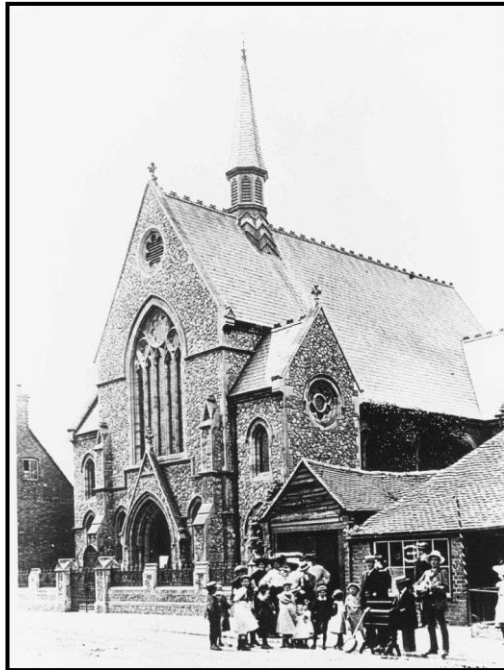


**Havant Congregationalists in the  
Edwardian Era 1901–1914  
'Loveability, Sympathy and Liberality'**

**Roger Ottewill**



Havant Congregational Church circa 1910.

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# **‘Loveability, Sympathy and Liberality’: Havant Congregationalists in the Edwardian Era 1901–1914**

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## **Introduction**

The evening of Thursday, 23 November 1905, was a particularly sad yet uplifting occasion for Havant Congregationalists. It was an unhappy one because they were saying farewell to Richard Wells, their beloved pastor who had served them faithfully for over twenty-three years. However, it was also tinged with pride because he had been appointed to the prestigious post of Secretary to the Congregational Union of England and Wales. This was a testament to his commitment to Congregationalism as well as his skill as an administrator.<sup>1</sup>

A few months later Wells returned to Havant to attend the public recognition of his successor Leonard Dowsett. In an address, he gave ‘his congregation and church an excellent character for their loveability, their sympathy and their liberality’.<sup>2</sup> This clearly demonstrated the affection he had for Havant Congregationalists and the warm relationship which had existed between the pastor and his people. For Congregational churches, which were self-governing and self-financing, the need for harmony between the minister and his congregation was crucial.

Located in North Street, Havant’s Congregational Church dated its foundation to the early eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The buildings it occupied at the beginning of

<sup>1</sup> For many years Wells had been Secretary of the Hampshire Congregational Union, a post he combined with that of pastor of Havant Congregational Church.

<sup>2</sup> *Hampshire Telegraph*, July 21, 1906.

<sup>3</sup> Although 1718 is shown as the year of foundation in the *Congregational Year Book*, the Church’s 202nd anniversary was celebrated in 1912. This would suggest that 1710 was regarded as the year of its foundation. There is evidence, however, to suggest that its origins lay in the seventeenth century. See John Pile, *A Chapter in the Early History of Havant United Reformed Church* (Havant: Havant Borough council, 2011).

the twentieth century, which survive to this day, had been opened in 1891, (front cover photograph).<sup>4</sup> They could accommodate 450 worshippers.

In 1972 most Congregationalists, including those in Havant, joined with the Presbyterians to become members of the United Reformed Church.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century Havant was still a small, self-contained market town with a population of 3,646 in 1901 and 4,092 in 1911. Something of its character can be gained from this contemporary account by a newspaper correspondent on his way to report on a service at Havant Congregational Church in the summer of 1905:

*Havant on a Sunday morning was quite Arcadian. At least so thought one who spends his week-days and a too frequent Sabbath day at work in Portsmouth's wilderness of bricks and mortar. To such a one there is real joy in the sloping fields between Cosham and Havant, bright with sunshine, brilliant in their greenness, the corn ripening for the harvest covered with glinting undulations born of the gentle breeze. Havant itself wore an air of genteel respectability. So deserted were the streets that it might have been a city of the dead. The cyclists and motorists passing through represented, with a lazy few basking in the sun, the sum total of human activity. At church and chapel en route came the swelling hymn of the singers within; and entering the Congregational Church, after running his bicycle round to the back, the writer found the Rev R.J. Wells occupying the pulpit.<sup>6</sup>*

What a contrast with today! The report continued with a very sympathetic and favourable account of the service and the preaching. The correspondent was undoubtedly very impressed with what he witnessed and Wells' messages, with a 'sermonette' for the children and something more substantial for the adults based on the text 'and Philip arose and went' (Acts chapter 5, verse 27). From a single visit, of course, it was only possible to obtain a snapshot of Congregationalism in Edwardian Havant. What might a

<sup>4</sup> Until 1891 Havant Congregationalists worshipped at the Independent Chapel in The Pallant, (back cover photograph).

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the history of Havant Congregational/United Reformed Church see <http://www.havanturc.org/id4.html>

<sup>6</sup> *Portsmouth Evening News*, July 3, 1905.

broader and more considered appraisal of the Congregationalists of Havant in the years leading up to the First World War reveal?

In what follows attention is given to the standing of the Havant Congregational Church during the long Edwardian era from 1901 to 1914, a period which some see as Congregationalism's 'golden age' and others as 'the beginning of sorrows'.<sup>7</sup> Five aspects in particular are considered, the statistical record; the pastorates; the deacons, who served as the lay leaders of the Church; features of church life; and the manner in which the Church engaged with the wider community. At this time, North Street shared with St Faith's Parish Church, St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and two Methodist congregations, Wesleyan and Primitive, responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the local population.

### **Statistical Record**

By the early years of the twentieth century, Congregational churches had become conscientious compilers of statistics. They were required to submit figures annually to their county unions, in the case of Havant this was the Hampshire Congregational Union [HCU]. These now provide historians with data that can be used to make qualified assessments of the performance of churches in recruiting and retaining members and Sunday school scholars. Membership was of great consequence for Congregationalists since it measured their effectiveness as a network of gathered churches. As Baxter has pointed out, gathered churches are those 'in any area or district, where there are like-minded people who are prepared to start and organise' them and once formed they are 'maintained and continue ... as long as there is sufficient support'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Reg Ward, "Professor Clyde Binfield: A Critical Appreciation," in *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations*, ed. David Bebbington and Timothy Larsen (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p.16; R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (London: Independent Press Ltd, 1962), 334–342; and David M. Thompson, 'The Decline of Congregationalism in the Twentieth-Century' The Congregational Lecture 2002 (London: The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd), p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Colin B. Baxter, *A Study of Organisational Growth and Development of the Congregational, Presbyterian and United Reformed Churches*, unpublished PhD thesis, Brunel University, 1981, p.43.

To provide an overview of the membership of Havant Congregational Church and its Sunday school, data has been collated for the years 1901 to 1914 inclusive in Table 1.

**Table 1: Membership and Related Data for Havant Congregational Church 1901-1914**

Year	Members		Sunday School	
	No	3 Year Average	Scholars	Teachers
1901	156	152	180	12
1902	150	152	140	19
1903	151	149	144	18
1904	147	149	144	17
1905	150	149	144	18
1906	150	147	144	18
1907	142	146	206	17
1908	147	139	205	19
1909	127	136	199	19
1910	135	136	168	18
1911	146	146	196	28
1912	157	154	168	29
1913	160	161	164	28
1914	165	164	164	28

## Notes

1. The three year moving average has been calculated to even out sudden changes in the figures for individual years, which may have been due to a comprehensive revision of the membership roll.

2. It seems likely that the relevant information for 1906 was not submitted with the result that the figures for the previous year were simply repeated.

Source: *Yearbooks of the HCU*, Hampshire Record Office [HRO] Ref: 127M54/62/46 to 59.

Notwithstanding some ups and downs, membership remained reasonably buoyant and, as can be seen, it was higher in 1914 than it had been in 1901.

However, if account is taken of the increase in Havant's population and what is known as 'membership density' is calculated for the two census years this shows a decline from 6.5 per cent of the population aged 18 and over in 1901 to 5.3 per cent in 1911.

To probe further into the dynamics of church membership, it is necessary to consider the relationship between losses and gains for each year. In the case of North Street this data is available only for the years from 1910 to 1913 (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Losses and Gains of Havant Congregational Church's Membership 1910-1913**

Year	Jan	Losses			Sub-Tot	Gains		Dec
		Death	Transfer	Struck off		Faith	Transfer	
1910	138	1	3	6	125	7		135
1911	135	1	4	3	127	10	9	146
1912	146	2	3	2	139	10	8	157
1913	157	2	1	1	153	3	4	160

Source: *Havant Congregational Church Manuals*

As can be seen, North Street lost members as a result of death; transfers to other churches following a move away from Havant; and striking off due to non attendance. With respect to the last category, in the Church rules it was stated that unless a reason was given 'an absence from the Communion for six successive months shall disqualify a member from voting, and after absence for twelve months, membership shall cease'.<sup>9</sup> To offset these losses, North Street gained new members in two ways. First, there were those making a profession or confession of faith. This involved a visit from the pastor or his representative to confirm the genuineness of a person's Christian faith followed by a formal vote of the membership. Second, there were transfers to North Street from elsewhere with the applicant's Christian credentials being confirmed by a letter from the minister of the church he or she was leaving.

<sup>9</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Year Book 1901*, p.6.

For years where the church roll, giving details of the names and designations of members, has survived, it is possible to determine the gender composition of the membership. Thus of the 160 members on the roll at 1 January 1914, 103 (64 per cent) were women. Of these 61 (38 per cent) were designated 'Mrs' and 42 (26 per cent) 'Miss'. This is similar to the situation in other Hampshire Congregational churches where such data are available.<sup>10</sup>

Although membership figures undoubtedly provide insights into the strength or otherwise of a Congregational church, they by no means constitute the complete picture. This is because members represented a proportion of those who would have regarded North Street as their church and attended services regularly. In the absence of definitive data, unlike some Hampshire towns, such as Basingstoke and Portsmouth, where surveys of church attendance were undertaken by newspapers in the early 1900s, it is only possible to estimate the size of congregations. It seems likely, however, that there would have been as many non-members as members in North Street congregations. With seating for 450, it is probable that for many services the church would have been approximately two-thirds full. Numbers attending would have been influenced to some extent by the qualities and reputation of the minister, especially his performance in the pulpit.

For the Sunday school, the figures again record movement both upwards and downwards. The reason for the sharp increase in 1907 is not known, but it may have been due to the addition of another class, perhaps for very young children. For Congregationalists, the Sunday school made a valuable contribution to the mission of the Church and as can be seen a substantial number of people were involved in the teaching of Sunday school scholars. Approximately 18 per cent of Havant's population aged between 5 and 18 attended the Sunday school.

While quantitative data has a certain appeal, it constitutes part of the evidence. Of potentially greater importance are the more qualitative aspects of church life, with the character of the ministers being very much to the fore.

<sup>10</sup> At London Street Congregational Church in Basingstoke, for example, the equivalent percentages for the membership in 1911 were 39 per cent 'Mrs' and 23 per cent 'Miss'.



## Pastorates

Three pastors had charge of Havant Congregational Church during the Edwardian era. As has already been indicated, until 1905 the post was held by the redoubtable Richard Wells, (Fig. 1). His successors were Leonard Dowsett, who served from 1906 to 1910, and Edward Kirby, from 1910 to 1923.



Fig. 1: Richard Wells.

In his reminiscences Lewis Lasseter, who had close connections with the Church, describes Wells as one of the most charismatic of ministers who:

*...had great natural attributes; handsome presence, fine physique, distinguished bearing, great personal charm, tact, grace, and courtesy, a genius for making and keeping friends, organizing ability of a high order, sincerity and singleness of purpose; he had more wit than humour, no music, a pretty turn of speech ... an aptitude for games ... Through everything ran the finely tempered blade of undeviating loyalty as Christian, Nonconformist and Congregationalist.<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Lasseter, *These Fifty Years 1891–1941 Some Reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 1991), pp.2–3.

At the farewell gathering for Wells, mentioned at the beginning of this account, the church secretary indicated the esteem in which he and indeed his wife were held. As it was put:

*... looking back on the years which had passed since Mr Wells had settled among them, he felt they had a sort of paternal right to him. The relationship which had existed between them had been a family one.*<sup>12</sup>

With the announcement of his resignation, the deacons and church members were faced with the daunting task of finding a suitable replacement. Initially, there was an attempt to secure the services of Walter Lovell, who had been pastor of Gosport Congregational Church from 1891 to 1901. However, although he appreciated the invitation, he declined the offer to preach 'with a view' to the pastorate and 'the matter was then considered closed'. The members subsequently voted in favour of offering the pastorate to Leonard Dowsett from Margate, with 48 members voting for and 4 abstaining, which was 'deemed to be virtually unanimous'.<sup>13</sup> His stipend was to be £250 per annum.

At his public recognition Dowsett was so overcome by the tributes paid to him that he simply 'prayed that God would make and keep him humble'.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding his humility he spent four years at Havant and it seems that his unorthodox ways were not appreciated by all sections of the membership. Lasseter, who was living elsewhere at the time, quotes from a letter he received from 'one who had a real knowledge of those days of Mr Dowsett's ministry':

*But the deacons murmured, for the minister went about hatless, which was undignified, and he did many unconventional things. And the deacons rebuked him so that he presently went away, but those who were young then cherish the memory.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Hampshire Telegraph*, November 25, 1905.

<sup>13</sup> *Havant Congregational Church: First Church Minute Book 1847-1910* HRO Ref: 10A05/A1/1, pp.260 and 263. Margate Congregational Church had been Dowsett's first charge.

<sup>14</sup> *Hampshire Telegraph*, July 21, 1906.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis Lasseter, *These Fifty Years 1891-1941 Some Reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 1991), p.18.

There was also a decline in the membership during his pastorate (see Table 1), which may have been due to Dowsett's behaviour. Nonetheless, the Church minutes for January 1910 record that:

*In view of the early departure of Mr Dowsett to assume pastoral oversight of the Congregational Church at Harpenden it was considered a suitable occasion for presenting Mr and Mrs Dowsett with an expression of the regard and esteem entertained for them and appreciation of their work in Havant. To Mr Dowsett a clock was presented and to Mrs Dowsett a silver salver each article having suitably engraved on it the date and occasion of presentation.<sup>16</sup>*

This suggests that Dowsett's ministry at Havant was not viewed in entirely negative terms. That said, in the 1920s his name disappears from the *Congregational Year Book* and there is no official obituary for him, which may indicate that his unconventionality ultimately led to him giving up the ministry.

Following Dowsett's departure, in June 1910, 53 members voted in favour, with 7 abstaining, of appointing Edward Kirby, (Fig. 2), from Whetstone Congregational Church in Leicestershire to be their next pastor once again on a stipend of £250 per annum. He undoubtedly proved to be a steadier hand than Dowsett and his pastorate was generally regarded as a great success. As his obituarist observed:

*... [he] felt deeply the joys and disappointments of the Ministry. Keenly interested in people as individuals and earning their affection and respect, he had a scholarly mind and a quiet zest for life ... He was a man of wide sympathies and a great encourager.<sup>17</sup>*

Moreover, he also had a highly supportive wife:

*Mrs Kirby was the pastor's ideal wife and helpmeet. Compact of courage, good sense, keen wit and good humour. All wrapped up in the kindest of hearts. Her husband was always the first to pay tribute to*

<sup>16</sup> *Havant Congregational Church: First Church Minute Book 1847–1910* HRO Ref: 10A05/A1/1, p.296.

<sup>17</sup> *Congregational Year Book 1971/72*, p.361.

*her sane Scottish judgement to which he would constantly defer. In all things connected with women's work in the Church she took her rightful place as president and leader.*<sup>18</sup>

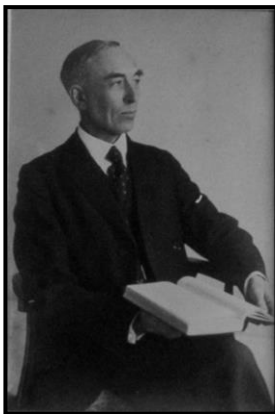


Fig. 2: Edward Kirby.

In addition to leading Havant Congregationalists Kirby was in demand as a visiting preacher. For example, in June 1911 at Christ Church Congregational Church in Southsea he preached at the Sunday school anniversary morning and evening services and in the afternoon to the scholars. It was reported that 'he was quite at home among the young people, and his services were greatly appreciated by the friends of the Sunday School, as also by the congregation'.<sup>19</sup> Kirby remained at Havant for over three times as long as his predecessor, a clear indication of his eminent suitability for the pastorate. His arrival coincided with an increase in membership and a substantial rise in the number of Sunday school teachers (see Table 1).

## **Deacons**

Acting in partnership with the pastor, as previously mentioned, the deacons were responsible for leading the church. They were elected by the membership at regular intervals. At Havant there were six deacons who each served for a term of three years. Two retired each year, with those retiring

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Lasseter, *These Fifty Years 1891–1941 Some Reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 1991), p.19.

<sup>19</sup> *Hampshire Post*, June 16, 1911.

being eligible for re-election. Significantly, however, in keeping with the norms of the period, the Church rules restricted membership of the diaconate to 'the male members of the Church'.<sup>20</sup> Thus, even though they constituted two thirds of the membership, women were debarred from performing the role of deacon.

Deacons held the key posts of church secretary and church treasurer. Collectively known as the diaconate their role was to support the pastor and when the church was without one to ensure that everything continued to function smoothly as well as to invite potential future ministers to lead services and preach 'with a view' to being considered for the pastorate. Details of the membership of the diaconate in 1901 are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Havant Congregational Church Deacons in 1901**

Name	Age	Occupation	Address	Ser- vants
William Fletcher	45	Corset manufacturer	St Hilda	1
William Lassetter	55	Watchmaker/jeweller	West Street	n.k.
Thomas McIlroy	39	Draper	Wray House, Warblington	2
George Stallard	72	Fellmonger/parchment maker	39, East Street	2
Thomas Suter	54	Printer/deputy registrar of births, deaths and marriages	46, West Street	0
George Thomas	67	Retired chemist living on own means	Trosnant, Bedhampton	2

George Thomas was church secretary and Thomas McIlroy, church treasurer.

Source: *1901 Census Returns* and *Kellys Directory*.

<sup>20</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Year Book 1901*, p.6; *Havant Congregational Church Manual for 1914*, p.8.

Both the occupations of the deacons and the fact that most of them had one or two live-in servants confirm their relatively high social status. This was not particularly unusual, since Congregationalists were generally regarded as the most middle class of the Nonconformist denominations.

In terms of longevity, the principal deacons in Havant during the Edwardian era were Thomas McIlroy who served for the whole period, apart from a break of service in 1909/10; George Thomas, who served until he was forced to resign as a result of ill health in 1911; George Stallard from 1900 to 1909; and William Fletcher, from 1900 to 1908. As can be seen from Table 4, notwithstanding the substantial turnover of deacons, the social composition of the diaconate in 1914 was very similar to what it had been in 1901.

**Table 4: Havant Congregational Church Deacons in 1914**

Name	Age <sup>1</sup>	Occupation	Address	Ser- vants
George M. Brown	61	Private means	Rowanhurst, Emsworth Rd	1
Frederick Leng	48	House Furnisher (assistant)	Wyngate, Beechworth Rd	0
Thomas McIlroy	52	Retail draper	Gwalen, South Hayling <sup>2</sup>	2
George Meades	42	Baker and Grocer (Dealer)	Glenhorne, Grove Rd	1
Cdr Henry Walker	57	Engineer Captain RN (ret)	Brightside Villa, Grove Road	1
Henry F. Young	48	Commercial traveller drapery	Edensor, Bellair	1

<sup>1</sup> Age in 1911 plus three years.

<sup>2</sup>Address in 1911, three years later the McIlroys were living at Penshurst, Leigh Road.

George Brown was church secretary and Henry Young church treasurer.

Source: *1911 Census Returns* and *Kellys Directories*

The role of deacon was a particularly demanding one and consequently it was necessary for those elected to the post to have the requisite time and resources to be able to exercise their responsibilities and meet the expectations of the membership in an effective manner. In short, their contribution to the life of the Church was critical.

## Church Life



Fig. 3: Interior of Havant Congregational Church.

Attending to the spiritual needs of those residents of Havant who regarded North Street as 'their church' through the provision of regular acts of worship was, of course, the central feature of church life. During the Edwardian era the pattern was a morning and evening service on Sundays; one service on a weekday evening; a monthly administration of 'The Lord's Supper'; and a weekly prayer meeting. Interspersed with the regular services were those for special occasions, such as Easter, the anniversary of the founding of the Church, the Sunday school anniversary, hospital Sunday, harvest and recognition of the work of missionary societies. On these occasions there were often visiting preachers. They were seen as opportunities for outreach and were eagerly anticipated. The scene that would have greeted worshippers as they entered the church is shown in Fig. 3.

However, services constituted just one part of the life of the Church. Like Congregational churches elsewhere, North Street sought to meet many different needs of the various cohorts which made up the congregation, such as children, women and men, by adopting what might today be termed a holistic approach to ministry. At the time it was known as the institutional principle and it involved giving attention to not only the spiritual side of life but also the social, recreational and educational. To this end North Street sponsored a variety of affiliated organisations.

In 1901, those mainly for children and young people included the Sunday school; a Christian Endeavour Society, with its motto of “For Christ and Our Church” and an emphasis on developing a mature approach to faith alongside involvement in good works; a Band of Hope, the principal temperance organisation for young people; and the International Bible Reading Association. As indicated earlier, through its Sunday school North Street had contact with nearly one-fifth of the younger members of Havant’s population. In the words of the Superintendent’s report for 1910, ‘The arduous but glorious work of the School has been maintained through another year’.<sup>21</sup> A constant challenge, however, was maintaining an adequate supply of teachers. In 1901, Richard Wells referred to the need for ‘an increase in the number of male teachers’; in 1910 it was reported that ‘a chronic insufficiency of teachers ... [had] hampered the workers and detracted from the pleasure and power of their ministry’; and in 1913 the Superintendent indicated that, as the statistics confirmed, although several new teachers had joined the staff there was still a need for more.<sup>22</sup>

The needs of adults, at the turn of the twentieth century, were met by a Benevolent and Maternity Society; a Women’s Paying-in-Club; a Ladies’ Sewing Meeting; a Magazine and Tract Society; and a Cycling Club that was in the process of being wound up. Most of the others, however, were still in existence at the end of the Edwardian era, although by 1914 a number had different titles and goals.

Amongst the newer organisations were a Young Men’s Bible Class; Young Women’s Bible Class; Children’s League, the meetings of which were ‘devoted

<sup>21</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Manual for 1911*, p.20.

<sup>22</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Year Book for 1901*, p.4; *Havant Congregational Church Manual for 1911*, p.20; *Havant Congregational Church Manual for 1914*, p.18.



to Bible study, total abstinence, missionary and nature study topics',<sup>23</sup> and a Guild. The last of these was established by Kirby shortly after his arrival and was restricted to those aged 15 and older. As the following testimonial confirms it quickly made its mark:

... here week by week we read papers, had debates, got delight from music, poetry and art. Always with us were the Minister and his counsel. I wonder whether any other institution ever brought such pleasure and profit to so many over such a long period.<sup>24</sup>

For the opening meeting of the 1913/14 season the programme consisted of 'a selection of grave and gay readings and recitations', musical accompaniments and two solos.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside the organisations, there were also events intended for the church family as a whole as well as serving as opportunities for promoting North Street to the wider community. These included the annual celebrations to mark the founding of the Church which were held in June, harvest festival in the autumn and Sunday school anniversaries also in the autumn, when the previously mentioned services were supplemented with other activities, such as public teas and meetings. It is, however, somewhat disturbing that in July 1914 at a Church meeting Kirby made reference to the fact that although the Church anniversary events were well attended 'he deplored the absence of so many of our own people.'<sup>26</sup> This suggests that they were more appealing to those on the periphery of the Church than to its core membership.

On a far more positive note, a particularly significant event in April 1912 was the hosting of the spring gathering of the HCU. For a relatively small Church this was quite an honour as well as a challenge to which the members responded with enthusiasm. As the *Hampshire Post* reported:

<sup>23</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Manual* for 1914, p.22. In the Manual for 1908 there are also references to a Boys' Life Brigade and a Girls' Life Brigade which was started in 1908. However, these are not mentioned in later Manuals and in the Church minutes for 31 January 1912 it was reported that the Boys' Brigade had ceased to exist.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Lasseter, *These Fifty Years 1891–1941 Some Reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 1991), p.21.

<sup>25</sup> *Hampshire Telegraph*, October 10, 1913.

<sup>26</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Meeting Minutes Nov 1910–Mar 1933*, 1 July 1914, HRO Ref: 10A05/B1/1 unpaginated.

'Delegates to the number of 150 arrived, and of these at least half were accommodated with private hospitality, the local arrangements being made by a local committee of which Mr G.M. Brown was the hon. Secretary'. The ladies of the Church were also complimented on the manner in which at 'the public tea [... they] artistically arranged the tables' and attended to 'the wants of everyone'.<sup>27</sup>

The reference to the contribution of the ladies is a reminder that they were crucial to the maintenance of many facets of church life. As it was put by the deacons in the 1901 Church Year Book their thanks and those of the pastor were 'largely due to the ladies for the priceless help they have invariably rendered in every department of Church work, and to whose willing and intelligent aid the success of our social meetings, sales and entertainments is mainly owing'.<sup>28</sup> This makes their exclusion from the diaconate all the more telling.

Women were also involved in the musical life of the Church. As the earlier reference to the Congregational Guild meeting indicates, music was to the fore not only in services but also on social occasions. This is confirmed by a note at the back of one of the Church meeting minute books:

*Music has always been a strong feature. In 1908 it is recorded that at a church meeting music was rendered by the church choir ... In 1909 the organist had to train a supplementary choir.*<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the farewell gathering for Richard Wells was enlivened with solos and songs and contributions from the choir.<sup>30</sup> Music was also a language with which North Street could communicate with those who did not share its core beliefs and was one aspect of its engagement with the community at large.

<sup>27</sup> *Hampshire Post*, April 26, 1912.

<sup>28</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Year Book for 1901*, p.10.

<sup>29</sup> *Havant Congregational Church: First Church Minute Book 1847–1910*, HRO Ref: 10A05/A1/1 unpaginated

<sup>30</sup> *Hampshire Telegraph*, November 25, 1905.

## The Wider Community

In addition to music, North Street interacted with the wider community through its affiliated organisations, anniversary celebrations, sales of work, a monthly magazine (started in 1896), the press coverage it received and the roles played by Church members in the local economy and local politics. It also lent the Congregational Hall to the Havant Reading Room Club for 'games, reading and recreation'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Church prided itself on being an integral part of the community, supporting and invigorating it. Moreover, through initiatives, such as a Coal and Clothing Club and Benevolent Society, it also helped a few of the poorer residents of Havant.

As indicated in Tables 3 and 4, a number of the deacons were local businessmen and in this capacity they would have provided employment for members of the community. Moreover, if they were so minded they were in a position to demonstrate how Christian principles could be put into practice in the workplace. In the political realm, at least three of the deacons, William Fletcher, Frederick Leng and George Stallard, served on Havant Urban District Council. Indeed, Fletcher was chair of the Council in 1903/4. Although not explicitly stated, it is probable that all three were Liberals. At this time there was a very close relationship between Congregationalists and the Liberal Party, with politics and religion being seen as complementary rather than antithetical.

However, as it engaged with the wider community, North Street did not lose sight of the need for an evangelistic dimension. Here there is evidence of Kirby's commitment to outreach of this kind. In early 1911, for example, a press report provides details of 'a special popular service' with the pastor giving 'a very forcible address on the subject: "Can God spare Anyone?" 'In addition to the powerful preaching the service was enlivened with music and as reported: 'There was a crowded congregation, and the singing of some of the old favourite hymns was greatly enjoyed'.<sup>32</sup> Later in the year, a series of monthly services for young people was introduced with 'the attendance fully justify[ing] the change'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in the Church minutes for December 1913 it

<sup>31</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Manual for 1908*, p.24. As recorded: 'This Club supplies a great need in Havant, although it does not get the support it should from the artisan and others to make it a complete success.'

<sup>32</sup> *Hampshire Post*, February 3, 1911.

<sup>33</sup> *Hampshire Post*, June 2, 1911.

was recorded that special services were to be held early in the following year 'which would quicken the zeal and spiritual life of all, would help to gather in those who are almost persuaded – also to plead with those who are living in darkness'.<sup>34</sup> These were held every month and they appear to have been extremely popular. In February 1914, there was 'a large audience' with the pastor preaching on "The Fairness of Christ".<sup>35</sup>

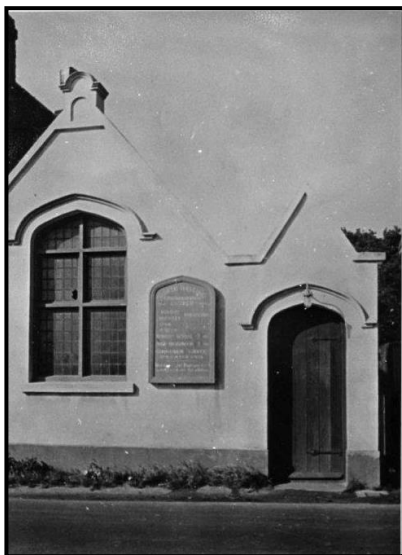


Fig 4: North Hayling Congregational Church circa 1950.

In keeping with the prevailing collegial spirit within Congregationalism, in 1911 North Street responded positively to a request to exercise pastoral oversight of North Hayling Congregational Church in Stoke. This involved 'arranging for the conduct of services' and taking forward the scheme for the erection of a new chapel at a cost of £300, (Fig. 4).<sup>36</sup> In 1913 it was reported that 'the work amongst the children had made fine progresses'.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Meeting Minutes Nov 1910–Mar 1933*, 3 December 1913, HRO Ref: 10A05/B1/1 unpaginated.

<sup>35</sup> *Portsmouth Evening News*, February 16, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Meeting Minutes Nov 1910–Mar 1933*, 20 July 1914, HRO Ref: 10A05/B1/1 unpaginated. The building was not to be erected until £150 had been received or promised.

<sup>37</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Manual for 1914*, p.26.

North Street was also mindful of the need to promote the Free Church interest within the locality and to this end it was a member of the Portsmouth and District Free Church Council.

Thus, in a variety of ways, Havant Congregational Church demonstrated that it was outward facing and willing to engage with the community in which it was situated and, indeed, further afield. While not losing sight of its mission to evangelise, North Street was also mindful of its obligation to engage in good works.

## **Conclusion**

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate the high profile which churches enjoyed in the early years of the twentieth century. Havant Congregational Church was no exception and can be seen as an exemplar of market town Congregationalism, with its desire to engage with the wider community through both its collective endeavours and the contributions of individual members to the economic and political life of the town. While it is not possible to determine precisely how far 'loveability, sympathy and liberality' continued to characterise Havant Congregationalists following the departure of Richard Wells, such qualities would have helped to sustain the Church as it sought to negotiate the more challenging and, in some ways, more perplexing social milieu of the Edwardian years. That said, there is a somewhat jarring note in the Church minutes of July 1914 with the pastor referring to the fact that a member of the Church had not received 'the Christian love and sympathy which she had expected'.<sup>38</sup> Although he did not elaborate and it might well have been an isolated incident it did indicate the need for even buoyant churches, such as Havant, to guard against complacency. Ongoing self-examination and constant vigilance were the hallmarks of a church family that was seeking to apply the key principles of Christian fellowship. Undoubtedly it was with this mind that Edward Kirby brought to the attention of his congregation any failings which came to light.

Notwithstanding any shortcomings, however, on the eve of the First World War, as far as can be judged from the surviving records, Havant Congregational Church was in good heart. Led by a pastor who was, as

<sup>38</sup> *Havant Congregational Church Meeting Minutes Nov 1910–Mar 1933*, 1 July 1914, HRO Ref: 10A05/B1/1 unpaginated.

mentioned earlier, a 'great encourager' and a high status diaconate members and adherents could look ahead with a degree of confidence.

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The Dissenters' meeting-house was the Independent Chapel in The Pallant.

One of a series of booklets on local history in the Borough of Havant.