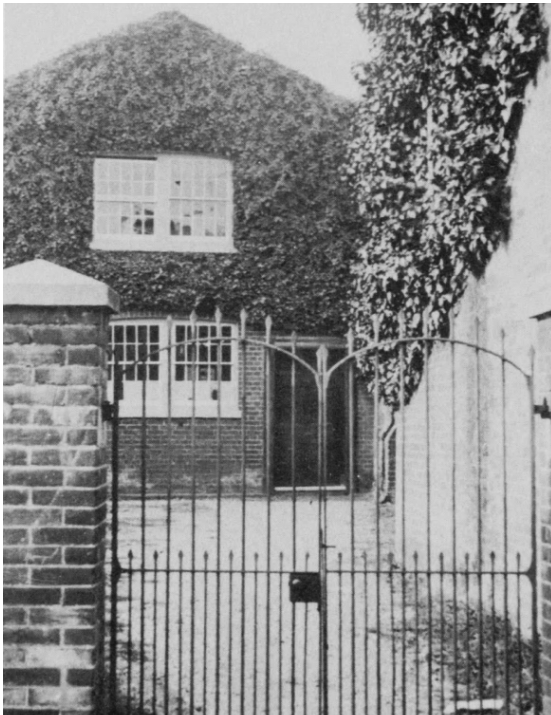


IN THE BEGINNING

THE HISTORY OF
HYTHE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

by

Glyn Stephens



Ebenezer Chapel

FOREWORD

A few years ago Glyn Stephens researched into the history of our church here. As we planned special celebrations for 1989, with Glyn's agreement we decided to publish this history and with the help of three church members it has now been prepared for publication.

Glyn Stephens first came to live in Hythe in the 1930's; here he married Margaret in 1941; and, after some years in Southampton, they returned in 1955. Glyn died after a long illness in April this year. Hythe United Reformed Church owes a tremendous amount to both of them and this history reminds us of many people who have enriched our church life. Glyn himself would emphasize that it is God who kept him and keeps us all faithful and true.

“God is at work in you who believe”.... the history of this church is still in the making.

TONY SHIELD
Minister
Hythe United Reformed Church

October 1989

Many residents of Hythe and the surrounding area will be aware of the thriving United Reformed Church standing at the corner of New Road and Atheling Road. During the course of a typical week passers-by would see a constant stream of people of all ages entering and leaving the premises: families coming for Sunday worship, boys and girls arriving on Brigade evenings and for the youth club, ladies attending the two women's organizations, as well as members of the local population using the buildings for various community purposes, such as the handicapped children's Opportunity Group, the Golden Age Club and blood-donor sessions.

Few would pause to think of the varied and in many ways exciting history which lies behind the church in Hythe. Many local people will be unaware of its previous building, now an ivy-clad furniture store alongside Jones Lane car park. Not many will give a thought to the pony and trap which used to convey visiting preachers to Hythe from the new railway at Totton, and even fewer will know that men actually lost their lives while rowing across from Southampton to conduct services in the village.

It was as early as 1795 with George III on the throne that a decision was made by the Rev. William Kingsbury and the deacons of Southampton's Above Bar Congregational Church to evangelize the surrounding villages. Hythe was one of the earliest 'preaching stations', as they were known, and an early document underlines the perceived needs of the area:

"Hythe is an extensive village in the New Forest. It stands in a pretty populous neighbourhood, but its inhabitants have long been neglected as to their spiritual and everlasting concerns. They have been like sheep wandering in the

wilderness without a shepherd, destitute of any place or means of public instruction.”

The account went on to point out that All Saints, Dibden, the nearest church, was two miles distant from the residents of Hythe and that “some Christian friends in Southampton were touched with compassion at their state.” Accordingly, in 1797 a house was opened for the worship of God and the preaching of the gospel. The people of Hythe were apparently appreciative of this development. “Many of the inhabitants expressed a desire of its continuance and some appeared deeply and hopefully affected, with concern about their eternal state.”

Such was the success of the Hythe preaching station that the congregation almost immediately outgrew the house and it became necessary to erect a chapel, which was opened for public worship on June 20th 1798. There is some evidence to suggest that this was in the present School Road. No known trace remains, but its inauguration was described with religious enthusiasm. “A chapel has been erected by voluntary subscription; its foundation was laid with prayer, and its top stone has been brought forth with praise; a suitable minister has been provided for a year and has begun his labours amongst the people, and all has been conducted hitherto without any charge to them.”

The work continued under the auspices of the Above Bar Congregational Church, who formed the first Sunday school in the village in 1812. At the opening ceremony twenty-one scholars were enrolled; this number had increased to as many as eighty-one by the end of the year.

To avoid the twelve-mile journey “by land”, as an early report rather quaintly put it, the customary practice was for the

preachers and Sunday school teachers from Above Bar to cross Southampton Water in an open boat, in all seasons and under all weathers, starting out sometimes early in the morning and returning late in the day. This was not always without incident and it was recorded that “many a time the teachers, in crossing, were drenched with rain and the boat frequently swamped with the fierceness of the storms.” On the afternoon of Sunday, October 1st 1815 (just three months after Wellington’s victory at Waterloo) five teachers were crossing the water, three on the way to Hythe chapel and two to Marchwood, when a gale suddenly sprang up and capsized the boat about three quarters of a mile from the shore. All were thrown into the water. The superintendent, a Mr. Sampson, together with the boatman, were drowned, the four others being rescued after a considerable struggle against the storm and the wind. This sad calamity cast a gloom over the whole district; at the special funeral service a hymn was sung composed by one of the school teachers.

The work, however, continued to thrive. In 1839, now into the reign of the young Queen Victoria, the local church, still under the patronage of Above Bar, joined the Congregational Union of England and Wales, an event celebrated at the church’s official centenary in 1939 and at its 150th anniversary in 1989, although it was in fact considerably older, as we have seen. A further significant step was taken in 1844 when Mr. William H. Bower was engaged as the church’s first regular and resident preacher, subsequently being ordained and appointed pastor.



Reverend William Bower

The chapel was already proving too small and Mr. Bower, with the assistance of a friend, Mr. J. Grimstead of Marchwood, obtained a piece of ground for the erection of a larger one. Building began on Good Friday, March 21st 1845 and, “the weather being favourable”, was ready for opening for public worship on May 28th of the same year. For the opening ceremonies there were no fewer than three services. The Rev. Thomas Atkins, minister of Above Bar Congregational Church, preached in the morning, the Rev. F. Crabb in the afternoon and the Rev. Thomas Guyler of Ryde in the evening. Known as the Ebenezer Chapel, this is the building that can still be seen today adjacent to Jones Lane car park. It remained in use as a chapel until 1914, then becoming a coal-store and latterly a furniture store for a local business.

Little is known of the pastorate of the Rev. William Bower, but one source describes it as “very happy”. In July 1886, however, after a long ministry of forty-two years, he tendered his resignation “owing to indisposition”. Southampton again came to the rescue and the Rev. G.J. Charrett, who had ministered at Hurstbourne Tarrant for ten years, gave valuable assistance to the church at Hythe, later being appointed local evangelist, an appointment confirmed by the Hampshire Congregational Union meeting in Lymington. Rev Charrett ministry at Hythe began on December 5th 1886, membership of the church at this time being twenty-two. It was shortly afterwards, on March 2nd 1887, that the first book of rules was discussed at a church meeting, which approved the printing of one hundred copies.

Finance inevitably plays an important part in any church’s life. The Hythe church was often in financial straits during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and certain

members often had to collect around amongst themselves to foot the bills. In the mid-1880s concern was expressed about the dilapidated condition of the building. In March 1887 it was decided that the proceeds of the Queen Victoria Jubilee Day fete be used towards a new church building. The sum of three pounds, three shillings and a penny was raised, but in the event it was to be a further twenty-seven years before the new church was opened. At a church meeting held in the 1890s it was resolved that the sum of ten shillings per quarter be paid to cover the duties of a church keeper. Later in the same decade it was decided, after much discussion, to purchase for church lighting a forty-gallon drum of kerosene and convey it by rowing boat from Southampton as this was cheaper than buying in the village!

Neither the ministry of Rev Charrett, who resigned in 1891, nor that of his successor the Rev. B. Roles, who took the pastorate on February 9th 1892, was particularly happy, reportedly because of the hostility of the treasurer (who happened also to be the Sunday school superintendent and church organist!). At one stage this gentleman resigned from the church, stating that he would carry on his duties only on his own terms. As he was also the local grocer and people presumably wished to remain on good terms with him, a petition was drawn up and signed by members of the congregation. The result of this, after discussion with the Hampshire Congregational Union, was that Mr. Roles ended his ministry in 1898 and left the church, whereupon the treasurer promptly returned and resumed his duties!

Church records of this period give an insight into both the pleasant and the less pleasant aspects of church life. The first meeting of the Men's Fellowship was held on October 7th 1887

when it was suggested that “female members of the church should adopt the same idea.” In the late 1890s it was resolved that “the name of one of our older members, living in Marchwood, be erased from the church roll for habitual drunkardness.”

CHURCH MEETING MINUTE DECEMBER 29th 1898

The year (1898) has been very trying in some respects, but taking things as a whole there has been much to encourage as well as try, & we are not without signs of a brighter day. Some who have left us are returning: & we are receiving more encouragement & help at our prayer meetings. One young Person has made an open profession of Christ.

Four out of the five Young People who joined the church at the beginning of the year have left the neighbourhood and one who had formerly belonged to us has been transferred to The City Temple and had become an active member of that church. Though so trying to lose the Young and active members of our church we have the consolation of knowing that they are not lost to the Church of Christ, but are serving him in other spheres of labour.

One of the older members of the church living in Marchwood has been erased from the Roll for habitual drunkenness. We have also lost by removal two of our best workers at Marchwood who were not members of the church. This together with several failures of pulpit supply not keeping their appointments has had the effect of diminishing the attendance.

The Trustees of our church at Hythe have just purchased a small piece of land on which part of a cottage stood neighbouring the Chapel, this will give us an open

frontage and when properly fenced will very much improve the external of the Chapel. The whole of the money for the purchase has been raised by the Trustees and the Members of our Chapel. We are now raising a fund for two {cottages} of the same.

CHURCH MEETING DECEMBER 29th 1898

The church had been without a minister since 1898, and at a church meeting held in November 1899 it was agreed, on the recommendation of the Rev. H.J. Howell, the representative of the Hampshire Congregational Union, to call the Rev. F.J. Baines to the pastorate. The proposition ended with these words: "We believe that we have been divinely led to this choice, and that he may come amongst us as sent by God to help in building up this church and overthrowing the kingdom of Satan." All present voted for the proposition with (we are perhaps not surprised to learn) the exception of the treasurer.

Under Mr. Baines, who began his ministry in 1900, the church took on a new lease of life, a number of new members being received. Once again, however, the problem of the church premises was raised. More and more money was being spent on repairs to the building, this cost being borne mainly from the pockets of one or two in the congregation. On one occasion a special tea was organised at which a sum of nearly £24 was raised for a new church. The Hampshire Congregational Union was also approached for a grant.

The Rev. F.J. Baines resigned from the pastorate in July 1903 and his successful ministry was terminated by a farewell tea. Little time was lost in seeking a successor. In September of that year a letter was sent to the Hampshire Congregational Union asking that the Rev. R. West be appointed minister. A

resolution was also passed that the church be free to appoint a new minister at the end of three years if they so wished.

Although the Hythe church had joined the Congregational Union of England and Wales as early as 1839, they became fully affiliated to the Hampshire Congregational Union only in November 1904, albeit they had enjoyed its oversight for a number of years. It was also in 1904 that the church first introduced its own magazine, fifty copies being produced and distributed at the cost of one shilling per magazine per year.

Numbers at services and at the church meeting were gradually growing, but financial problems continued to dog the congregation. When, for example, the Rev. J.D. Jones of Bournemouth was invited to preach at an anniversary service, he was asked if he would come “for expenses only”. In 1905 a Weekly and Freewill Offering system was introduced. A new building was still the aim and various events and socials were held to raise money. At the annual meeting in January 1907 the building fund stood at £65, and the following year, on June 23rd 1908, the site on which the present building stands was bought for £62. Progress was being made, but six more years were still to elapse before the new church was erected.

Meanwhile, other new developments continued during this Edwardian era, including the formation in 1906 of a choir to lead Sunday worship and the appointment in February 1908 of the first lady deacon.

In June 1908 the Rev. R. West left for Birmingham after a very successful pastorate. For a year the church was without a pastor, but progress was made during the interregnum when the church was again served by ministers from Southampton. With

the arrival of the railway they were now able to come by train to Totton, where they were collected, usually by pony and trap.

It is interesting to note that it was during this interregnum that the Hythe church itself began to reach out in turn to other villages. In May 1909 the first mission meeting was held at Dibden Purlieu; the work at this 'mission station' was continued for a number of years and later became the present Methodist Church.

In July 1909 the Rev. F.J. Phillips was called to what turned out to be a happy but very short pastorate. Two years after Mr. Phillips's call, the local doctor was asked to attend the church meeting to explain fully that the minister was seriously ill. The caring nature of the church in Hythe was already in evidence in that the members agreed to Mr. Phillips going away for four months to recuperate, although this was unfortunately to no avail and he was obliged to resign. During his ministry the church was still working towards the eventual building of a new church: in October 1909 they passed a resolution to sell their present chapel and surrounding land when the time came and to use the proceeds to defray the cost of the new church.

The Rev. Herbert Merrivale of Feltham then accepted the pastorate, beginning his duties on December 6th 1911. The state of the building was still worrying the members and in July 1912 a subscription list was opened for donations to the building fund, which benefited to the tune of £55. In November 1912 the church invited local builders to submit plans and estimates for the erection on the Atheling Road site of an iron or brick church building capable of seating one hundred and eighty persons. The 1909 resolution was put into effect in March 1913 and the Ebenezer Chapel put up for sale.

In the midst of these exciting events, however, in October 1913 Mr. Merrivale handed in his resignation. The church is said to have “commiserated with him in his troubles”. What these troubles were is not referred to in the records, but there may be a clue in the fact that the church told him that he could keep the balance in the communion offering for his own use.

Meanwhile, during 1913 money raising for the new church was proceeding: even the grass on the empty plot was sold for five shillings. The Above Bar Congregational Church, active in Hythe’s history since the very beginning in 1795, held a bazaar in the Watts Memorial Hall in April 1914 raising the sum of £218. This at last enabled the church, in conjunction with the Hampshire Congregational Union, to accept the tender submitted by Messrs. H. Stephens & Son of Southampton for the building of a new church for £1,025. The old chapel was sold for £250 to Mr. W.H. Longman, a life deacon of the church and local coal merchant.

The foundation stone was laid on June 10th 1914 at a ceremony presided over by the Rev. F.S. Saunders of the Above Bar Congregational Church. The official opening was reported by the Southampton Times as follows: “The new church of the Hythe Congregationalists, which commands an excellent position at the junction of New Road and Atheling Road, was opened on Wednesday, 7th November 1914. The building is plain and substantial, but not unattractive, with plenty of sphere for expansion. Seating is provided for three hundred and fifty approximately, but a part of the building has been partitioned off and will serve as a schoolroom. There is a heating installation and petrol-gas has been chosen as illuminant. The

opening was performed by Mr. E.D. Williams of Southampton, the excellent attendance including many from town churches. Mr. Brightcliffe was the architect and H. Stephens & Son of Southampton were the builders.”



Stone laying ceremony 1914

A statement of the financial position showed that £1,044 of the £1,860 now needed had been raised and that an additional sum of £81 had been received on the day of the opening. To help to defray the balance, the church took out an interest-free loan of £200 from the English Congregational Chapel Building Society, to be repaid in ten yearly instalments of twenty pounds.

The Great War was now, of course, in progress and it was for this reason that the planned ancillary buildings could not be provided - hence the partitioning off of the schoolroom. The church organist was amongst those volunteering for military service.

The first minister of the new Hythe Congregational Church was the Rev. H.W. Rose, whose pastorate lasted until October 1916. A year's interregnum was followed by the ministry of the Rev. Francis Griffiths until January 1920, when he resigned, the oversight of the church being taken over yet again by Above Bar. Local ministry was resumed on July 1st 1923 with the appointment of the Rev. H.C. Miller from Balford and Durrington.

It was also in 1923 that Mr. Kemp of Kemp's Shipyard, Hythe, offered to install electric lighting in the church to replace the petrol-gas plant. The old hanging lamps were sold to Dibden Purlieu Methodist Church for the princely sum of two pounds. The debt on the new building was finally paid off only in 1930 when a church member made a gift of £150 in memory of her late husband.

In June 1930 Mr. Miller departed to take up a ministry at Billingshurst, and Above Bar Congregational Church again took on the oversight of the church at Hythe. During the summer of that year the church enjoyed its first student pastorate with the coming for three months of Mr. R. Taylor of New College. In March 1932 the Rev. H.W. Rose, who had been minister at Hythe from 1914 to 1916, returned from Sarisbury Green to Hythe for a further period of two years ministry at an annual salary of £60.

Music has always played an important part in Christian worship and Hythe is no exception. Reference has already been made to the formation of a choir as long ago as 1906. The church has always been generously endowed with organists, too, for many years having four or five in the congregation. Organists, however, need a reliable organ to play on, and in the early 1930s the existing instrument was causing so much

trouble that an organ fund was opened. In 1933 the purchase took place of a pipe organ from Bitterne Park Congregational Church for £25.

Affording the services of a minister was continuing to prove a perennial problem. In January 1934 a joint meeting of the deacons from both Hythe and Totton Congregational Churches was held under the chairmanship of the Revs. Howard James and Griffith Jones of the Hampshire Congregational Union with a view to linking the two churches under a joint pastorate. The outcome was the calling by both churches of the Rev. Martin Sheppard as minister from July 1934. Mr. Sheppard was inducted at Totton, a tea being arranged at Hythe to welcome him.

The village of Hythe was now becoming popular with industry and the opening of the British Powerboat Company's works, together with the formation by Imperial Airways of their flying-boat base, were increasing the local population. This was reflected in an increase in church membership, so that in November 1936 the joint arrangement with Totton was terminated and the Rev. W.C.C. Broadwater was inducted to the Hythe pastorate.

The summer of 1939 brought not only the returning clouds of war but also, on a happier note, the church's centenary celebrations. On July 12th, at a tea and service conducted by the Rev. Dr. John Short of Bournemouth, the Hythe Congregationalists were in fact celebrating a hundred years of their membership of the Congregational Union of England and Wales although, as we have seen, the history of this local Christian witness dated back to over forty years earlier.

War brought a deterioration in the church's financial position and by 1940 Mr. Broadwater's resignation had become inevitable. The oversight of the ministry was taken over temporarily by the Rev. Owen Coxon of Southampton. There were structural problems too. In 1941 the building was damaged by enemy action, but the few remaining members faithfully carried on the church's work and started a reconstruction programme. The damage, however, was more serious than at first thought. A local architect, Mr. Saunders of Southampton, agreed with the War Damage Commission that the underlying cause was faulty construction due to bad planning: a steel girder at the gable-end of the church was resting only on four-inch walls. The cost of the repairs came to nearly £700, of which the Commission allowed only £150. The church, however, carried on undaunted and by April 1945, just a month before the allied victory in Europe, the debt had been cleared.

After the ministries of Mr. Broadwater and Mr. Coxon the church had for most of the war been under the care of Interim Moderator the Rev. Robert Latham, assisted by the Rev. Edna Rawlinson. Foreseeing the likely growth of the area, not least because of the proposed extension of the old AGWI oil-refinery, the Hampshire Congregational Union arranged for the appointment of Mr. Gwilym Davies as honorary pastor at Hythe from October 1946. At first it must have been heartbreaking. Numbers were few, Sunday evening services being held in the schoolroom with perhaps at the most seven people in the congregation. The Methodists even offered to buy the church building, but the faithful few carried on.

Numbers gradually began to increase; a weeknight meeting which had been closed was recommenced. In 1949 the



Gwilym Davies

non-denominational Golden Age Club was started by some older members. The British Powerboat Company closed down and Imperial Airways, now part of BOAC, left Hythe, and thus the church lost a number of members, including its Sunday school superintendent and a few teachers. Despite these problems, the few again carried on bravely. Once more the tide turned as, with new houses being built on the Langdown and Hollybank estates, the area began to prosper. Church member Mr. Frank Cook was Clerk of the Works on the Langdown estate; he made it his business to ask each new occupant whether they were church or chapel, whereupon he would arrange a visit accordingly from either the vicar, the Rev. Horace Molyneux, or the Congregational minister, Mr. Davies.

It was soon found that the schoolroom was becoming too small for the children to be accommodated and the church itself was being pressed into service for use by the Sunday school. In 1952 plans were drawn up for an extension of the building, although it was to be another twelve years before the project began to be realised. The church was now developing at such a pace that Mr. Davies thought it right that there should be a resumption of full-time ministry and so asked the church to accept his resignation.

In June 1955 a unanimous call was given to Mr. Marshall Owen Edwards, a student at Swansea College, to take over the ministry of the church, which he did with effect from August of that year. This was an exciting time for the congregation, with a number of new developments: the introduction of a morning service (whereas only evening worship had been held previously) and the reinstatement of a weeknight fellowship which had lapsed. A Young People's Fellowship was formed which, among other activities, held a short service at Hythe Hospital every Sunday morning before coming to worship at church. A newsletter was again started.

In his report for the year 1956 Mr. Cook, the church treasurer, stated that a sum of seven pounds seven shillings per week was required to run the church, now that they had a minister again. It was also in 1956 that the church secretary, Mr. William Wilson, handed in his resignation for health reasons. Mrs. Margaret Stephens volunteered for the job for one year only, but in the event continued as secretary until 1982.

The new full-time pastorate was, unfortunately, not to last for long. In October 1956, on the advice of his doctor, Mr. Edwards handed in his resignation and returned to Wales. The

church welcomed back Mr. Davies's oversight of the church. During the late 1950s the question of appointing a new minister became linked with the need to provide a manse: in fact, the Moderator, the Rev. Andrew James, had stated that if the church could provide a manse he would see that a minister was forthcoming. At a special church meeting in March 1958 it was decided to purchase 5 Drummond Road for the sum of £1,500. The church now had a manse. It was, however, an old house and it was felt necessary to carry out alterations at a cost of £490. To meet the total cost of £1,990 village traders were approached, members and friends rallied round and interest-free loans were raised from the Hampshire Congregational Union and the Above Bar Congregation.

In her annual report for 1959 the secretary said that the past three years had been the most successful in the history of the church. The manse had been bought and decorated throughout by the love and labour of church members, the membership roll had increased, as had the attendances at both morning and evening services, necessitating the gift to the church of a new communion set. A junior membership roll had been introduced, and the young wives of the church had formed themselves into a group meeting in their homes as they could not be accommodated at the church. The very successful envelope scheme of giving to the church was introduced. The climax of the year was the induction on November 11th of the Rev. David Nevard.

Mr. Nevard's ministry saw progress and new developments continuing into the early 1960s. In 1960 the manse debt was cleared. A new hall, first mooted in 1952, was being planned. In 1962 a Girls' Life Brigade Company was started, the Life Boys' Company beginning the following year,

and the Sunday School was reorganised in 1964 as Junior Church.

Due to the increased numbers of children, the Junior Church teachers kept pressing for more accommodation, as their work was being hampered. Accordingly, plans for the erection for £2,800 of phase one of a common-room block at the rear of the church building were agreed by the church meeting. The stone-laying ceremony was performed by Mr. W. Owers, secretary of the Above Bar Congregation, on February 15th 1964 and the building was eventually opened on September 12th by the chairman of the Hampshire Congregational Union, the Rev. W. Bush of Winchester. These encouraging developments in the life of the church had been highlights in the ministry of Mr. Nevard, who left Hythe in November 1966 to take up the pastorate of Zion, Manchester.

Extension of the premises was still a pressing need. Although plans for a new hall at the rear of the site had been passed by the New Forest Rural District Council, they now had to be held in abeyance. A temporary building was erected, however, as a further classroom.

Upon Mr. Nevard's departure, the Rev. Frank Wallace of Freemantle was appointed Interim Moderator, but the interregnum this time was to be short: the Rev. Dinsley Hamilton of Brighton was inducted to the Hythe pastorate in February 1967 before a full congregation.



Hall opening ceremony 1967 (Photo B A Moody, Southampton) Left to right – Mr L Flemming, Reverend Dinsley Hamilton, Mrs Margret Stephens, Reverend Douglas Smith

In April of that year the building committee reported that the sum of £7,700 had been raised for the building of a church hall: this included a grant (£1000) and a loan (£2000) from the Hampshire Congregational Union and a loan of £500 from the National Sunday School Union. The stone-laying ceremony was performed on June 21st 1967 by Mr. Gwilym Davies, twice, it will be recalled, the church's pastor and the hall was opened on November 8th 1967 by the Moderator of Southern Province of the Congregational Church, the Rev. Douglas Smith.

Mr. Hamilton's pastorate was a very happy one, Mrs. Gladys Hamilton being particularly involved in the women's work which flourished under her guidance. In fact, the church made such good progress that it became necessary to think of extending the worship-area itself. Once again, however, plans

had to be shelved as Mr. Hamilton accepted the call in October 1974 to the church at Grange, Reading. Appreciation of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton's work was shown by the large attendance at a farewell party and presentation.

The Rev. Wilfred Wall became Interim Moderator and the church continued to make progress, welcoming new members and continuing to work very happily with St. John's and other churches on the Waterside. Good ecumenical relationships and Christian unity were growing at this time, and it was in fact during Mr. Hamilton's ministry in October 1972 that the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in England and Wales joined to constitute the United Reformed Church. The Hythe church, which had been under the Congregational label for so many years, thus now became Hythe United Reformed Church.

Mr. Wall, together with representatives of the URC District, suggested that a new manse should be provided in readiness for a new minister. The Rev. Geoffrey Harmer was inducted to the pastorate on April 22nd 1975 and within three weeks of his arrival moved into the newly purchased manse at 15 Atheling Road.

By 1979 the need to extend the worship-area had become acute: frequently on Sunday mornings an overflow had to be accommodated in the schoolroom. The following year a rebuilding scheme was carried out to remove the 1914 dividing wall separating the schoolroom from the main church to cope with the growing congregations. The alterations included a new moveable platform to allow for versatility in the arrangement of the worship-area and the installation in 1981 of a new electronic organ.



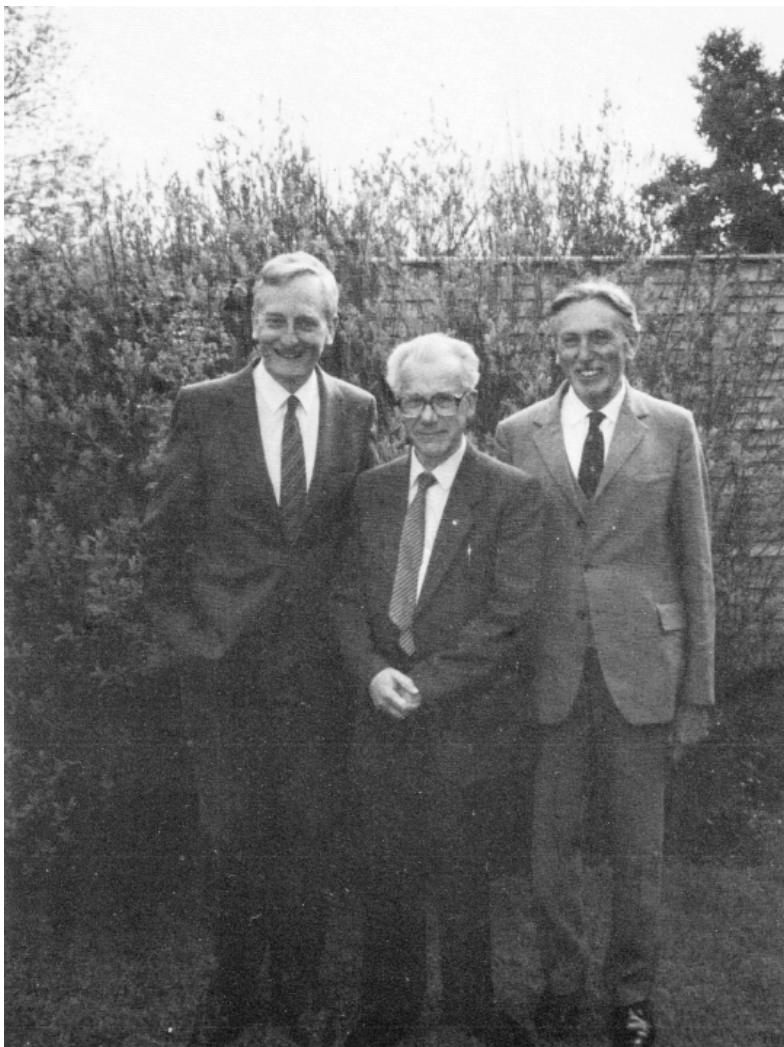
Hythe United Reformed Church 1989

The church treasurer reported to the church meeting in February 1983 that all the debts on the hall and the new buildings had now been cleared, so the following month the Wessex Provincial Moderator, the Rev. Peter Chesney, dedicated the extension, together with the new organ.

During Mr. Harmer 's ministry there was an emphasis on outreach to young families. Social events were arranged, including church family days and, latterly, informal evening services of Prayer and Praise.

It was in January 1984 that Mr. Harmer announced his call to ministry in the Channel Islands and that he had accepted. His last Sunday in Hythe was June 17th when the newly enlarged church was full to capacity both morning and evening. Appreciation of Mr. and Mrs. Harmer s work in the church and in the community was also shown at the farewell tea and

presentation. The six-month interregnum saw the Rev. Robert Murray as Interim Moderator before the Rev. Tony Shield from Broadstone took over the ministry from January 1985.



Reverends Tony Shields, David Nevard and Geoffrey Harmer at the 150th Anniversary weekend celebration

While long-established aspects of church life have continued during the 1980s, a number of further innovations have enhanced the life and witness of Hythe URC. In May 1985 it was agreed to encourage the congregation to meet over coffee after worship once a month; this proved so successful that it was extended to three Sundays per month. In August 1986 the first children's Holiday Club was held, a venture to be repeated in 1987 and 1989. Home Groups were introduced in 1986 and it was in the same year that the first service of Blessing and Healing was held. Ecumenical links have been strengthened by active membership of the Waterside Christian Group.

A conference on Church Growth was held in 1988, resulting in the congregation's setting itself six measurable goals. Thus, as Hythe URC officially celebrates its 150th anniversary and gives thanks to God for many years of local church history reaching back into the eighteenth century, the membership has its eyes fixed very firmly on the future.

The same unchanging God who motivated those who set up the Hythe preaching station, who risked their lives at sea to bring the gospel to this area, who worshipped and served at the Ebenezer Chapel and who built and extended the present church to accommodate its ever-growing ministry, will be sufficient for the future as he has proved to be in the past.

Addendum

The only slight correction to Glyn Stephen research is it should be the Rev George James 'Charrett'. I also attach a photo of him for your historical records. According to the 1891 Census, they lived in Newtown Villa next to the entrance to the Shipyard which as far as I can work out would have been near the current junction of Shore Road (previously Winterton Rd) and South Street.

Martin (Field) 11/6/2024



Rev. G.J. Charrat 1887–1891

ROLL OF MINISTERS

1845 – 1886	Rev. William H. Bower
1887 - 1891	Rev. G. J. Charret
1892 - 1898	Rev. B. Roles
1900 – 1903	Rev. F.J. Baines
1903 - 1908	Rev. R. West
1909 - 1911	Rev. F.J. Phillips
1911 – 1913	Rev. Herbert Merrivale
1914 - 1916	Rev. H.W. Rose
1917 – 1921	Rev. Francis Griffiths
1923 - 1928	Rev. H.C. Miller
1932 - 1934	Rev. H.W. Rose
1934 - 1936	Rev. Martin Shepherd
1936 - 1940	Rev. W.C.C. Broadwater
1940 - 1940	Rev. Owen Coxon
1940 - 1945	Rev. Robert Latham (I.M.) Interim Moderator
1946 - 1955	Mr. Gwilym J. Davies
1955 - 1956	Rev. M.O. Edwards
1956 - 1959	Mr. Gwilym J. Davies
1959 - 1966	Rev. David Nevard
1966 – 1967	Rev. Frank Wallace (I.M.)
1967 - 1974	Rev. Dinsley Hamilton

1974 - 1975	Rev. C.W. Wall (I.M.)
1975 - 1984	Rev. Geoffrey Harmer
1984 - 1985	Rev. Robert Murray (I.M.)
1985 - 1994	Rev. Tony Shield (died in service)
1994 - 1996	Rev. Mark Westerman & Rev. George Watt (I.M.)
1996 - 2006	Rev. Simon Thomas (removed from the Roll of Ministers)
2006 - 2007	VACANT
2007 - 2020	Rev. Edmond (Eddie) Boon
2020 - 2025	VACANT
2025 -	Rev. Andrew (Andy) Hall (I.M.)

Additions made JUNE 2024