



The History of
Blatt Chapel

BY

E. Stwindells.

Platt Chapel : : Rusholme.

1700 1950.

*The Story of its Congregation, and some
account of the Ministers who have served
through its long life.*

By

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FOREWORD.

On the approach of the 250th Anniversary of the opening of the first Chapel at Platt, this little book is offered as an outline of the story of the congregation which founded it, and of its ministers.

Much of the material concerning the earlier years was included in the "History of the Ancient Chapel of Birch," written by the Rev. John Booker, M.A., F.S.A., ninety years ago, and published by the Chetham Society.

In writing this sketch, an attempt has been made to supply some additional facts, and to bring the record up to the present time. Materials for original research have not been plentiful, but details have been brought together from various scattered sources, which make up a more complete outline than was contained in previous accounts.

The writer would express his grateful thanks to the Revd. Raymond V. Holt, M.A., B.LITT., and the Revd. H. McLachlan, M.A., D.D., D.LITT., for their encouragement and help in undertaking this work.

E.S.

Withington 1949.

Platt Chapel, Rusholme

1700-1950.

THE number of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches which have a long history dating back to the middle years of the seventeenth century, and which are still playing a vital part in the religious life of our country is considerable. Many of these histories have already been written and are available to all who are interested in the origins of modern Nonconformist denominations, and we make no apology for adding the story of Platt Chapel to their number; for the story is as full of historical interest and even romance as any of them.

Many such histories contain some points of more than local interest, and the sum total of these constitutes a very important contribution to the history of English dissent.

Platt Chapel stands in Rusholme, about three miles south of Manchester, the present building occupying the site of an earlier chapel built for a congregation of Independents who had held together under persecutions and difficulties for half a century and with whom this story naturally begins.

During the sixteenth century, the course of the great religious renaissance known as the Reformation was not uniform, and great changes were not effected with startling completeness. The struggle for liberty of conscience was long and hard, with tyranny ever and again raising its head in new guises. The advent of Queen Elizabeth to the throne soon saw attempts being made to enforce uniformity of worship under Episcopalian government, which from the outset were opposed by the growing number of people who feared compromise with Roman Catholic

practices, and were seeking to build a church stripped of all that which they regarded as corrupt in doctrine and ecclesiastical government. Feelings were aroused by social and political considerations, and fears intensified by local circumstances, especially in districts where considerable numbers of people still adhered to the unreformed faith which did not by any means quietly fade into insignificance.

Lancashire in particular was outstanding for the number of influential families who clung tenaciously to Rome. In 1580 a law was passed imposing a fine of £20 a month on all who refused to attend their parish churches, and it was recorded in 1590 that at least 700 Lancashire gentry were paying this fine, while at the same time all available prison accommodation was overcrowded. This state of affairs did not apply to the towns of the south eastern part of the county, Manchester and Bolton having already become centres of fervid Puritanism. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the majority of the leading families in Manchester district adhered to the Protestant Church but there were still some including the Barlows of Barlow Hall, which still stands near Barlow Moor Road, and the De Traffords of Old Trafford, who did not disguise their loyalty to the Catholic church.

In Rusholme, all that is known of the landowning families points to the conclusion that they were not only Protestants, but that from the beginning of the Puritan movement, their sympathies were entirely with those who maintained that Episcopalianism was not in harmony with the teaching and practice of the founders of Christianity as they found it in the New Testament, but that orders of Archbishops, Bishops, and most of the lower grades of the priesthood were an encumbrance not to be tolerated.

First of these families were the Birches of Birch Hall, the site of which is now occupied by part of the modern Grammar School buildings. The Birch Family had occupied their lands in Rusholme since the thirteenth century, and one of their house, William Birch, was ordained priest by the subsequent martyr Bishop Ridley. When Lawrence Vaux, the last Roman Catholic warden of the Manchester Collegiate church refused to accept the reformed faith in 1560, this William Birch became the first Protestant warden in his place.

On the Birch Estate was a small chapel-of-ease which, although under the authority of the Manchester collegiate church, was described as the "private oratory" of the Birch family, and stood on the site of the present St. James' Church. The Birches had the gift of the living subject to the approval of the mother church, but the building was commonly used for worship by all the inhabitants of Rusholme.

During the Civil War the head of this family was Thomas Birch, a militant Puritan who was a captain in the Manchester train band, and was concerned in the skirmishes in Manchester which in July 1642, was the occasion of the first bloodshed in that sad event of our history. He was early given the rank of Colonel in the Parliamentary forces, and is heard of taking part in several actions under Ralph Assheton, finally being in command at the taking of Liverpool of which town he subsequently was appointed Governor. He was a loyal friend and supporter of Presbyterian and Independent ministers at Birch until his death in 1678.

About half a mile from Birch stood Platt Hall, the home of the Worsley family, comparatively new-comers to the district. Their estate had been in the hands of the Platt family for four centuries until 1625 when it was purchased by Ralph Worsley, a Manchester merchant who is believed to be connected with the Worsleys of Worsley. His eldest son and heir was the famous Major General Charles Worsley, personal friend of Oliver Cromwell, who ably filled many important offices during his relatively brief career. He was the first member of Parliament for Manchester and at the age of 32 held the governorship of Lancashire, Cheshire and Staffordshire under the Commonwealth. Charles Worsley played some part in the historic dissolution of Parliament in 1653, and it is believed that the Mace which was removed by Cromwell's order was brought to Platt and remained there until required for the opening of the next Parliament three months later. He died at the early age of 35 before he could succeed to the Platt estate. It was his son Ralph who carried on the Puritan tradition of the family and as shall be told, later played a prominent part in the actual founding of the dissenting chapel.

Among the remaining families adhering to the Puritan congregation of Birch Chapel were the Syddalls of Slade Hall whose lands were situated to the east of Rusholme, mostly in what is now known as Longsight.

Slade Hall, which still stands in Slade Lane, was tenanted by Edward Syddall in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and was purchased by him in 1588. His descendents continued to reside there until about 1850, and continued to give the most loyal support to Platt Chapel down to the present generation.

Mention should also be made of the Edge family who lived at Birch Hall Houses and were also members of the Birch congregation. We do not know much of the history of this family, but they were staunch Puritans like their neighbours and it is recorded that during the Civil War, Captain Oliver Edge took Lord Derby prisoner after the battle of Worcester. Their lands were probably situated to the south of Old Hall Lane.

Lists of the early seat holders and subscribers to the support of Birch Chapel are extant, and it is of interest to note a few family names which have persisted in the neighbourhood. These include Boardman, Bradshaw, Broome, Bowden, Fletcher, Mellor, Percival, Dickenson, Shelmerdine, Wallwork and Whittaker.

Seventeenth century Manchester would be considered a small place by modern standards, but was nevertheless a place of considerable importance, while Rusholme, over two miles away, was a sparsely populated district connected to the town by the Wilmslow road which was doubtless a dusty track in summer and a miry rutted lane in winter. Approaching it from the town, the Rusholme boundary would be passed about the spot where Moss Lane East now branches off. A little further on the road passed the old village green which extended from about Great Western Street to near the present Claremont Road. Cottages and farmhouses were scattered thinly along this length, the whole population of Rusholme being at this time not more than two hundred. Claremont Road follows the line of an old lane which led to a farm and a small group of cottages about the end of Heald Grove. Travelling on along Wilmslow Road, Platt Hall would next be seen, a "black and white" structure occupying the same site as the present hall, but fronting towards the roadway. Old Hall Lane went by Birch Hall Fold to the ancient Birch Hall, the last traces of which were removed when the hall was demolished to make room for the new Grammar School, while from the Hall, Birch Hall Lane provided a road in the opposite direction to Longsight.

Birch Chapel stood near the hall on the site of the present St. James' Church, but a little nearer to the Gore Brook. It was a small building of not very attractive appearance, which continued in use until one hundred years ago, when as it was rapidly becoming too small to meet the needs of a growing population it was removed, and the present handsome structure was built and opened in 1846.

Such account as we have of the earliest ministers of Birch Chapel is but meagre, and has little bearing on this particular story. The chapel was subordinate to Manchester Collegiate Church and tithes were payable to the Warden and Fellows there.

In 1646 the Rev. John Wigan was appointed, and here the story of dissent in Rusholme definitely commences. A good deal is known of the career of this remarkable man, and the story is worth dealing with fully.

Of his early days nothing appears to be known, and he is first heard of at Gorton Chapel in 1641, when he was appointed curate. In 1642 the Civil War broke out, and it is probable that he served with the Parliamentary forces as chaplain during the next two years.

Some time before 1646 he had returned to Manchester and settled again at Gorton, but it would appear that his contacts with all the many types of "sectaries" in the Parliamentary army had already made a dissenter of him. The Presbyterian Settlement had already become an accomplished fact and the Manchester Classis formed in that year, but John Wigan repudiated both, preferring Congregational government. This was not well received by the Gorton people who were for recognising the authority of the classis, although he succeeded in converting a minority to his views. There is a very interesting paragraph in the autobiography of Adam Martindale who followed Mr. Wigan at Gorton which is worth quoting in full.

"This was that bustling year wherein the Presbyteriall and Congregational governments were like Jacob and Esau struggling in the wombe. The latter (not waiting for a civil sanction as the former did) was got into possession at Duckenfield, in Cheshire, within two miles and a half of us, had been tugging hard at Gorton to get in there in the

days of Mr. Wigan, my predecessor, who spent his afternoons sermons constantly to promote it, and meeting with remoras too weighty to be removed, he was then using all endeavours to get it up at Birch, (as neare to us as Duckenfield) which in time he effected. The presbyterians were as busie (especially some) to get their government settled all over the county, and that all separate congregations, such as Birch, (for Duckenfield was out of their compasse,) might be suppressed."

The ordinance for setting up the presbyterian government in Lancashire was introduced in September, 1646, and the first classis consisting of the ministers and elders, the latter elected by their congregations, was appointed to rule all the churches in Manchester district. The name of Mr. Wigan is first mentioned in the minutes of the third meeting of the classis as one of those to whom "warrants" were ordered to be sent out, but at the next meeting we learn, "the members of the last classis appointed to deale with Mr. Wigan returned answer that the said Mr. Wigan, not desiring to meete them as members of a classis but as fellow brethren, promised to returne his scruples in writing. Not yet done." There is no record in subsequent minutes that the promise was ever kept, and if the classis took any further steps against him no doubt they in turn met with "remoras too weighty to be removed," for he held his post at Birch Chapel until 1650.

During his years at Birch, John Wigan's enquiring mind took him further afield and he adopted the theological views of the Anti-paedobaptists, but again found a congregation unwilling to follow him.

His stipend at Birch was payable out of funds raised by the sequestration of properties of "recusants" who had opposed the Commonwealth regime, but had got considerably into arrears. In 1649 these arrears were paid up and shortly after he left Birch Chapel, bought the former priests college at Manchester, which had been sequestered from the Earl of Derby, and is now known as Chethams Hospital. Here according to Adam Martindale, he "made a barne there into a chappell, where he and many of his persuasion preached doctrine diametrically opposite to the ministers perswasion under their very nose." His new church was quite outside the pale of official recognition, and the voluntary contributions of his congregation failed to suffice the upkeep. Before the end of another

year he took a cavalry captains commission, rising eventually to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Baptist historians regard him as the pioneer of their body in the north west of England, and there is a tablet to his memory erected in the courtyard of the College, where the Baptist congregation continued to use the barn until 1657. In 1654 when Cromwell turned against Baptists and republicans, he left the army but was able to recover a further £357 of arrears of his stipend at Birch. In the year following, we hear of Wigan defending a revised Presbyterian confession which was attacked by George Fox. After suffering imprisonment in 1663 at Lancaster castle, where he again met Fox as a fellow prisoner, he went to London where he died of the plague.

John Wigan had left congregational rule firmly established at Birch chapel, and to the end of the ministry of his successor this position was maintained. The minutes of the Manchester Classis down to the last meeting in 1660 include Blackley, Didsbury, Chorlton, Denton and Stretford as under its jurisdiction, but there is not any mention of Birch. This appears to be good evidence that Platt chapel derives, from the oldest dissenting congregation in Manchester district. The next occupant of the pulpit was the Rev. Robert Birch, probably a connection of the local family. He was less aggressive in his attitude to the orthodox Presbyterians, as is learned from his attendance at a meeting of ministers convened in Manchester on the 13th of July, 1659, for the purpose of settling amicably the differences of opinion prevailing amongst them in religious matters.

At this meeting it was agreed to "lay to heart all unnecessary distances and unbrotherly carriage one towards another and engage in this accommodation in all unfeigned love and steadfast resolution, to pray one with and for another, and to lay aside to their utmost all words and carriage that may violate or prejudice this Christian communion." This is recorded in the Proceedings of the first Manchester Classis, but not in their minutes. On the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662 he refused to conform, and was silenced. He remained resident in the neighbourhood but gave up the ministry and practised as a physician and surgeon, dying in 1693.

With the passing of Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth he had set up, the restoration of the monarchy was practically inevitable, and the end of Presbyterian power in religious matters, never very strong in many parts of the country, drew quickly nigh. Charles II. returned to the throne in 1660, greatly aided by the Presbyterians, who mostly believed that under a restored monarchy a new national church could be set up which would be sufficiently broad in its constitution that it would comprehend both themselves and episcopalians, but extend no toleration to Papists. For two years the king continued to encourage them in this delusion, while on the other hand the episcopalians were steadily preparing for their revenge. The "Solemn League and Covenant" was publicly burned at the command of a predominantly loyalist House of Commons, and in 1661 the Bishops were restored to the House of Lords.

In May, 1662, the Act of Uniformity was passed and received the royal assent. It provided that worship everywhere must be conducted by the clergy strictly in accordance with the newly issued Book of Common Prayer, and the public declaration by every minister of "unfeigned assent and consent" to its contents, while episcopal ordination was also made compulsory. Nearly two thousand ministers found themselves ejected from their churches on their refusal to conform.

Three years later a further vindictive measure was passed in order to lessen the opportunities of the ejected ministers continuing to influence their late supporters. The Five Mile Act forbade them to live in, or even temporarily visit any city or town in which they had held a clerical office or conducted nonconformist services. This followed a renewal of the Conventicle Act which contained provisions that persons over sixteen years of age must not attend religious services held "in other manner than is allowed by the Liturgy," in greater numbers than four, under penalties of five pounds for the first offence and ten for the second, (three and six months imprisonment being the alternative for non-payment), while for a third offence the fine was one hundred pounds or the alternative of transportation for seven years. This meant banishment to very many ministers who found their local magistrates ready to enforce these penalties, and several from other towns sought asylum in Manchester.

The effects of all this on the congregation at Rusholme were very serious. In the first place, as previously mentioned, they lost the services of their minister, Robert Birch, and were without any place where the congregation could gather to worship according to their consciences. Nevertheless during many dark years they held together, sometimes gathering in stealth and sometimes risking apprehension openly. The pulpit of Birch Chapel remained vacant and occasionally the risk was taken of holding nonconformist services there, when a minister was available. Adam Martindale in his "Life," states that in 1671 he "preached publicly at Gorton and Birch," being the only one of the ministers whose name can be discovered. We also have an account of a clandestine meeting which was held in Birch Hall on Sunday, November 16th, 1666. This service was conducted by two wandering German ministers, who held forth from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon, foreboding all manner of woe to England and advising their hearers to fly to Germany. They also sang two German hymns, one of them beginning "Hark how the trumpet sounds."

Whether the singing of such a hymn in the house of an old Roundhead officer gave alarm to some of his royalist neighbours we do not know, but the sequel to this meeting was the enforcement of the Conventicle Act; several persons were fined £5, including Thomas Birch and Deborah Worsley the wife of Ralph Worsley of Platt Hall. The grave of this Deborah Worsley may still be seen in Birch churchyard, to the right of the path as you enter. That such action on the part of the authorities did not put a stop to the meetings is evidenced by the report of a Didsbury "informer" in 1669 :- "Some persons out of this chapelry doe resort to Birch Chapell where (as its informed) certaine nonconformists doe preach every Lords Day. Also several inhabitants of Chorlton Chapelry and Stretford resort to the Conventicle at Birch Chapell." During this period the chapelry remained vacant so far as the appointment of a conformist minister was concerned, owing chiefly to the fact of there being no subsistence provided. The endowments of the chapel were almost non-existent, and the Birches, Worsleys and the Syddal families could hardly be expected to open their purse strings for a conformist.

The year 1672 brought the first Declaration of Indulgence from Charles II., largely suspending the penal laws and offering the dissenting ministers liberty to preach under licence. Of those ministers who had found refuge in Manchester, several obtained licenses as soon as possible. It is highly probable that most of them had from time to time officiated at conventicles in Rusholme, at any rate Colonel Birch in spite of his Congregational views of church government was quite on friendly terms with them. The question of Presbyterian organisation had ceased to be an issue of first importance, and common suffering had drawn its supporters and the Independants nearer together.

One of these ministers, the Rev. Henry Finch was invited by Colonel Birch to fill the vacant pulpit at Birch, for which he already had the approval of the congregation. Henry Finch was born at Standish, near Wigan, in 1623, and was educated at the grammar schools of Standish and Wigan. It is very probable that he graduated later at one of the universities, but we have no record of this. He was presented to the vicarage of Walton-on-the-Hill, near Liverpool, in 1656, and was a member of the fifth Presbyterian classis. In July, 1659, he took an active part in the preparations for Sir George Booth's premature attempted rising in favour of the restoration of the king, and for this suffered the sequestration of all his property. When ejected from Walton as a nonconformist he retired to Warrington, and as none of his sequestered property had been restored to him he was in such need that he lived in dependence on his wife's relations for some years. In 1665, the Five Mile Act drove him and others to Manchester, where he supported himself by keeping a school, and during this period he frequently preached to small gatherings in his own house. He formed a very close friendship with Henry Newcome who was later the founder of the Cross Street congregation, and the famous Oliver Heywood frequently mentions visiting them together on his visits to Manchester.

It is most probable that many of the Rusholme people had already had opportunities of hearing Henry Finch preaching at conventicles and other illegal gatherings, and he did not hesitate on his part to accept the offer of the congregation, although he fully realised the risks he was undertaking. It is interesting to note that when applications were made for licenses, the different leanings of both minister and congregation were

mentioned. The entries in the register of licenses preserved in the Record Office mention in one place the licensing of the private oratory of Thomas Birch "for a congregation of presbyterians," and in another "for a congregational meeting place."

The indulgence of the king did not meet with the approval of the Parliament of the day, and a year or two later they took occasion to revoke these licenses, but Finch continued to preach at Birch Chapel.

Very little has been left on record of his life during the next few years, but there are entries in Henry Newcome's autobiography from which we learn that Mr. Finch brought suspicion on himself of too much interest in political movements.

June 16th, 1685, Newcome writes "The news was bad of the Duke of Monmouth's landing etc." June 20th, "I was in the garden, and in that time they searched my house for arms. An unkind part, to set a mark thus upon me and some others." June 27th, "About five Mr. Finch was seized. . . . It troubled me, and all expected my turn." July 14th, (Tuesday) Poor Mr. Finch went to-day toward Chester, which was a great affliction to me." He tells nothing further of this arrest and imprisonment beyond the brief entry, July 23rd, "Mr. Finch came home this day from Chester."

Colonel Thomas Birch died in 1678 and was succeeded by his son Thomas, who continued the family's loyal support of the ministry of Mr. Finch, while at Platt Hall, Ralph Worsley the son of Major General Charles Worsley also remained his loyal friend to the end of his days.

The Revolution which finally drove out the Stuart kings and set Prince William of Orange on the throne brought about a new settlement of church affairs, and the Toleration Act which was passed in 1689, gave dissenters (with the exception of any who repudiated the doctrine of the Trinity) a legal status for the first time. Henry Finch forthwith applied for Birch Chapel to be recognised as a dissenters' meeting house but at the same time the Warden and Fellows of Manchester Collegiate Church renewed their claim to Birch as one of their consecrated chapels. Although he had no legal standing in such a course Henry Finch and

his congregation continued to use the chapel until 1697, when on the death of Thomas Birch the patronage came into the hands of his son and heir George Birch, who had little sympathy with dissent and restored the chapel to the Established church.

This had been a long period of dissenting occupation of a chapel belonging to the establishment, and the fact that it was so held with so little disturbance was no doubt largely due to Nicholas Stratford, D.D., who succeeded Richard Heyrick as Warden of Manchester Collegiate Church in 1667. His "gentle and considerate treatment of dissenters" is said to have given so much offence to the Jacobite element that he resigned in 1684, five years before he became Bishop of Chester.

Whether there were earlier instances of baptisms at Birch we have no record, but a copy of a baptismal register shows that such services were regularly conducted from July 1687, parents bringing children from districts as far away as Reddish, Gorton and Kirkmanshulme. One of the earliest entries in this register is somewhat remarkable, "December 4th, 1687, Mary, Martha and Alice daughters of — Woolstener of Rusholme (all three adults.)" This might indicate either an objection to infant baptism, or equally strong scruples against what many regarded as superstitious practices in administering that sacrament in the orthodox manner.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper had naturally been regarded as an essential feature of the services at Birch, and when the majority of the congregation left the chapel along with their minister they took with them the communion plate, regarding it as the peculiar property of the congregation. This plate remains in the possession and use of Platt Chapel at the present day, and will be referred to again later.

October 1697, saw Mr. Finch preaching in various private houses which were licensed for the purpose, including Platt Hall and the house of Oliver Edge at Birch Hall Fold, the form of license being as follows :-

These are to certifye that at a General Qr Sessions of the peace held att Manchester the 14th day of October anno Dni. 1697, the dwelling house of Mr. Ralph Worsley of Platt within Rusholme is

recorded for a meeting place ffor a meeting place ffor an assembly of Protestants dissenting from the Church of England ffor ye exercise of theire religious worshipp in according to an Act of Parliament intituled an Act for exempting their Maties, Protestant subjects dissenting from the said Church of England from the pennaltyes of certain Lawes according to the letter and purport of the said Act :-

Given under my hand the day and yeare above written.

Roger Kenyon. Clicus pacis ibm.

During the next few years the amount of "wage," as it was usually denominated, voluntarily subscribed for Mr. Finch's maintenance was £16 per annum, from fifty individuals, surprisingly enough including Mr. George Birch who had dismissed Mr. Finch from Birch Chapel, although his name did not appear openly in the list of subscribers. This was doubtless a gracious personal tribute to the worth of the old friend of his father and grandfather.

The homeless congregation and their aged minister held loyally together during the next three years; indeed there were so few reversion, to the church that the curate appointed by George Birch found himself almost without financial support and soon resigned leaving Birch Chapel without a curate for about ten years. During these years the register records several baptisms by Henry Finch, presumably conducted at the licensed meeting houses. The need of a chapel was keenly felt and encouragement to build was supplied by the example of several dissenting congregations in the district including Cross Street, Manchester, who had opened their chapel in 1694. The first definite move toward meeting the need was the convening of a meeting of the congregation on the 30th of May, 1699, when the following resolutions were adopted and signed by twenty-four individuals, including Raphe Worsley and Ebenezer Edge :-

(1) Wee whose names are hereunto subscribed doe declare our earnest and hearty desire that there may be a Building erected for the Worshipp of God ffor the benefit and convenience of that congregation which now attends upon the ministry of Mr. ffinch.

(2) Wee doe promise and declare that wee will duely attend the worshipp of God in such a p'lace when erected.

(3) further wee doc promise to contribute to the maintenance of such Dissenting Minister or Ministers as shall be unanimously elected to officiate in the said place.

Little time was lost in deciding ways and means. Mr. Raphe Worsley gave the land for the site and a contribution of £10, while Mr. Finch gave £20. A list of smaller donations has been preserved as follows :-

	£	s.	d.
Mr. Edge of Warrington	6	0	0
Richard Whittaker	5	0	0
Mr. Thomas Butterworth.....	1	10	0
Mr. Birche, minister.....	1	0	0
Mr. Alexander Boardman.....	1	10	0
Adam Barlow	1	0	0
Obadiah Hulme	1	0	0
Mr. Charles Worsley	1	0	0
Mrs. Okell	1	0	0
Francis Wood	1	0	0
Mr. Siddal.....	1	0	0
Mad. Gill	1	0	0
Mrs. Loyd.....	0	10	0

The land given for the site was a portion of a close known as Blake Flatt, bounded on the south by the ancient Nico Ditch, a feature which has been carefully preserved down to the present time.

THE OLD CHAPEL AT PLATT.

So eager were the congregation to realise their vision of a house of worship that no time was wasted in commencing work on its erection, and great progress was made during the summer following the meeting in May.

The structure was of brick, and it is said that 39,008 bricks were required to complete it. Some of the more interesting items in the account of expenditure were :-

	£	s.	d.
ffor Bricks	19	10	0
ffor 56 loads of lime at 18d. per load	4	4	0
Peter Ryland, Bricksetter	4	2	6
Randle Thornley &c. ffor Slate	4	15	6
ffor Timber	10	0	0
Jeremiah Kirsley for slatinge and Mosse	2	13	8
ffor Boardes for Doores and Weatheringe and for 50 yards of sparrs at 3d. per yard	2	8	2
Three Loades of fflaggs and carriage	1	7	6
ffor meate, drinke, ale, Pipes and Tobaccer att ye Rearinge, being ye sixth day of October	0	19	0
ffor Glass six score and foure foote at 4½d. ye foot	2	6	6
The Smith for Bandes for Doores with Barres and Bolts and window rods	1	12	10
ffor Recordinge our Chappell	0	1	6
ffor the Pulpitt Quishion	1	3	3
John Odcroft's Bill for ye Pulpitt, Sounder, seates, wainscott &c.	18	7	11

The total amount of money expended on the chapel is said to be about £95, but it is possible that some skilled labour was given voluntarily, and some materials also, by members of the congregation.

The entry regarding the "rearing" is interesting, not only as marking the date when the roof was reached, but also illustrating the antiquity of the custom of celebrating this stage in the progress of a new building which has persisted until quite recent times, indeed even nowadays the roofing of quite small buildings is very often an occasion for hoisting a flag on the timbers.

The outlay on the "Pulpitt Quishion" may appear somewhat extravagant, especially when one considers the much higher purchasing power of money in those days, but it points out the reverence in which the Holy Bible was held by the old dissenters, who would consider nothing too good for its usual resting place in the pulpit.

So far as we are aware, unfortunately no picture or drawing exists of this first chapel, but we have a ground plan showing the seating arrangements and the position of the Communion Table and Pulpit.

The chapel was rectangular and probably of similar dimensions to the present chapel without the apse and Worsley chapel. There are two entrances shown on the plan, one from Wilmslow Road near the north end, and the other on the west side about the centre. The pulpit and communion table were placed a little to the north east of the centre of the chapel with seats all round, as was quite usual in dissenting chapels of the period, although it was also not unusual to place the pulpit against one of the walls. There would be a bell-cot carrying the identical bell still in use in the present chapel, this being the only surviving relic of the first structure. The ancient landmark known as the "Nico Ditch," still forms the southern boundary of the chapel land, and originally carried a small stream of water. This has been the subject of considerable speculation among antiquaries

Its exact age is unknown, but it is mentioned in some of the oldest local documents as a well known boundary of several parishes or townships between Ashton Moss, where it took its rise, and Chorlton-cum-Hardy. In some parts of its course it coincided with the stream known as the Gore Brook, while other sections possessed an earth embankment of obviously artificial construction. The fragment of the ditch which bounds the chapel yard and passes for a short distance into Platt Fields is all that can still be seen in Rusholme, the remainder having been built over or filled in years ago, and even from this fragment the rampart has disappeared. Various theories have been advanced to account for the origin of the ditch but it remains an unsolved mystery. Some of the evidence supports the idea that it may have been constructed by order of the Romans when they occupied Manchester, but the use of it is not established.

The building and furnishing of the chapel was completed, and the official opening service held in the autumn of the year 1700.

The minister who preached on this happy occasion was the Rev. James Grimshaw, of Lancaster, who was born in Manchester and married Hannah, the daughter of Henry Finch. We can imagine that his wife probably

accompanied him to Manchester where a family reunion would fill up the cup of her old father's happiness. James Grimshaw was ordained at Macclesfield the previous June and Lancaster was his first appointment. We have it on record that the Platt friends gave him 5/- for his trouble, which does not sound very generous, but it compares favourably with many entries in the churchwardens accounts at Didsbury in those days, when visiting preachers were given sums ranging from fourpence to two shillings. We have, of course, to make full allowance for the considerable difference in the value of money as compared with modern times.

By this time many of the brave ministers who had suffered in the great ejection of 1662 had passed away, and the few who had survived to see these happier times were nearing the end of their days on earth.

Mr. Finch had seen his old friend Mr .Newcome laid to rest at his newly opened meeting house in Cross Street, before it had been in use a full year, and in 1701 he preached the funeral sermon of another old friend and former colleague, Robert Eaton, who had shared with him the ministry at Walton, and with him accepted expulsion for conscience sake, ending his days as minister of Stand Chapel. Less than four years after the opening of the chapel, he himself joined their great company.

Unfortunately Henry Finch did not leave to posterity any published writings or biographical material as did Henry Newcome, Oliver Heywood, Matthew Henry and others of his contemporaries, and we have no portrait of his features, but we have many evidences of his lovable character

The fact that he retained the lifelong friendship of such men as Heywood and Newcome speaks of the high regard in which he was held, and may be taken as evidence of the orthodoxy of his presbyterian views.

At the same time his acceptance by the congregationalists of Birch informs us that he had none of the intolerance which was frequently a characteristic of the orthodox Calvinist. He won a place in the hearts of the people of Rusholme which is amply demonstrated by their loyalty to him through so many troublous years to the end of his life.

Calamy in his "Abridgement" says of him, "He was a great blessing and help to the younger ministers, who loved and honoured him as a father, and his behaviour to them was full of condescension and tenderness. He greatly resented either anything that broke in upon order or tended to the reproach of the ministry; in particular the bold intruding of forward and rash young men without examination and trial. As he was of sound and healing principles in religion, so his thoughts about civil government were according to the English constitution. He absolutely refused the Engagement, and was desirous of King Charles return. After the defeat of Sir George Booth, the sequestrators seized all of Mr. Finche's estate they could meet with, which he had certainly lost for his love to the King if the speedy turn of affairs had not prevented. He rejoiced at the revolution of 1688, and entirely fell in with it; and yet he had a greater tenderness for those who refused the oaths, and lost their places for conscience sake; to some of them he was a charitable contributor while he lived. His preaching was clear and methodical, and was adapted to convince the mind and move the passions. He lived, according to his profession, a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

It is probable that as he felt the end drawing near he became less regular in his attendance at Platt, as we find the entry in the Burial register of Manchester Collegiate Church reads, "Nov. 16, 1704, Mr. Henry Finch of Salford," indicating a last change of residence from Rusholme.

Before proceeding with an account of the succession of ministers who served Platt Chapel, some explanation of the organisation of the dissenting bodies under the new freedom should be given.

As already mentioned, the old congregation of Birch Chapel was never included in the Presbyterian classis at Manchester, which ceased to exist in 1660, and although the long years of persecution did much to wipe out the differences which had separated them, no organisation was possible until toleration set them free. From the year 1690 in many parts of the country, the dissenting ministers formed local or county associations usually known as United Brethren. These resembled the old Classis in that their meetings consisted of ministers mainly, lay elders also taking some part. These bodies met regularly in their districts, conducted ordinations of ministers and regulated their appointment, but of course

had no powers of excommunication or otherwise interfering in the private lives of the people as had the Classis, which latter title was sometimes used by the meetings of Lancashire ministers. In South Lancashire these general meetings were held in turn at Manchester, Bolton, Warrington and Blackburn, and occasionally at Preston. Representatives often attended from the Northern districts and sometimes from Cheshire, although that county had its own association established in 1691. The oldest minutes of the Lancashire body extant are dated April 3, 1693, although meetings may have been held before that date, and the last of these documents, (in the possession of Cross St. Chapel) is dated August 13, 1700. The adherence of the Rusholme congregation to this organisation is shown by the appearance of Henry Finch's name whenever they met at Manchester, advancing years and infirmity prevent him from travelling to more distant places, and at some of these meetings he acted as "Moderator." It is highly probable that this organisation continued long after the date of the last minute; indeed there is some outside evidence in the Cross St. records that such was the case in that the ministers from surrounding districts were called upon to assist in conducting communion services at Cross St. including ministers from Platt, an arrangement which continued until 1768.

The minister who succeeded the Rev. Henry Finch was the Rev. Robert Hesketh, of whom our knowledge is somewhat scanty. He was a pupil of Franklands Academy at Rathmel in Yorkshire, which he entered in 1692. After leaving the academy he appears in the minutes of the provincial ministers meetings in 1696 as a candidate from Warrington.

His first appointment as a minister was with a congregation of non-conformists at Carnforth, near Lancaster, where he was also married.

He removed to Platt in 1704, where he served until 1712. During his residence here his first wife died and he contracted a second marriage April 6, 1708, with Miss Hannah Sykes of Leeds. We have no record of his subsequent career on leaving Platt.

The minister who succeeded Robert Hesketh was John Whittaker, who was the son of the Rev. Richard Whittaker, and was born in 1688.

His name first appears in the minutes of the meetings of Cheshire Ministers as a Licentiate (a probationary who had not been officially ordained) then ministering at Platt Chapel, with a grant from the London Fund of £5 a year, on May 4th, 1714. This grant was reduced in 1723 to £4 and continued to his death in 1752. At the request of the Lancashire Ministry he was ordained at Knutsford by the Cheshire Classis on August 3rd, 1714. At his examination on August 2nd, he defended the thesis "An infantes fidelium sint baptizandi?" (Are the infants of believers to be baptised?) which of course he answered in the affirmative.

He attended the meetings of the Cheshire Classis, which were usually held at Knutsford, fairly regularly, and preached to it in 1726 and 1740. It is recorded that he had at Platt 257 hearers, including 29 County Voters. He remained at Platt until his death on April 4th, 1752 and was buried at Platt Chapel. His gravestone may easily be found near the Ditch almost opposite the present door of the chapel, and we give here a translation of the Latin inscription it bears.

"Here lie the remains of John Whittaker, a most upright and learned preacher, who died on the 4th day of April, in the year 1762, in the 65th year of his age, and the 40th year of a ministry, which, having been put in charge of this church, he performed with commendation and credit.

Learn To Die.

Here too lie the remains of Elizabeth his wife, who died on the 13th day of February, in the year 1761, in about the 72nd year of her age. Her charity, her liberality failed never.

Watch And Pray."

The next minister to occupy the Platt pulpit was the Rev. Robert Andrews. He was a native of Bolton, and a member of an eminent non-conformist family which had been seated for nearly two centuries at Little Lever and Rivington. He received his theological education under Dr. Caleb Rotherham at Kendal, and having completed the usual course of study came to Platt Chapel as his first charge. The precise period of Mr. Andrew's stay is uncertain, but it did not exceed three years. He afterwards served a Presbyterian congregation at Bridgenorth in Staffordshire, where he remained until mental derangement compelled him to

withdraw from the pulpit. He was a man of considerable scholarship and taste. In 1757 he published a volume of poems entitled "Eidyllia," to which he prefixed a violent attack on rhyme. Some time previously he had sent to the press "Animadversions on Dr. Brown's Essays on the Characteristics," and a criticism on the Sermons of his friend the Rev. John Holland. His latest work was a "Translation of Virgil in blank verse," which is not destitute of merit, though it has the strange peculiarity of conveying the sense of his author line for line. This handsome volume in Baskerville's type finds a place among the curiosities of literature. Mr. Andrews married Miss Hannah Hazlewood, and died about the year 1766. This is the account given of him by the Rev. John Booker nearly a century ago, and we have not been able to discover anything material to add to this.

The next minister was the Rev. John Houghton, who after taking his ministerial training partly at Dr. Doddridge's academy and partly at Glasgow University, came to Platt as his first settlement.

In 1755 he married Mary Pendlebury, a relative of the Worsleys of Platt, the marriage settlement being dated June 21st in that year; but in 1758 he removed to Hyde. Later he occupied pulpits at Nantwich, Eliand and Wem, finally in 1788 again removing to Norwich, where his son, the Rev. Pendlebury Houghton was settled as one of the ministers of Octagon Chapel, and where he opened a classical school. Here he died in April 1800, aged 70.

The pulpit of Platt Chapel was next filled by the Rev. Richard Meanley, who was in some respects the most outstanding of its occupants in the eighteenth century. He was one of Dr. Caleb Rotherham's pupils at Kendal, and we first hear of him taking charge of Leek Chapel, before his actual ordination, as a licentiate from 1742, with a grant from the London Fund of £7 a year. He remained here only to 1744, when he removed to Nantwich in succession to the Rev. Thomas Haynes, with a grant of £4, still as a licentiate. The minutes of the Cheshire Classis state that on September 3rd, 1745, "He at the request of his People at Namptwich consented to ordination next meeting," and accordingly arrangements were made for his ordination on May 6th of the following year. At this time it is well known that there were rather deep divisions

among the Cheshire ministers on what have been (perhaps inaccurately) described as Socinian leanings on the part of number of them. Urwick, the author of "Nonconformity in Cheshire," thinks Mr. Meanley's doctrinal views "may have been Socinian," and manifested at his ordination, but of this we have so far no documentary confirmation. Here is at least a strong suggestion that when he left Nantwich for Platt in 1758, he took with him the first marked trend towards Unitarianism. It is of interest in this connection that his successor at Nantwich was the famous Dr. Joseph Priestley.

On settling at Platt, he had a grant for some time from the London Fund of £5 a year.

Little more than the foregoing has been recorded of this worthy minister by his biographers, but something of his story may be added from another source. He was the first of the ministers after Henry Finch to write and preserve a Register of Baptisms and Burials at the Chapel, and this book is still among our treasured possessions, along with an account book dating from February 1759, recording a system of Quarterly collections from the members of the congregation possibly inaugurated by Mr. Meanley, and which is partly in his handwriting.

The writing conveys the impression of a plain blunt man, and while it is perfectly legible, it is devoid of flourishes and does not display the artistry shown, for example, by the Rev. George Checkley in later entries. In the Register each baptism or burial is carefully entered in full as e.g. "John Siddall of the Parish of Manchester, in the County of Lancaster, aged thirty nine, was buried in the Protestant Dissenters Burial Ground at Platt Chapel, on the Tenth Day of May, 1786, By me Richd. Meanley, Protestant Dissenting Minister."

"Mary Holt, Daughter of James Holt & Mary his Wife, of the Parish of Manchester, in the County of Lancaster, was baptized on the 8th of December, 1785, By me Richd. Meanley, Protestant Dissenting Minister, at Platt Chapel." His regular fee for these services was the sum of threepence, receipt of which was duly acknowledged against each entry.

It is quite evident he loved order and would attend to the spiritual needs of his flock with loving care, and was himself beloved by them and by the dissenting ministers of surrounding districts.

The last entry in his handwriting, which had become very shaky, is of a burial conducted by the Revd. Mr. Meldrum, of Hatherlow Chapel, near Romiley. The ministers of Cross Street and other local chapels came to his aid in his last days, and there are several entries of burials conducted by the Revd. Ralph Harrison and Dr. Barnes, the latter minister officiating at the funeral of Mr. Meanley. The date of his death was the 24th of September, 1794. He left a son, Astley Meanley, to the ministry, Prescot, Smarbur Hall, and Stannington being among the chapels which he served. Another son, Samuel, lived in Manchester, and was a trustee of Cross Street Chapel, while the name Benjamin Meanley occurs in Platt Chapel records. Mention should here be made of another interesting relic left by Mr. Meanley in the form of some loose slips of paper between the pages of the Register, containing entries of baptisms at Nantwich. On one side of one of them are notes in a obsolete system of shorthand. This has been submitted to an expert, but so far a transcription has not been obtainable. It was towards the end of Mr. Meanley's ministry that the old Chapel built for Henry Finch was pulled down and the present building erected, being opened for public worship on May 11th, 1791. We are not able to state with certainty the circumstances which prompted this change; there is a vague tradition that the old building was damaged by fire, but of this there is no documentary confirmation. His tombstone in the chapel yard is no longer to be seen, as it was among those to be removed during the widening of Wilmslow Road over 20 years ago, but we have a record of the inscription which read:—

Interred Here
The Revd. RICHARD MEANLEY,
of Platt, who died September 22nd, 1794,
Aged 77 years.

Also Mary his wife, who died
March 5th, 1772, Aged 52 years.

Also Mary, their daughter,
Who died January 28th, 1813,
Aged 66 years.

Also Ellen their daughter,
Who died February 3rd, 1813,
Aged 62 years.

During the three years following the death of Richard Meanley, the chapel was supplied by students, and of this period we have not been able to discover any particulars of interest. The eighteenth century was drawing very near to its close before another regular appointment was made, and this is a convenient point to review some of the events which had taken place during that time.

With the death of George Birch, the direct line of that ancient family died out and the estate passed to the Dickenson family.

Ralph Worsley died in 1719, and although no trace of his grave is to be found to day, we are told he was buried at Platt Chapel. His brother Peter succeeded to the Platt estate, but when he died in 1759, the family were left without a male heir. A sister, Deborah, who had married a Manchester merchant, John Lees, came into the estate, and in 1775 her husband assumed the name and arms of Carill Worsley. Of this marriage there was no issue, but John Lees had a son by a previous marriage whom his wife adopted as her heir, and at her death he succeeded to the inheritance as Thomas Carill Worsley of Platt Esq. His father lived to the age of 89 and was buried at Platt Chapel March 4th, 1799. The Chapel books show him to have been a staunch and generous supporter of the chapel during the whole of his life at Platt. He was evidently a man of public spirit as his name appears as one of the gentlemen who founded the first Manchester Infirmary in 1756.

The Siddall family of Slade Hall remained attached to the old chapel throughout the century, and in unbroken line far into the next, but owing to the rapid growth of Manchester the Slade lands ultimately became more valuable for housing the increasing population. The Siddalls eventually left the Hall and sold the estate, although several of the family still reside near Manchester, and to some extent maintain connection with Platt Chapel.

For the next three years after the death of Mr. Meanley, the chapel was without a regular minister, the pulpit being supplied by students until in 1797 the Rev. George Checkley was appointed. Mr. Checkley had received his education under Dr. Caleb Ashworth at Daventry, and had already spent over thirty years in the ministry at Hyde and Ormskirk.

He had a small estate at Ashley, near Altrincham and had already retired there previous to this date, with the intention of passing there the remainder of his days. In Manchester however, he had a large circle of friends amongst whom was Mr. Worsley of Platt, and at his invitation came to serve the chapel until his death 10 years later. We have very little on record of these years, but Mr. Checkley was evidently much interested in the story of the chapel, and we are indebted to him for a copy of a record of Baptisms by the Rev. Henry Finch in the years before the first chapel was built, and also the baptisms by Mr. Whittaker.

He died on the 2nd February, 1807, and the entry in the old Register of burials reads :- 1807. February 5. "The Revd. George Checkley, Minister to the Society of Protestant Dissenters at Platt. Aged 62 years, buried by W. Harrison." The Revd. W. Harrison was the minister at Blackley chapel at this time, and for a few weeks gave all the assistance he could to Platt during this emergency.

Mr. Checkley's gravestone may still be seen on the Wilmslow Road side of the chapel, his wife being buried in the same grave fifteen years later.

For the next three years the pulpit was supplied by the Revd. Joseph Lawton Siddall, who had been educated at Warrington Academy, and after many years in the ministry at Chorley had retired to Manchester. The account book shows that he was paid one guinea for each Sunday, plus a "Quarterly Allowance" of five guineas.

From the same book we glean a few other interesting facts about this period. The congregation had among its officers one who was designated "Clerke" who was paid "Quarterage" of one guinea for his services, probably secretarial. Already the chapel possessed an organ and the "Organist" received the odd sum of one pound, nineteen shillings per quarter while twopence per week rewarded the blower.

Entries for candles and coals are frequent, the latter costing one shilling per hundredweight. One guinea per quarter was paid regularly to Sam Shelmerdine probably for using the "besoms" which were provided, and acting generally as verger.

It is also shown that Mr. Robinson stood as guarantor for the payment of Mr. Siddall, and the congregation got a little in arrears in refunding him, as on May 3, 1812, we read "Paid Mr. Robinson the Ballance of his Debt...£3 : 13 : 8," nearly two years after Mr. Siddall ended his service at Platt. This is the William Robinson whose memorial tablet is on the west wall of the chapel ; numerous entries in the account books show him to be a generous and regular supporter of the chapel for many years.

The next minister, the Rev. William Whitelegge, came of an old nonconformist family, their name appearing as early as 1720 among the founders of the old Presbyterian chapel at Hale, near Altrincham.

He obtained the first part of his education at the school kept by the Rev. W. Turner at Warrington, and afterwards at the Manchester Academy, where among his teachers may be named John Dalton, Dr. Barnes, Mr. Harrison and George Walker. His first charge was at Fulwood, near Bristol, and while there he married Miss Nicholson of the Park Farm, near Sheffield, in 1806. In 1810 he removed to Platt Chapel, where he continued his ministry until near his death in 1865.

The period covered by his long service was one of the greatest difficulty in many respects. The Industrial Revolution was passing through its worst stages ; hunger and even starvation stalked the land among the working class, accompanied by ruthless political oppression.

Those who openly voiced their protests were liable to arrest and long imprisonment, following a trial that was frequently little better than a mockery of justice. August 1819 saw the ruthless attack of the Yeomanry on a peaceable demonstration at "Peterloo," and it is on record that some of the blood-spattered wounded were seen fleeing through Rusholme that day past Platt Chapel. The bitter struggle for religious, political and economic liberty went on for many weary years, and while we have no record of individual contributions, there can be little doubt that members of Platt Chapel were not behind their fellow dissenters in standing for freedom. In 1812, the principal Acts still remaining on the statute books against Dissenters were repealed, and in the following year those especially directed against Unitarians, but urgently needed social reform moved much more slowly. During his years at Platt, Mr Whitelegge saw the

population of Manchester multiply rapidly, and Rusholme sharing this increase and changing from a rural community to a suburb of a great manufacturing centre.

For a number of years, Thomas Carrill Worsley of Platt Hall, continued his support of the chapel, but his generous subscriptions ceased after 1830, which probably marks the time when he was drawn to the Established Church. Holy Trinity Church in Platt Lane, consecrated in 1846, was erected at his sole expense. About the same time, the present Church of St. James' was built at Birch, and the old Birch Chapel was demolished. The growing population was further served by the Wesleyan Methodists who had commenced work in Rusholme, followed soon after by the Congregationalists who built the chapel in Wilmslow Road. Of the names of the old founders of Platt Chapel, only the families of the Siddals and Shelmerdines are to be found in the account books towards the end of Mr. Whitelegge's long term of service.

Following his death, the Rev. J. C. Street wrote an obituary notice for the "Inquirer" which is well worth quoting at length.

"I do not know that any words of mine respecting him may be of value, but I could not satisfy myself unless I placed on record some little of what I know about him. Not for many years have I known him, but they were his latest years, and years of particular moment to him and to Platt Chapel.

I met him first but a few years ago. He was then anxious and troubled respecting the state of Platt Chapel. He had btried two generations of worshippers. From one cause or another the congregation had fallen away, and the old chapel was gloomy and sad. Evidently he bore a great trouble about with him. It was trying to his spirit to see the dear old place empty, and to feel that he was now too old to make any great effort to restore the congregation. There were some people who fancied he was content with these things, and did not care to have them altered, and many foolish things were thought and said about the matter. But on the formation of the Manchester and District Unitarian Association, of which I became the first missionary, it was thought desirable to do something in connection with Platt Chapel. I waited on Mr. Whitelegge with some

little trepidation and nervousness, fearing lest he should think I was moving in some scheme to interfere with his position. I knew that he was proud of the fact that he was the oldest officiating Unitarian minister in England, and that it would grieve his heart to be disturbed in the work he was still trying to do. But when the venerable man learnt my purpose, when he saw that I and those with whom I was working desired to aid him, not to interfere with him - when he found that our wish was to fill the old place with worshippers - he not only dispelled my nervous fear, but entered so warmly and generously into the scheme that he made me feel that there might be many friends of Platt Chapel, many who desired its real welfare, but foremost of them all was its old minister, the Rev. W. Whitelegge.

From this time Mr. Whitelegge did everything that lay in his power to forward the movement. He was always at his post. No weather deterred him. Bearing his burden of more than fourscore years, he walked two miles to the services and meetings, took his part, helped us all he could, and then walked back again. He was more reliable than younger men; I remember one night I had called a meeting for consultation as to what steps should be taken to gather a congregation. It was mid winter and the snow was falling fast, but when I got to the chapel I found the old minister there, the first at the post of duty. This was characteristic of all that he did in regard to Platt Chapel. Others might fail of their duty, but not he.

He joined, or rather I should say he began, every subscription that was needed. His own income from the chapel was scarcely so many pounds as there are days in the month, but he would have been willing to forego even this to aid in securing the services of an active minister. When, after laborious activity, prosperous days came for the old place, and a good congregation was gathered within its walls, his reward consisted solely in the delight he experienced at seeing the people flocking into the sanctuary. No heart seemed so glad as his on the Sunday morning as the bell rang out its call to worship, and the congregation peopled the old and long deserted pews. A perpetual sunshine seemed to be in his heart. Nothing I am sure, gave him, during the last three years of his life, so much real and heartfelt joy as the sight of the congregation gathered within the old walls.

He was a true father in God - a gentle hearted, self denying man, a faithful pastor of the old noble stamp—in every sense an upright, pious, simple-minded patriarch. The good old man belonged to the whole Church, and something of the fragrance of his life ought to be diffused.

The memory of his fidelity and zeal when more than fourscore years old will long remain, and will quicken many a younger minister of Christ into greater faithfulness.”

There are no portraits of any of the predecessors of Mr. Whitelegge extant to our knowledge, but the chapel is fortunate in possessing the excellent one of this fine old minister which hangs in the vestry.

The memorial window in the “Worsley Chapel,” with Jesus blessing the children as its subject, was erected to the memory of one of his grandchildren, and it is said that all the figures represented are portraits of members of his family, with the exception of the face of Jesus.

He died on February 8th, 1865, and was buried in Platt Chapel yard, his grave however, is no longer to be seen there, doubtless being one of a number which were removed at the time Wilmslow Road was widened, and the chapel wall set back to its present position.

The plan for helping forward the revival of the congregation referred to by Mr. Street included as its most important feature the introduction of a younger and more vigorous minister. The Rev. S. A. Steinthal was selected as the most suitable man for this work, and as events proved, a more suitable choice could not have been made.

Mr. Steinthal was born in Rusholme Road, Manchester, on November 15th, 1826, his father being a naturalised British subject, who left Germany and settled in Manchester in 1809. From 1849 to 1852 he was a student at Manchester New College, then located in Manchester. From 1852 to 1857 he was minister at Bridgwater, 1857 to 1862 minister to the Domestic Mission in Liverpool, and in 1864 came to Platt Chapel to relieve Mr. Whitelegge, who did not actually retire until the following year.

Mr. Steinthal was a man of dynamic personality, a zealous minister of the gospel, conspicuous for his tolerance and his charity, but also as a great citizen prepared to work on terms of friendship with all sorts of men in many diverse directions where public welfare could be advanced. Both religious and secular education owed a great deal to his enthusiasm and genius, the former being exemplified in his work for his old college, as he took a prominent part in the movement which led to its removal to Oxford, while we have an example of the latter in the Portland Grove Schools, Fallowfield, which was established as the first National Day School in Fallowfield, largely as a result of his initiative.

A few years later he was among the founders of Lower Mosley Street Schools, and remained for many years a most valuable supporter.

Anti-slavery found in him a warm advocate, and he was also one of the very early pioneers of Women's Suffrage. It was during his years as minister at Platt Chapel that this truly remarkable man carried out some of his most valuable work, in these and other directions. In conjunction with John Stuart Mill, Cobden, Jacob Bright and others, what was probably the earliest society with the object of securing votes for women, was formed at a meeting held at Mr. Steinthal's house. A story is told of the way in which he and Miss Becker were indirectly responsible for an amendment in the House of Commons, which secured the municipal franchise for women. In 1869, during the passage of a private bill through the House, Mr. Steinthal scribbled an amendment on the back of an envelope, and sent it in to Mr. Jacob Bright. The object was simply to raise a discussion on the disabilities of women ratepayers in corporate boroughs, but to the surprise of everybody the amendment was carried with very little opposition, in the small hours of the morning. A National Association for the Promotion of Social Science was launched in 1857, and for many years Mr. Steinthal sat on its Council. The cause of Temperance was yet another sphere which enlisted his very active sympathy, and he was for many years a member of the executive of the United Kingdom Alliance, and during his time at Platt Chapel he joined the board of management of the Manchester Children's Hospital and served until 1898.

It was during Mr. Steinthal's ministry that a remarkable event occurred with relation to the Trust Deeds of the Chapel.

We have some particulars of this story in the handwriting of Mr. Steinthal, copies of three letters written by him at the time being preserved among the papers belonging to the Chapel. The first of these is dated March 2nd, 1868, and begins "After a meeting at which I was present this morning, the Revs. Dr. McKerrow and J. C. Patterson asked me whether I was in receipt of the endowment connected with Platt Chapel. I told them that as far as I knew, the Chapel was not endowed.

They then informed me I was mistaken, there was they knew, a considerable endowment belonging to the Chapel, but they believed that it was withheld from me, as it had been from my predecessor, because the trust deed securing the sum (which Mr. P. believed was £600) required that the minister should hold the doctrines of the Westminster Confession and should circulate a certain number of copies of the Shorter Catechism among the congregation annually. Dr. McK. further said that the late Mr. Worsley had once shown him the deed and had begged him to apply for it and to oust the late Mr. Whitelegge, but he had declined to do so. I informed the gentlemen that this was new to me, but that as it was now brought forward I should immediately make enquiries about the matter." The letter goes on to express the alarm he felt at the position in which he found himself, and he asked the Chapel committee to take up the matter without delay, and if it was confirmed that the trust deed was as stated, to take steps to rectify the position as quickly as possible, even if it meant holding services in the new school at Portland Grove and giving up the Chapel at once.

An early meeting of the Chapel committee was called, and the question fully debated, the result being that they unanimously decided that, so far as their occupation of the Chapel was concerned, they were fully entitled to remain as they were. They pointed out that the present building had been built with Unitarian money, and so maintained. That the minister was appointed by the committee of the congregation, and not by the Trustees.

They also said that if the Unitarian congregation left the chapel, there was no other congregation in the district with any title to take it over. As the endowment had not been of benefit for so many years, they could not be charged with misapplication. This attitude by no means

satisfied the conscience of Mr. Steinthal, who in a further letter said he could not remain their minister under such conditions, as he thought it was neither strictly honest or legal, and the congregation had no right to continue to reap advantage from what he regarded as the slackness of the trustees in carrying out their duties. Full details of the further negotiations with the Presbyterians are not available, but there was a final settlement by which on payment of £300 (presumably to the Charity Commissioners) the Chapel was retained for the congregation and a new trust deed executed. What eventually became of the capital sum of £600 is not stated. In the old account books the interest was certainly drawn during Mr. Checkley's time, and then all mention of it disappears.

In January, 1871, Mr. Steinthal exchanged his position at Platt for that of colleague to the Rev. Wm. Gaskell at Cross Street Chapel in succession to the Rev. Jas. Drummond, and remained at Cross Street until his retirement from the active ministry in 1893. His death took place on 6th May, 1910, and at the largely attended memorial service the Rev. A. C. Smith truly said "Only a great soul, inspired with a lofty and noble purpose and conscious of the mighty workings of the Divine Spirit could ever have wielded such an enormous and far reaching influence."

The minister chosen to succeed Mr. Steinthal was the Rev. Charles T. Poynting, B.A., and a meeting of friends and members of Platt Chapel was held at the Memorial Hall to take leave of Mr. Steinthal and welcome Mr. Poynting. Mr. James Glossop presided and among those present were the Reverends Wm. Gaskell, M.A., W. H. Herford, B.A., and many others including the Rev. Thomas E. Poynting, the father of the new minister. During the proceedings the chairman referred to the future work of the new Day Schools, and in his reply Mr. Poynting especially appealed to the younger members of the congregation to assist him in forming a Sunday School, as he believed that a church without such an institution was in a wrong position. From this position thus early proclaimed he never wavered, and all through his long years at Platt, the religious training of the children was one of his deepest interests.

Platt Chapel was Mr. Poynting's first and only appointment in the ministry, as he remained its minister until 1910, when failing health compelled his resignation. His death took place in January, 1911.

His previous education had endowed him with exceptional advantages for his chosen work. He was at Owen's College from 1859 to 1862, where he graduated B.A. Subsequently he was at Manchester New College, London, from 1862 to 1868, and even then his scholastic work was prolonged a further two years as a Hibbert scholar at Heidelberg and Zurich.

His scholarship was recognised by all, and from 1884 to 1889 he was one of the tutors of the Unitarian Home Missionary College at the time when Dr. J. E. Odgers was the principal.

At the commencement of his long and faithful service, Mr. Poynting was faced with a trying difficulty. The Chapel building, although not very old, had got into a very bad state of repair, and it was found that considerable reconstruction would have to be carried out. This meant that for about two years the chapel was not available for services, and these had to be held in the newly erected school at Portland Grove, Fallowfield.

The alterations which were completed in 1876, included the removal of the vestry from the north end to its present position, and the building of the small apse in its place. The chapel was re-roofed and the old oak straight backed pews replaced by the present pews, while a new pulpit was also provided. The original doors faced Wilmslow Road, and these were built up and the present South entrance substituted, with the provision of the vestibule screen as it is now. The heating arrangements were also brought up to date about this time. In spite of such an inconvenient disturbance, Mr. Poynting quickly settled down to a life devoted to the service of his congregation and the wider church, ably supported by his young wife whom he married in 1872, and who proved an ideal helpmeet in all respects. In those days Rusholme and Fallowfield still included large areas which were decidedly rural, and the work entailed in the mixed community presented its own peculiar problems. The project so dear to his heart of establishing a flourishing Sunday School, did not prove easy of attainment at first, and the first attempt was not a great success. However, Mr. Poynting was not the man to be easily discouraged, and a little later a fresh beginning was made and carried through to fruition. His interest in the young people was not confined to his own chapel, and he took a great interest always in the district

sunday school federation. Mr. Poynting was never a preacher of extreme views in theology, his knowledge of, and love for the New Testament was deep and sincere. On its teaching he founded the message he felt given to preach. It followed that his Unitarianism was neither negative nor aggressive, and the present writer well remembers how his name was respected among members of other denominations in Rusholme in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

During this period the various activities of the Chapel and Sunday School included a "Dorcas Society," which met twice monthly as a sewing class, making garments etc., usually for distribution among the needy poor of Manchester, but sometimes devoted their efforts to the benefit of Sales of Work or Bazaars connected with the Chapel. This activity continued until 1928. For the young people there was a Temperance Guild which organised social evenings, lantern lectures, debates, etc., besides more suitable activities for children under fourteen. We also note that a very successful "Goose Club" was carried on for about ten years, its popularity being shown by a turnover of more than £100 per annum.

A further alteration, not affecting the Chapel building itself, was effected in 1909, when Manchester Corporation carried out a scheme for widening Wilmslow Road between Rusholme and Fallowfield. This incurred the moving back of the Chapel wall to its present position, which for the time being left a number of old graves under the pavement of the new footpath. These graves remained there for a number of years, a matter of which we have more to tell later.

With advancing years, Mr. Poynting's health showed serious signs of failing, and in 1906 it became necessary for him to take three months' leave of absence to recruit. For a few years longer he was able to keep up the work of the Chapel, though not without difficulty. In May, 1910, he conducted the private funeral service of his old friend the Revd. S. A. Steinthal, who had become a member of the Platt congregation during the few years of his retirement. In the same month he asked the chapel committee to arrange to relieve him of his duties at the end of the year, when he would have completed the forty years of his ministry at Platt, as he found persistent physical infirmity brought increasing difficulty in fulfilling the duties. This was received with considerable

regret by the members, but there was no alternative to acceding to his wishes. Between then and the end of the year the necessary steps were taken to find a successor, and in the meantime a testimonial to Mr. Poynting was raised among the congregation, which resulted in a cheque for over £200 being presented to him. In November, the Rev. Wm. Whittaker, B.A., was invited to take over the ministry at Platt, he being then at Hull. He accepted the invitation, and it was arranged for him to commence his new duties at the end of February, 1911. Mr. Poynting however, did not live to see the installation of his successor. Early in January he passed away, and after cremation, the remains of this well-beloved minister were interred at Monton in the yard of the chapel where his father had ministered for many years, and where he had spent his childhood. A large number of distinguished ministers and friends attended, and the Rev. R. Travers Herford, B.A., gave a very moving address.

Mr. Whittaker was welcomed to Platt at a Soiree held at the Memorial Hall on March 10th, and remained at Platt for ten eventful years, carrying on the work with great devotion and endearing himself to the members of the chapel. In 1911, the Manchester Education Committee finally gave up the Day Schools at Portland Grove, and the buildings for the first time became fully available for the use of the Chapel.

Some changes were made at this time in the organisation of the institutions. In place of the Temperance Guild, a wider Platt Chapel Guild was formed for all members of the congregation, while a Band of Hope was instituted for the juniors.

At this time the agitation for Womens' Suffrage was at its height, and as might be expected, many of the Platt congregation were keenly interested, with the result that several of the leading suffragists, including Miss Horniman were invited to address the Guild. The first World War with all its tragedy intervened and brought great difficulties to be faced, including considerable financial strain.

In 1919, the memorial window to the late Lieut. Siegfried Herford, only son of Professor and Mrs. C. H. Herford, who was killed in the war, was placed in the chapel by some of his friends.

In 1921, Mr. Whittaker resigned his post at Platt, taking up the ministry at Birkenhead at the beginning of June.

At this time the financial position of the chapel was causing considerable anxiety to the committee, and the idea of sharing a minister with another chapel was seriously considered. For some months the pulpit was filled by supplies, and it was not until October of that year that the Rev. Ernest A. Smith accepted the invitation to fill the vacancy, the "welcome" meeting being held in January, 1922.

One of the first innovations under Mr. Smith was the formation of a Womens' Union, which later became the Womens' League, although the meetings of the Dorcas Society were carried on for some years longer. Repairs were carried out on the organ, the chapel was re-decorated, and other incidental improvements effected.

In 1923, by arrangement with the Manchester Corporation, a number of graves which had been left under the pavement on the widening of Wilmslow Road in 1909, were opened and the remains along with the gravestones, (which had been left undisturbed), were disinterred and removed to the Southern Cemetery, where they were re-interred in a group. Among these were graves of a number of families whose names are prominent in the ancient records of the Chapel, including Siddall, Meanley, Lees, Hulme, Shelmerdine, amongst others.

In spite of all the re-organisation which had been effected by Mr. Smith, the minute records book that in 1927 the Chapel committee were much concerned because of a considerable falling off in attendance, poor congregations taking part both mornings and evenings. This coupled with financial strain caused considerable difficulty.

In 1930, Mr. Smith resigned the ministry at Platt, to take charge of the chapel at Wandsworth, and a period followed so difficult, that the closing of the Chapel was seriously urged by some of the members. This proposal was rejected by the stalwarts, who decided to carry on the struggle.

Great difficulty was found in securing a new minister to take full charge, and the minutes record a number of unsuccessful approaches to possible candidates for the vacancy. Various ministers supplied the pulpit, and for a time the work was carried on by members of the congregation, among whom honourable mention should be made of Mr. and Mrs. Jewison and Mr. Harding. It was not until November, 1932, that this regrettable state of affairs was ended by the appointment of the Revd. Stanley Mossop, who came to Platt from Unity Church at Sheffield.

Mr. Mossop brought to the task all the spiritual and mental equipment the difficult circumstances required. His previous experience of religious work may be said to have begun in 1910, when following his early training in the Wesleyan Methodist body, he became one of the Pioneer preachers who served in London under the Rev. R. J. Campbell. This organisation, chiefly composed of young men, preached the "New Theology" on the streets of London under the aegis of the Liberal Christian League.

In 1912, the League came under the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and in 1914 to 1917, Mr. Mossop studied for the ministry at the Unitarian Home Missionary College, Manchester, and the Manchester University. On leaving the College, his first call was to Newhall Hill Church, Birmingham, where he served from 1917 to 1924. In the latter year he moved to Unity Church, Sheffield.

The year 1932 was one of terrible economic distress and frustration. The number of unemployed was already well over two millions, and steadily increasing, while the hated "Means Test" was imposed to add to the burden of the unfortunate. In spite of these depressing conditions, Mr. Mossop set to work to revive the fortunes of the Chapel with great courage and determination. Finance, Congregational attendance, Sunday School and the young people all soon felt the benefit of his energetic organising ability, and very soon Platt Chapel became once again a valued arm of Christianity in the district. Old members returned, and many new families joined in the work and worship, attracted by a man in whom they recognised not only a successful leader, but a loving friend. Many a despairing family where the bread-winner was unemployed took heart

from his sympathy and advice, often accompanied by some material help, when it could be given. His utterances from the pulpit on the side of social justice for the "bottom dog" were timely, and undoubtedly had their effect on local public opinion. It was not only in these channels that Mr. Mossop's spirit found outlet; every good cause evoked his sympathy, and as far as one man could do so he played his part. Before the coming of the second World War, he joined with others in forming a Christian Peace movement, in which Anglicans, Nonconformists, and Roman Catholics joined; at the same time he fearlessly proclaimed himself an absolute pacifist by forwarding the work of the Peace Pledge Union.

The refugees, both political and religious, who fled from the Continent before the coming disaster which threatened certain death in so many cases, and who found refuge in Manchester in large numbers, found Mr. Mossop among their friends. Later on he performed good work as chairman of the China Relief fund in Manchester. We do not pretend to name here all his useful activities, and it is not surprising that from time to time his friends feared a complete physical breakdown, as with all this in his hands, he put his duty to Platt Chapel first, and neither Chapel nor Sunday School ever suffered from neglect. It is certain he could never have continued such a variety of work without the support and care of Mrs. Mossop to whom so much is due, while we would also mention the valued help of his step-sons, Mr. Walter and Mr. Raymond Austen, whose work for both Chapel and School was highly valued.

In 1936⁴⁶, Mr. Mossop received a call to Knutsford, but not until after long consideration with his friends at Platt did he accept the change, and his resignation was received with very real regret on every hand. The high regard in which he was held was shown in no uncertain manner both at the farewell meetings, and by the large number of Platt friends who attended his induction service at Knutsford.

During a few months interim, the services were conducted by several visiting ministers, and students of the College, while a successor to Mr. Mossop was sought. Ultimately, a unanimous invitation from the congregation was extended to the Rev. C. A. Piper, of Liverpool, and his welcome acceptance received. Mr. Piper's initiation into the ministry took

the same form as that of Mr. Mossop, he having also been a Pioneer Preacher in London from 1911, and later a student at Manchester at the same time as Mr. Mossop. From 1917 to 1919, Mr. Piper was in France and on his return became the minister of Ilford Chapel, where he served until 1924 when he removed to Coventry until 1927.

West Kirby in the Wirral was the next scene of his labours until 1936 when he took charge of the church at Hamilton Road, Liverpool. Here he worked all through the years of the second World War, staying with his congregation through the agony of the repeated murderous bombings that Liverpool suffered during those years.

As these lines are written, Mr. Piper's work at Platt has so recently commenced, that one cannot say more than that already he has endeared himself to the members, who appreciate his very apparent ability, lovable qualities and wise guidance, and they anticipate that in the rapid changes of social conditions to which we are accustomed nowadays, we have a minister who will worthily maintain the highest traditions of the ancient Platt Chapel.

So far in this story, the most prominent names have naturally been those of the succession of worthy ministers who have maintained the service of the Chapel, but we feel that it would be wrong to omit mention of those officers of the congregation, who through generations have given the Chapel loyal and devoted service. We cannot say how long there has been an elected committee to carry on the business of the Chapel, or when its chairman was first designated Chapel Warden; early minute books are entirely missing, but from the minutes of later days we would mention the names especially of the two sons of the Rev. S. A. Steinthal, Ernest and Egbert, who successively occupied the office of Chapel Warden from the end of the nineteenth century to the present time. At the time this is written (1948) Mr. Egbert Steinthal is still with us as "Warden Emeritus," although advancing years and distant residence have not permitted him to carry out the duties for some years past; but his interest in the old chapel so long expressed in loving service, we know is maintained to this day.

The congregation have also been fortunate in its secretaries, the late Miss Fryer, and the present secretary, Miss P. J. Humphry, M.A., having covered nearly half a century between them in labours for the Chapel which have always well earned the grateful appreciation of the congregation.

Prominent people in the business, civic and social life of Manchester have worshipped here, and given generous support to the work, and some of their names, as C. P. Scott of the "Manchester Guardian," have had an international reputation.

Mention has been made of the ancient Communion Plate, which was originally used by the congregation at the old Birch Chapel, and was retained when they finally gave up possession of that chapel to the Established Church. This plate consists of two silver Chalices, the larger one dating from 1640-41, and the smaller 1661-62. Both are beautiful examples of the work of the period, and the congregation are rightly proud of such interesting and valuable links with the past. They were in regular use until the 1870's, when a modern set was substituted. For some years the Chalices were in the possession of two of the trustees, but eventually the Rev. Chas. Poynting persuaded them to restore them to the Chapel, which was done on condition that they should be retained by the congregation so long as the Chapel continues to function. Since then they have only been used on special occasions, and are usually kept at the Bank.

To mark the 300th Anniversary of the congregation as an Independent Dissenting Congregation, taking the commencement of Rev. John Wigan's ministry as the definite date, special sermons were preached in May, 1945, by the Rev. Raymond V. Holt, M.A., and leading members of the modern Congregational body in Manchester joined in the celebration.

Here we end the story of the good and courageous men and women who founded Platt Chapel in years of stress and persecution, and those who carried on their witness of Faith and Free Worship through long days of tolerance or opposition, success or neglect, and who have left us a heritage of fragrant memory in service to their fellow man.

ADDENDA.

During recent minor structural alterations in Platt Chapel, two vaults were found beneath the central seating, one which bears no inscription is immediately in front of the memorial tablet of Thomas Robinson on the wall of the chapel, is evidently the vault mentioned in that inscription the other vault which is opposite the Worsley chapel is covered with a large slab recording the burials of John Carrill Worsley, died March 4th, 1799, aged 89, and his son Thomas Carrill Worsley, died July 31st, 1809, aged 70. What makes this tomb of greater interest is that at the top of the slab there is a third burial recorded of one of the family who died June 1st, 1783, aged 77. In this case the name is covered by brickwork supporting the chapel floor, but there can be little doubt that it is that of Deborah, wife of John Carrill Worsley, who was the daughter of Charles Worsley of Platt.

This vault is therefore a relic of the original chapel, which was not demolished until 1790, and contains the remains of one of the original Worsley family. At least two others of the Worsley family were buried at Platt, namely Ralph Worsley, died August, 1728, and his wife, Mary, died 1701. Whether they were also buried in this same vault or in another part of the chapel is uncertain, but possibly if some of the builders rubbish which has been left under the flooring could be cleared away further burial places might be discovered.

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