benjamin Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity, Or Sketches, Historical & Descriptive of the Congregational and Old Presbyterian Churches in that County*, 6 Vols, published Manchester in various years in 1890s.

PDM – *Protestant Dissenters Magazine*, monthly 1794-1799.

Record PA Lancs – G Eyre Evans (compiler under the direction of the Assembly), *Record of the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Manchester, 1896.

Sharpe Pictures - *Pictures of Unitarian Churches with explanatory remarks*, collected and edited by Emily Sharpe, Unitarian Christian Publishing Office London, 1901.

Short, Scottish Pioneers – L Baker Short, *Pioneers of Scottish Unitarianism*, printed privately Wales, 1963.

Seedsower The – *The Seedsower*, monthly, Birmingham, 1893-1899.

Sibree Indep Warcs – John Sibree & Moses Caston, *Independency in Warwickshire; a history of the Congregational Churches in that county*, London, 1855.

Stell – see note at start of this section.

TUHS – *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, mostly yearly, from 1916. ProQuest (Chadwyke Healey) has placed the issues 1916 to the late 1990s on its serials website, so that articles can be downloaded by those academic institutions who subscribe to the service.

UA – *Unitarian Almanac*, issued yearly, after 1850. See also UPA

UH – *Unitarian Herald*, weekly, 1861-1889, when it was incorporated into the *Christian Life*.

UPA – *Unitarian Pocket Almanac*, issued yearly, after 1850. See also UA

Urwick Noncon Cheshire – William Urwick, *Historical Sketch of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester*, Manchester, 1864.

Urwick Noncon Herts – William Urwick, *Nonconformity in Hertfordshire etc*, London, 1884.

Unitarian Heritage- *The Unitarian Heritage, an architectural survey of chapels and churches in the Unitarian tradition in the British Isles*, Sheffield, 1986 (text Graham Hague). This is an extensive record of known buildings which have housed Unitarian congregations with many associated photographs. There is a high degree of accuracy on dates of the buildings and congregations. An occasional disagreement occurs with what is contained in this bibliography which updates many of the references relating to events that have occurred since 1986.

Unitarian Heritage E Anglia – *Unitarian Heritage in East Anglia*, Eastern Union of Unitarian Churches, 1994, updated on Unitarian History in East Anglia website.

Unitarian Heritage Kent – Brian Packer, *The Unitarian Heritage in Kent*, London, 1991.

Unitarian The – *The Unitarian*, monthly journal from 1903 and continuing.

VD Davis LDMS – VD Davis, *The London Domestic Mission Society: record of a hundred years 1835-1935*, London, 1935.

Vestiges – G Eyre Evans, *Vestiges of Protestant Dissent: being lists of ministers, sacramental plate, registers, antiquities and other matters pertaining to most of the churches (and a few others) included in the National Conference of Unitarian...congregations*, Liverpool, 1897. This work covers most but not all known Unitarian congregations existing in 1896.

Whitley – *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches in England*, edited with notes by WT Whitley, Baptist Historical Society, 1910, Vol I 1654-1728, Vol 2 1731-1811 (with indexes) . These minutes, originals held in Dr Williams's Library, mention all of the GB churches at one time or another which can be located through the places index. The notes are valuable.

Wright Missionary – Richard Wright, *The Missionary Life and Labours of Richard Wright*, London, 1824. This work is now available on disc.

Additional information

In 1964 the Foy Society carried out a survey of Unitarian congregations in Britain, the first survey of its kind undertaken. An interviewer with a pre-printed multi-page form visited each congregation in person to talk to a church officer or representative and obtain details. The results were published in *A Census of Unitarian Congregations in Britain* (GA, 1967, 180 pp), with an abridged version: *Unitarian Congregations Surveyed: a Guide to the Report of the Foy Society's Survey* (GA, 1967, 63 pp.) There were 238 responses from 258 'active' congregations (92%), including 14 Fellowships. Sometimes other current documentation was added to the completed survey form. The boxes containing the original returns are being transferred from the GA at Essex Hall to DWL.