**How FIRM A FOUNDATION**

By

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A Picture of

Union Church

Hunstanton

1870-1995

Published to mark for 125th Anniversary of Union Church, Hunstanton

Foreward

Chapter I – Christ is All (1870 – 1899)

 Building Specifications

 The Opening of the Church

Chapter II- I will build my Church (1899-1911)

 The Organ

 The Methodists

 Windows

 Wood carvings including the hearts

 Hymnboards

Chapter III - Entrust to Reliable Men (1911-1930)

 The Manse

 Committee

 First World War

Chapter IV – In the World you will have trouble (1931-1946)

Second World War

Chapter V – Devoted to the Fellowship (1946-1958)

 The Great Flood

Chapter VI – We will all be changed (1958-1966)

 Church Meetings

Chapter VII – That they may be one (1966-1983)

 Denomination

Chapter VIII – I will restore it – says the Lord (1983-1995)

Appendices

**FOREWARD**

This is not an extensive History. There was much more interesting research that could have been done. But if I had done any more it would never have been written. My thanks must go to all those who gave me information on which this book is based, in particular, Mrs Sybil Mills, Miss Kathy Winch, Mrs Millie Cooper and Rev. Stanley Hall. Needless to say, any mistakes or inaccuracies are my own!

The purpose of History is not simply to record the past, but to inspire for the future, so let me quote some words spoken by Rev Amos at the 50th Anniversary Celebrations in June 1921: “We should no more waste our breath sighing for the return of the giants of the past, unless with equal fervour we covet the Spirit by whose strength they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness and waxed valiant in the fight. We cannot praise the total devotion of our fathers in the past and, at one and the same time, refuse to make a like dedication of ourselves in the present.”

 Jonathan Calvert

April 1995

Chapter 1

**Christ Is All** (Colossians 3-11)

1870 – 1889

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Hunstanton existed solely as a village, with St Mary’s as its parish church. All the land around was owned by the Le Strange family who resided at Hunstanton Hall. At that time there was no buildings between the lighthouse and the village of Heacham. The town of Hunstanton owes its beginnings to Henry Le Strange Styleman Le Strange, who saw the potential of an East Coast resort on his land. Some reports say he intended it as a rival to the increasingly popular Brighton on the South Coast. The first building erected was the New Inn (now The Golden Lion) in 1847. Soon houses began to be built, but the first sign of progress came in 1862 when the railway line was built from King’s Lynn. Now the population began to grow rapidly. Henry Le Strange, however, never saw the culmination of his vision, as he died in July of that year, and was succeeded by his son, Hamon Le Strange

As more people moved to the area, and the town grew, so were there amongst them were non-conformists. However, in Hunstanton they found a problem. Henry Le Strange had placed a clause in the agreements for holding property in the town which prohibited the “conduct of Divine Services” on any ground above the high water mark, other than that prescribed by the Anglican Prayer Book. Thus the non-conformists had no place to worship. Their initial solution was simple, to plan the times of services by the tides, and to worship God on the beach. In the 1869, they applied to Hamon Le Strange to remove the clause his father had included, and to allow them to build a chapel. He agree to lease them a piece of land, perhaps because many of them were leading citizens in the town, but on two conditions: firstly that there would be one non-conformist chapel, in which all the dissenters in town would worship, and secondly “that a building in architectural conformity to the village be erected, which should be an ornament and not an object of repulsiveness to the beholder.” Until the time it was built, they were permitted to meet for worship in a private house – the one used belonged to Mr Jewson, a member of the family of businessmen from Norwich and a prominent Baptist. In fact the congregation grew so rapidly that within a couple of months the house was not big enough, and they met each Sunday in the Refreshment Rooms by the Station.

On 2nd July 1869, two of the congregation’s leaders, Charles Ibberson and J.W. Beeton met with the estate manager, a Mr Partridge, to choose a plot of land. Once agreed, plans were then drawn up by Mr Oaks of Swaffam for a building to be erected by Mr. Beeton, a builder in the town. They describe the specifications as follows “The Chapel will be 70 feet long by 32 feet wide, and capable of holding 350 persons. The front of the building will be half hexagon and on either side the entrance is to be through a porch. The windows are to be gothic, with white stone dressings and ornamental stone terminals. Beneath the chapel will be a schoolroom capable of holding 200 persons, being 52 feet long by 32 feet wide. Vestries are also to be connected in connection with the chapel and all other requisite buildings, so that £1000 will be required for the whole pile. When the building, which is to be called Union Chapel, is completed it is proposed to convey it to trustees, representing different denominations, so that it shall always be available for services of all evangelical non-conformists.”

Thus a date was arranged for the stone-laying ceremony, and the following advertisement was placed on the back page on the Lynn News for Saturday 18th June 1870:

*“Hunstanton Chapel and Schoolrooms*

*After much consideration it has been determined by a few Christians resident in the neighbourhood to erect a Chapel with schoolrooms at Hunstanton, a pleasant village and bathing place on the North Coast of Norfolk. The construction of a railroad from Lynn made Hunstanton easy of access to visitors from all parts of the Kingdom. This circumstance has induced other persons to become residents in the village, whilst enlarged and improved accommodation has encouraged an annually increasing number of strangers to seek rest and reinvigoration in so quiet and healthful a locality.*

*Up to the present time no place has been erected for non-conformist Worship in Hunstanton or within easy walking distance. It is intended to convey the proposed chapel to Trustees, who are members of Evangelical non-conformist bodies, for the public worship of God, so that it shall always be available for the ministrations of evangelical non-conformists of all denominations, and that whenever a Christian Church is organised within its walls, the condition of membership and communication shall be credible profession of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*The Lord of the Manor has very kindly granted a most eligible site for the proposed building, and plans have been prepared to secure accommodation for 300 persons in the chapel, and for 200 children in the schoolroom, at a cost of £1000. The state of the village and the urgency of the need which is intended to meet, encourage the hope that all persons who can assist in the present effort will generously do so.*

 *Messrs. Gurney and Co, Bankers, Lynn*

 *Mr. W. Armes, Lynn*

 *Mr. C. Ibberson, Lynn*

 *Mr. J.W. Beeton, Hunstanton*

 *Mr. R. Vynne, Swaffam*

 *Mr. W.A. Creak, Burnham*

 *Mr. R. Wherry, Wisbech*

 *Rev. W.E. Winks, Wisbech*

 *Mr. Pentmey, Peterborough*

*` Mr. C.W. Alexander, East Dereham*

 *Rev. G.S. Barrett, Norwich*

 *Rev. G. Gould, Norwich”*

The stone laying ceremony took place on Thursday 28th July 1870, and the Lynn News reported that some 300 to 400 people were present in the afternoon. The guest of honour was Mr. J.J. Colman, the businessman of Norwich, and a well-known Baptist. The service included the reading of Psalm 122 and the singing of the hymn “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord”. After Mr. Colmans speech, in which he pointed out that “if we thought a little more of our own defects and a little less of our denomination differences it would be better for us”, he placed notes to the value of £20 on the stone as his own gift. A collection was raising which raised a further £37. Up to this point, it seems that about half the required amount of money had been raised., mostly from direct giving. Interestiingly, one of the founder members, Mr Vynne, was taken ill during the ceremony, and had to be carried over to The Golden Lion. It was there, in a marquee, that tea was held afterwards for about 250 people. Special thanks were awarded to Mr. Ibberson and Mr. Beeton for all their hard work so far. The Lynn News concluded, *“The great unamity expressed at the meeting, and the hearty response given to applications for aid, clearly prove one fact – that the effort was needed to supply a place of worship for both residents and visitors.”* It took just under a year for the chapel to be built at a final cost of £800, and, said The Lynn News, *“It is to say the least pretty little building, and seems well-suited to the requirements of this rising watering place.”*

The official opening took place on the 15th June 1871, with Rev. Newman Hall of London as guest preacher. The building was packed full, and there were crowds outside, who could not get in. Rev. Hall preached from Colossians 3:11 “Christ is all”, making the point that denominations would not get one to heaven, Only Christ could do that. The full text of the sermon was printed in the Lynn News the following week and contains many stirring challenges: *“What is the door to Christianity? Is Methodism the door? Are Baptists right to say they must go through cold water to get to the Kingdom of Christ? What would Jesus say? “I am the door”...... What must you do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not your works you can plead, not your Church, or profession, or experience; not your sacrements, not prayers, not feelings; It is Christ Alone! Come then Romanist, your Protestantism will do you nothing without Christ; come Independent, your Independence will do nothing without Christ. Ye that are rich are miserably poor without Christ. Ye that are Learned are fools is Ye have not Christ........God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son whosoever believed in him should not perish. There’s no getting out of it! It follows you wherever you hide. It drags you out of the darkness, and brings you into the sunshine. Turn to Christ Today.”* Once again there was a Marquee in the grounds of the Golden Lion for tea, and afterwards Rev. Hall decided to preach in the open air on The Green, for those who had been unable to get into the building in the afternoon, and also “for the Pagans in the Village” He preached on Acts 1:11 “This same Jesus”. It was obviously a great and memorable beginning to the work of Union Chapel.

It is important to understand that at this point there was no Church – merely a chapel in which a congregation met each week. It was the responsibility of the Secretary of the Trustees, Mr Edwin Dunn, a member of the Congregational Church in Kings Lynn, to arrange for preachers each week. This situation continued for the next 18 years, during which time the Congregation seems to have grown. Unfortunately, there are no records of this period, as there was no formal church in existence. Although Trustees were elected almost immediately. The earliest Trust Deed was not signed until 1st September 1875. It states that the building is to be used as a place of Divine and Religious Instruction for Evangelical NonConformists” and that the “said Congregation shall not be empowered to hand over to the said place of Divine Worship to any one denomination of Evangelical NonConformists for their exclusive use. “However, with the growing congregation, it was clear that some changes needed to be made. They began with a momentous decision made by the Trustees early in 1889.

Chapter II

**I Will Build My Church** (Matthew 16-18)

1889 – 1911

In February 1889 the Trustees met to discuss what needed to be done to face the changing situation within the Chapel and the Town. Since the Chapel was built the population of Hunstanton had more than doubled, and the Congregation had increased likewise. Thus the decision was made to invite a full-time Minister to Union Chapel. The man chosen was already well-known to the Congregation: Rev. Richard Athol Cliff, who for some years had been Minister of the Congregational Church in King’s Lynn, which had such close links with Union Chapel. On Tuesday 11th February 1890, Rev. Cliff called a special meeting of the Congregation – the proposition was to form a Church. Rev. Cliff spoke for some time about the decision that was to be made, stressing the difference between Chapel and Church. The Chapel was the building which had been erected some 20 years earlier; the Church would be the people who met to Worship in the building. Thus Union Church would be the people who met to Worship in Union Chapel. After much discussion, it was carried unanimously “that a Church should be formed to unite more closely the Christian members of the Congregation in spiritual Fellowship, to facilitate the transfer of members to and from other communities, and for the reception of new converts. None shall be admitted except those who love the Lord Jesus Christ and accept his teaching. “Thus was the beginning of Union Church, and for two years Rev. Cliff provided pastoral oversight, and a regular preaching ministry. However, in 1892 he announced to the Congregation that he intended to move to Grantham, to be the minister of the Congregational Church there.

Rev. Cliff had formed a committee to oversee the practical running of the Church, and it was this Committee that decided that to maintain the non-denominational nature of Union, a Baptist Minister should be invited next. The man chosen was Rev. Wyndham Colin Bryan, trained at the Pastor’s College at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London under C.H. Spurgeon. He had a great evangelistic vision, and already had one very fruitful pastorate at Bluntisham in Cambrudgeshire. One of the major influences in the Church at this time was Herbert George Ibberson (1866-1935), son of Charles Ibberson one of the founders of Union Chapel. He was also related to the Jewson family. Trained as an architect, he and his wife moved to Hunstanton in 1890, and he quickly became an important figure in the Church and the Town. Many of the buildings in the town from this period were designed by him, housed along Lincoln and Boston Square, in Northgate and Austin Street, the Roman Catholic Church, the Vestry of St Edmunds, and a new wing on its vicarage. He was chairman of the local RSPCA, and treasurer of the Red Cross. He was soon co-opted onto the committee of Union Church, and it is not hard to see his influence at work. Rev. Bryan was married to Herbert Ibbersons cousin, and was a close friend.

It was initially decided to invite Rev. Bryan for just two years, but this was renewed twice over, and he remained until 1899. His evangelistic zeal soon came to the fore as he planned a mission for Hunstanton during the Spring of 1894, which was to be led by “an excellent lady” he knew by the name of Miss Ginger. In the end the Mission never took place as he failed to get the full support of the congregation for such a venture.

The thorny question of Baptism arose during this time, and strong views were expressed on both sides concerning infant and adult Baptism. Eventually a compromise was reached (although Rec. Bryan made known his dissatisfaction with it in the minutes) that “in any case where baptism was desired – infant or adult – arrangements should be made for the same to take place elsewhere than in the chapel”. An interesting case for church discipline arose during July 1894, one of the committee members a Mr Roberts was fined by the courts for assault and tendered his resignation from the church. It was decided he could remain in the congregation, but no longer play an active part in the life of the church. Said Herbert Ibberson “Whatever the right and wrong of the case maybe. It certainly is hardly the thing for a public official in connection with a chapel to place himself liable to a fine of assault”. The Hunstanton weather seems to have been a great problem for the committee, on a number of occasions the church suffered storm damage an oil lamp was purchased and to hang outside the the vestry door when required, there was a damp problem in the school room (something the church has suffered from for almost its whole existence), and there were many complaints about the coldness of the building for Sunday Worship. It was decided that “Heating Apparatus” would be introduced, and in 1895 a firm from Chatteris (Moulton’s) installed the heating system for £52.7.9 around this time new incandescent lighting was also fitted for £11.6.0.

For the first 25 years of life there had been no organ in the chapel, and singing had been accompanied by a harmonium and “other instruments as were available”. In 1895 Mr Dalladay, the organist at St. Mary’s Parish Church, Old Hunstanton, offered Union a small organ, he had in his house – free of charge, it was used for 5 years, until in 1900 Herbert Ibberson offered to purchase a new organ for the Church.

Originally the Methodist Circuit for North West Norfolk was centred on Walsingham but in 1887 a decision was taken to divide, and a new circuit be formed centred on Hunstanton. A minister was appointed Rev. G.H. Howson, and arrangements were made with the committee of Union to hold a Methodist service one Sunday per month. The work began to grow and in 1888 a mission was started in Old Hunstanton. But the Methodists wanted their own building, and therefore Mr J.H. Page secretary of Union took the new Methodist minister to see Hamon LeStrange about a piece of land in Old Hunstanton. To their surprise, he offered them a piece in the new town. Both had been under the impression that he would grant no more land there for nonconformist worship. Soon after, when Union made their decision to appoint their own Minister, and the Methodists knew their days were numbered, they began work on their own building. At the time the Methodist Minister wrote, “The Union Chapel friends had taken the step they had done because they heard The Squire had offered us land and imagined we might accept it. As a matter of fact we should not have had a Chapel today, had they not forced such a course on us”. The relationship between the churches was obviously very tense, as he goes on “Should you have occasion to require it, I can supply you with a correspondence which took place between Mr Ibberson and myself in the local paper, but my devout hope is that out antagonists will bury there opposition. It has never been reciprocated by myself or our people, and I have done everything consistent with principle to heal the breach. There is utmost need for the strength of union amongst the nonconformists in the face of priestism and ritualism in the Anglican Church”.

As well as monthly meetings of the committee, there was also an Annual Meeting of the Church membership, with a guest preacher. A minute for the meeting in September 1894 records “Rev. Green of Burnham made a long and not very satisfactory speech. Rev. A.J. Osborne followed with a much more excellent address. So Rev. Bryan had only a few minutes in which to share his plans for Winter Work”. At the meeting in September 1898 Rev. Bryan advised the Church not to invite him again. However, they ignore his advice, and unanimously called him for another two years! But in February of the next year, he announced from the pulpit that he would be moving to Rickmansworth Baptist Church, and would conclude his ministry in Hunstanton at the end of February. From there he went to Ampthill, in Bedfordshire, where he was to die, aged 61, while still in pastorate. His two sons both followed him into the Baptist Ministry. Rev. Bryan had a great influence on at lease one teenager in the congregation. Edward Murray Page was born in Hunstanton, and was the son of the Church Secretary. In 1903 he entered Regents Park College to train for the Baptist Ministry. He planned initially to be a missionary, but was turned down by the Baptist Missionery Society because of poor health. After leaving college, he married Rev. Cliff’s daughter, Mary, organist at Union at the time, and a Fellow of The Royal College of Organists. He held pastorates in Leeds, Northampton, Finchley and Amersham, before retiring to Bristol and dying in November 1969. He never lost his enthusiasm for the BMS, and would have been chairman of the society in 1947, had it not been for his ill health once again.

When Rev. Bryan left, it was the unanimous feeling of the committee that Rev. Richard Cliff should be invited back from Grantham. In his letter of acceptance, he stated he felt it was “a mark of great charity and great honour” to be invited for a second time. The initial plan was that he should begin in April 1899, but a bout of influenza meant that the recognition service had to be postponed to the middle of May. His stipend was to be £12.0.0 a month.

Soon after Rev. Cliff arrived, Herbert Ibberson proposed major changes to the inside of the Chapel. He wished to give an Organ, at a cost of £300, in memory of his late father, and wanted the church to agree to the installation of a communion platform, pulpit, communion table and choir pews. The total cost for this he estimated at £400 (although the final total was actually £570).

A gift day was called and £250 was raised immediately. Herbert Ibberson then made another suggestion, a glass lobby to be erected at the East Door but the membership were less happy about this, and so it was never built. During the renovation which took about 3 months, the congregation met for worship in a private home (one wonders how they all squeezed in), but on 27th May 1900 the chapel was re-opened, complete with new fixtures, new organ, new hymn books (also given by Mr Ibberson), and a movable portable lavatory! With a proper organ, an organ blower was engaged for Sunday Services and other practices at a salary of 13/- per quarter.

Union Chapel, unlike many nonconformist buildings, is rich in religious symbolism, much of which can be traced to the direct influence of Herbert Ibberson. The Stained glass windows, is in Art Nouveau style depicting the ‘Tree of Life’ a design which can also be seen in some of the carved woodwork. The Roof Trusses have fretted heart motifs, as does the dark pine communion table. Each of the two hymnboards proclaim a truth about hymn singing, the one on the left carries a carving of an ill nourished bird with its leg broken surrounded by dying leaves and rose petals. The bird on the right hymnboard is very different, well fed, and uninjured surrounded by roses in full bloom, above it is a crown, and the words ‘Gaudens Lauda’ – praise in rejoicing. Whatever our mood and situation in life, sorrow or rejoicing, we can still praise God. There are also three repousse copper plaques, two small and one larger. The smaller ones depict subchristian worship, one bears a sun, representing those people who worship God in Nature, the other a square, a heart and a circle, symbols of honesty, charity and wholeness, representing those whom, although ignorant of Jesus, seek to live a Good Life. The larger plaque has on it a lamb bearing a cross, proclaiming the central feature of the Christian Faith: The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World. After Rev. Cliff had been at Union for two years, the question came up as to whether like. Rev. Bryan, he needed to be re-invited at regular intervals. It was decided that he was so popular with everybody that “there is no need to call the church and congregation together”. The churches social conscience was very evident over these years, a resolution was passed against war and the Transvaal in 1899 and there was a regular meeting on Wednesday evenings for ‘friends favourable in passive resistance’. The latter group conducted the church anniversary in 1904, it was “remarkable” say the minutes “in that is was conducted entirely by laymen”. The previous years anniversary preacher had been Mr George White MP then President of the Baptist Union.

An important decision faced the church in 1908 – Hamon le Strange offered the church the freehold of the land for £199.4.0. The decision was taken to purchase it, and to help the finances Rev. Cliff took a £20 cut in Stipend for one year. This was seen as a challenge to all members and friends to give sacrificially.

In February 1911 Rev. Cliff announced to the congregation his intention to retire. He had spent 12 years in his second ministry at Union, and a total of 43 years in all in the Congregational ministry. There was great sadness at the announcement, but nothing could be said or done to persuade him to stay on. When he left Hunstanton at the end of the month of that year, it was another turning point in the life of the church – his influence had guided it, directly and indirectly for over 30 years.

Chapter III

**Entrust To Reliable Men (2 Timothy 2:2)**

1911 – 1930

The new Minister for the Union Church was another Baptist, Rev. James Amos. Although born in England he was brought up in Scotland, and trained for the Ministry in Edinburgh University. His first pastorate had been in Kilbarchen, where he met and married his first wife. Still only in his twenties when he came to Hunstanton, he was immediately well liked, and although he only stayed for five years, was frequently invited back to preach on special occasions. He was described in his obituary as “a scholarly and warm hearted preacher, a wise leader, and an understanding pastor”.

At the meeting of the committee after his induction Service in October in 1911, the question was raised of whether he should wear his gown in the pulpit. The congregation were used to such a practice, but Rev. Amos requested no to, as he felt it would separate him from the people. The committee agreed that if it was his wish, he should be allowed to wear his suit, and no gown. He was keen to reach both residents and the holidaymakers for Christ and 1000 evangelistic leaflets were printed in 1912 to distribute among hotels, boarding and apartment houses in the town. This practice was repeated each year during his ministry. He also started a series of short services in the Chapel each weekday morning during the holiday season. They continued each summer until the 1950s. The church grew and in the summer of 1912 the secretary wrote to Rev. Amos “In view of the financial prosperity of the chapel, due largely to your efforts, it was unanimously decided to ask you to accept an increase in stipend of £20p.a”. This growth continued and in December 1915 he was asked to accept a further increase of £40 increase, But he refused to accept such a generous offer, replying “I have no right to accept it, nor have I done anything to deserve it. Give it to God, not to me.”

During these years the church was predominantly Baptist, so much that when in 1913 the Norfolk Congregational Union wrote to ask why no subscription had been paid by Union. The church replied that they saw no reason to support them as well as the Baptist Union. However, when the Congregational Union wrote again two years later. It was decided that both denominations should be supported financially.

The outbreak of war led to a retiring collection being taken at the end of every service for the help of those suffering through the war, and in February 1915 it was decided to leave the schoolroom open at all times so that it might be available as a place of shelter in case of Zeppelin raids. Furthermore, the chapel was insured against risk of damage by such raids. The Methodists wrote to the committee urging them to discontinue evening services because of the prospective blackout, but Union members were not so easily dissuaded “It will discourage our Sunday School and Bible Class work” they replied “and disrupt our evangelism, as we have a basement schoolroom, we could exclude the light easily, and therefore do not think it necessary to discontinue evening services”.

On the first Sunday in February 1916, Rev. Amos announced his intention to leave Hunstanton – he had been invited to become a Minister of Mansfield Road Baptist Church, Nottingham. Later, he ministered at Moseley, Birmingham and Willingdon, Sussex. He died in 1962.

A number of prospective ministers preached over the next few months, but it was over a year before the church chose Rev. Arthur Bourne, at that time minister of New College Congregational Chapel, Swiss Cottage, London. He commenced his ministry at Hunstanton on 15th July 1917. During the interregnum two issues seemed to dominate the committee members discussions. The first was the choir, relations were not always smooth between the choir and the rest of the congregation, and eventually it was decided to form a choir committee to deal with any business relating to them, and to be an intermediary between the choir and the congregation. The other issue concerned a new chapel-keeper. An advertisement was placed in the Lynn News, which resulted in 15 enquiries. In June 1916 a Mr Woods was appointed.

The churches social conscience continued to be evident, as they collected money to provide for the “comforts and pleasures of wounded soldiers”, for Norfolk POWs, and for the starving families of central Europe.

Up until this point in the churches history, ministers had lived in rented accommodation which they themselves had to find. In October 1918 the issue of buying a Manse first raised its head. A number of houses were looked at over the next few years, including ones in Cliff Parade and Avenue Road. But each time the church felt that the asking price was too high, and the respective owners refused to drop the price. A Manse fund had begun in December 1918, and eventually a house in Northgate was bought in May 1922 – the price paid was £850. The following month Rev. Bourne moved in.

A number of alterations and improvements were made to the chapel building, inevitably under the watchful eye of Herbert Ibberson. The school room was panelled and redecorated, new gas lights were installed in the chapel, a stone memorial was put up to the memory of those from Union Church who had served in the war, and a new boiler was purchased at the cost of £46. Mr Woods, the chapel-keeper complained that he had not had an increase in wages since he started, but the committee felt that what he received at present was quite adequate. They did, however, agree that a shilling should be paid for each ladies meeting in the schoolroom!

In June 1921 the church celebrated its Jubilee, with a sale of work on the Saturday (raising £300, £200 of which went into the Manse Fund), and Rev. Amos preached at the Sunday Services. 1000 copies of a leaflet briefly detailing the history of the church were printed and distributed around the town. The weekend was however, tinged with sadness, the occasion for Mr. J.H. Page to announced his resignation as secretary, a position he has held for 25 years. Just over a year later he died. The opportunity was taken at the Annual Meeting in October to revise the Constitution, committee members were to be elected for a period of 3 years, in future, 2 of them retiring each year. They were however, eligible for re election. The new secretary who was an ex-officio member of the committee was Mr. Coppin. Also at the meeting a new stipend was agreed for the Minister. £260p.a in monthly instalments, plus £40 Manse expenses, plus £20 bonus in July towards the cost of a holiday. The following year the church found itself without an organist. An advertisement was placed in the Lynn News, but it received no replies. Local churches were scoured for possible candidates, but none could be found. Finally. The secretary said that he would try and play to the best of his ability until someone more suitable could be found. In fact, he continued for over £20 years.

Early in 1925 Rev. Bourne announced his resignation, he was going to Rhos Congregational Church in South Wales. The church began looking for a new minister almost immediately, and Rev. Arthur Wright of Bristol was preaching with a view before Rev. Bourne had left! He was invited unanimously, but did not begin his ministry at Union until January 1926. The preacher at his induction was the Well Known Congregational Scholar, Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson.

The six months between his call and coming saw the church change manse. The property in Northgate in which Rev. Bourne had lived was sold to Herbert Ibberson, and the church purchased a new house. Martin Villa in Austin Street for £1025.

It was also of note that the preacher at the 1925 Annoversary weekend was the Congregational minister and hymn writer Carey Bonner.

In September 1927 the church was shocked to hear the news that Mr and Mrs Ibberson were leaving Hunstanton, and retiring to Devon, a number expressed the view that they could not imagine Union without his guiding hand and influence.

As a token of their love, the church presented the Ibbersons with a gold inlaid clock, and a fountain pen and pencil. In return, Herbert Ibberson for a stone tablet to be built on the chapel wall commemorating those fought and fallen in The Great War. That plaque was unveiled in March 1929, a ceremony for which Mr and Mrs Ibberson were invited back. He died a few years later in 1935, the three communion chairs at the front of the chapel were given in memory of his distinctive contribution to the life of Union Church.

The town of Hunstanton was now becoming a very different place from the “quiet locality” described in the original 1870 newspaper advertisement. During 1928 this came home to the congregation in two ways. Firstly, a local resident of the town. A Mr. Morgan drove his motor car into the grounds, demolishing two brick pillars and the iron fence. As a result, the church contacted the local Police Inspector, complaining about the quantity of motor car traffic in Hunstanton on Sundays, in particular around the chapel and requesting a man on point duty during the summer season. Inspector Bentham gave a polite reply, but pointed out that there were many other areas of need in the town on Summer Sundays.

Secondly, the church discovered that the new owner of the neighbouring property Mr. Wells, was intending turning it into a cinema. The committee decided that “they should do what they can to influence public opinion against the scheme”. A meeting was held with Mr. Wells, at which they pointed out the grievous effect on the work carried out at the chapel, especially amongst young people, but to no avail. Finally, it was decided that the church secretary and the Minister would appear before the magistrates in Docking to oppose the granting of a license. This hearing took place on September 10th 1928, and the result was that the Magistrates refused the license. After considering all his options Mr. Wells put the property up for sale in April 1930. There was some discussion at the committee meeting as to whether the church should try and buy the premises for their own use. The decision was unanimous at a special church meeting that they should go ahead, but they did not have the money to do so, Rev. Wright offered to leave the church, so that the manse could be sold, and the resulting funds to used. Although his offer was declined, only 5 months later he announced his resignation, not just from Union but also from the Congregational ministry. Despite this however, the church did not proceed any further with the neighbouring property.

Chapter IV

**In The World You Will Have Trouble** (John 16:33)

1931 – 1946

The tension between the Baptists and the Congregationalists at Union has surfaced from time to time in its history, especially during interregnums. After Rev. Wright left, there were those who felt it was time the church invited a Baptist minister, as it seemed to becoming too Congregational in its outlook. The man chosen was Rev. Phillip Chambers of Mutley Baptist Church, Plymouth. After his initial visit in June 1931, he wrote raising a number of queries, in particular concerning the practice of infant baptism, in the church which under Rev. Wright had begun again for the first time since 1894. Initially he was persuaded by the church’s answers, for he accepted the call at the end of June, but the following day the secretary received a telegram in which he stated he had changed his mind, and now felt that under God he could not minister in a church such as Union. The committee decided that things would be easier under a Congregational minister again, and so, following an initial visit, Rev. Stanley Green of Hinckley was invited in January 1932.

During the interregnum, the church had entered into negotiation with the East Anglian Electricity Company as to the desirability of lighting the church by electricity. The installation cost of £20, and the regular amount of 11 1/2d per unit used seemed rather expensive, and the matter was deferred to a later date. Regular discussions took place on the issue over the next few years, but it wasn’t until 1937 that is was installed in the schoolroom (at a cost of £14.7.6), and in 1939 in the chapel itself.

Soon after his arrival, Rev. Green outlined his plans for the future, a young men’s circle to be held on Sunday Afternoons, A Young Peoples Fellowship on a weeknight evening, and an evangelical mission in the town. As to the latter, it was decided to enter into it jointly with the Methodists. Discussions with them and their minister Rev. Jukes continued over the next five years, and it was eventually decided that a monthly united midweek evangelistic service would be held in the schoolroom. These only ran for about a year, owing to the outbreak of the Second World War. It was also during Rev. Green’s time that a yearly bazaar in the Town Hall began, the first one in 1934 raised £192.16.7 for the church funds. Some of this was intended to pay for the renovation of the organ, but in the end all money for that was given to Mrs Ibberson in memory of her husband.

The traffic was still causing great problems for the church, especially during the holiday season. The secretary wrote to the council asking “could something be done to do away with the noise of motor traffic past the church during service hours in the season”. The council agreed to consult the local Police about the matter. The Lynn News reported the story over a number of weeks, and printed in full the letter the letter of reply to the church from the Police Superintendant. In it he wrote, “Although I sympathise with those attending divine service, I am afraid they are victims of the changed habits of the general public....we should not be within out rights in denying the use of Sandringham Road to hundreds of tax-paying motorists so that other citizens could worship in comparative silence. It would be giving the latter a kind of monopoly...that is quite outside our province”. Shortly afterwards, the suggestion was discussed at the committee of settling back the boundary wall at the corner of Westgate and Sandringham Road so as to make it safer for the motorists. At the same time, Mr. Coppin announced his resignation as church Secretary. He had seen the church through some difficult local issues, and was replaced at the general meeting in October 1936 by Mr. J.T. Whomes.

Within a couple of weeks of the outbreak of the Second World War, Rev. Green announced his intention to leave Hunstanton, to become the minister of Ramsgate Congregational Church. He left Union in October in 1939.

Almost immediately, the question of lighting restrictions was discussed and it was agreed to move the time of evening service from 6.30pm to 6.00pm and to hold it in the schoolroom, which could be blacked out. It was also decided that in the event of an air raid during morning service, the congregation should immediately move downstairs into the schoolroom for safety. The same schoolroom was opened up for the use of the forces on Thursday and Sunday Evenings from 1940, as a canteen. A wireless set was soon requested by them, and the church agreed on the condition that on Sunday evenings it be set for religious broadcasts. However, some church members were unhappy about this, and after three months, the soldiers were told they could not use the set at all on Sundays. There were other tensions with the forces, the choir offertory box in the apse of the chapel was pilfered on several occasions, and some church members kept it no secret that they believed the servicemen were responsible. The call for iron in 1942 meant the church had to give up it’s railings and gates, they were replaced by wooden ones. And as the war dragged on, so it was decided to keep the door of the church unlocked during the daytime so that the people of the town could come in and pray for peace.

Disquiet was expressed by a number of church members that there was no settled minister at Union, and that the committee seemed to be doing nothing about the situation. There seems to be some truth in this, as the pastorate was not discussed between 1940 and 1942. Spiritual oversight to the church, was being given by Dr. Gilbert Laws, the minister of St. Marys Baptist Church, Norwich. He would come across for special meetings, and was preaching at the church on about six or seven Sundays a year. He was obviously very well liked by the congregation, because on three separate occasions between 1942 and 1943 he was invited to become the minister of Union. Each time his reply was that mush as he would like he felt he should remain at St. Marys until after the War. The lack of a settled minister, and the continuing War was obviously getting the people down, it was pointed out that congregation sizes were dropping, and in 1942 the Womens Guild had to close due to lack of support. After a number of prospective ministers preaching at Union during the early part of 1943, Rev. Clifford MacQuire of Aston Park Congregational Church, was invited in August of that year.

Immediately, the cost of the Manse was raised. The house in Austin Street was in use by the Military, and could not be released. At a special meeting of the church members in October 1943, it was decided to raise a mortgage to buy the new property “Carholme” in Northgate. By the time Rev. MacQuire arrived in Hunstanton, the new manse was ready for him.

He led the church through the closing days of the Second World War, often calling special services or times of prayer regarding National Events, for example a Day of Prayer was held to coincide with the D-Day landings in Normandy in June 1944. At the end of the War, a special Thanksgiving Service was held, to which all residents of the town were invited. Soon after, the military left the old Manse in Austin Street, and it was quickly sold for £1250 to pay off the mortgage on the new house in Northgate.

There were inevitable continuing complaints about the noise of traffic on Sundays, outside the church, and once again the secretary wrote to the local Police. However, there was also concern about noise within the church, the minister was asked to “say a few words” to the choir concerning the level of chatter at the end of services! In November 1944, the church lost its oldest member, Miss Susan Peachy, aged 103. She had spent her youth in Vienna, working for the costumier who supplied the crowned heads of Europe, including the Hapsburgs. Returning to London, she had been converted under the ministry of C.H. Spurgeon, and was baptised by him at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. At the Annual General Meeting of the church in October 1945 Rev. MacQuire put forward a number of ideas he had for the future (only one of them was ever carried out), that there should be a young person on the committee (by which he meant someone under the age of 21), that the hymnbooks were unsuitable, especially for children, and should be changed to “Songs of Praise”, that the arrangement of the chapel be changed from 2 side aisles to 1 central aisle, and that an electric organ blower be installed. This latter was done in November 1945 at a cost of £70.

To be fair, the other suggestions may well have come into effect had it not been that Rev. MacQuire had to tender his resignation within a couple of months. His wife had been far from well for some time, and so in the summer of 1946 he left Hunstanton to work for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. That Autumn, for the first time ever, the Remembrance Day Service attended by the British Legion would not be held at Union Church, but at the Parish Church of St. Edmund’s. The World, and the town of Hunstanton in particular, was soon to become a very different place.

Chapter V

 **Devoted to the Fellowship** (Acts 2:42)

1946 – 1958

On the Sunday before Christmas 1946, Rev. G. O. Cornish, preached with a view at Union. He was then Minister of Gunnersby Congregational Church, Chiswick, and a meeting at the beginning of the New Year invited him for a period of four years, to begin in May 1947.

Social issues both National and Local seemed to dominate his time at Union. Within a few weeks of arriving, a poll was held in the town concerning the opening of the cinema on Sundays. The church opposed such a move, but the people of Hunstanton voted for Sunday films. As such, the church wrote to the Council as follows- “We, the members and congregation of Union Church, Hunstanton, do petition the District Licensing Justices to rule when granting a license to the Capitol Cinema to give public performance on Sundays, that such performances shall not open earlier than 5.30pm, and that no films except those suitable for Universal Exhibition are shown.” A couple of years later, the church involved itself in another matter, writing not only to the local council, but also to the Local Member of Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, the sale of contraceptives through slot machines.

One of the most memorable regular events during this time seems to have been the Exhibitions of Living Statues, it was held every year between 1947 and 1951, and people paid 1/- entrance fee. Those who took part still remember the events with great affection.

The church protested to the British Legion about the holding of the Remembrance Sunday service at St, Edmunds in 1946, and so it was decided from the following year that the service would alternate between the two venues. The practice continued until the mid 1960’s. There were problems with the Young Peoples Fellowship, which had been started by Rev. Green. Although a large number came to weeknight meetings, not one attended evening worship. Therefore is was decided by the committee to close down the young peoples work. Rev. Cornish did restart in 1950, and a Brownie Pack was also begun on Church Premises at that time, the latter only survived for two years.

The problem of a regular organist had been a perennial one since the 1920’s, and had frequently been discussed at committee meetings. The issue reached a head in January 1948, and Mrs Millie Cooper offered to take lessons, with a view to becoming the regular organist. She held that position until the end of 1994, a total of 47 years!

Another concern was the diminishing congregation size, a problem which many churches began to face during the 1940’s and the 1950’s. This was leading to increasing financial difficulties in the Church, and a letter was sent to all members and friends urging them to increase their giving. Sunday evening services were particularly suffering, and so it was proposed to change the format now and again. A monthly discussion forum was begun, the first being held in 1951 on the subject of “Religion in Hunstanton”. The forums seemed popular, and the evening congregation was certainly larger at them. Another approach was to have 1000 invitation cards printed, every member of the church and congregation to invite one other person to come to the church with them on Sundays.

As an incentive for newcomers, the evening service would occasionally be followed by a social hour in the schoolroom. A film projector was donated to the church, so that Religious films could be shown on some Sunday evenings. However, after only a year the church was broken into and the projector stolen.

The Anniversary services for 1950 (the 80th anniversary of the church) were conducted by Dr. Muriel Paulden of St. Paul’s House, Liverpool. She was born in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, but at the age of 12 (in 1904) was sent to Rhianva College a “select ladies boarding school” on Cliff Parade in Hunstanton. On Sundays the girls had to attend either the Parish Church of St. Edmunds or Union. On her 21st birthday, she took up a teaching post at the school, and shortly afterwards, under the ministry of Rev. Amos, accepted Jesus as her own personal saviour. She felt a call to missionary work in India, and in 1915 left Hunstanton to go to Missionery Training College at Selly Oak in Birmingham. Unfortunately, the London Missionary Society believed her medically unfit for mission work, and she was to spend almost the rest of her life working in Liverpool. Her biography records that during the next 30 years “over 2000 young men and women trained under the leadership of Rev. Muriel Paulden, strengthened the life of our Sunday Schools and Churches.

The property committee proposed and oversaw a number of renovations during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, a new lavatory was installed under the staircase leading to the schoolroom, the organ was renovated because of woodworm, the schoolroom was redecorated in an attempt to ge rid of the damp problem, and most importantly of all, the wall in Sandringham Road and the fence in Westgate were moved altering the shape of the corner. The scheme had first been discussed by the church in 1936, and the proposal was to give the corner to the council to make it safer for the ever increasing amount of traffic. It was hoped by doing this, the council would pay for all the work, and so a meeting was held with the surveyor and Clerk of the Council in July 1950. However, in January 1951 the church heard that the council were not willing to pay for anything. But all was not lost, a church member, Mr. Shanks, offered to pay for the scheme himself, as a permenant memorial to his late wife who had been a member of Union for over 50 years. The work went ahead, complete with plaque and seat for members of the public, and was officially dedicated by Rev. Cornish on Sunday May 11th 1952 (the gates were added in 1956).

By then Rev. Cornish had announced his resignation, and his call to West Ealing, Congregational Church from August of that year. At his farewell, the secretary said, that he would be remembered for four things, his high standard of preaching, his achievement of criticism “which is the mark of an independent mind”, his wider service in the town and Mrs Cornish “an atom bomb of Christianity”! During the interregnum, the Womens Guild was begun again (having been discontinued during the war), and 200 copies of the hymn book “Congregational Praise” were purchased in memory of Mr. Walton (who was a member of the church from 1917 to 1951).

The church invited Rev. Dennis Cornelius of London Road Congregational Church, Brighton to preach with a view on Sunday 1st February 1953. The evening before saw the Great Floods in Hunstanton in which many lost their lives. The Committee sent a letter to the chairman of the town council expressing their sincere sympathy to all who suffered in any way. Among the dead were five who passed through Union’s Sunday School, and a spray of flowers was sent for each one of the burial services held on the 5th February.

Rev. Cornelius was invited again in March (his first visit must of been quite traumatic), and was offered the pastorate. He began his ministry in June of that year, and two months later took part in the dedication of Memorial on the sea front to those who lost their lives in the floods.

At his first Annual Meeting, Rev. Cornelius laid out his vision for the future of the church, quarterly church meetings (as opposed to the annual at present), monthly “Question and Answer” evening services, the formation of a new Youth Fellowship, a regular “Fayre” to be held in the Town Hall to raise funds, and the complete redecoration of the premises.

The first “Country Fayre” took place on Thursday September 9th, and was opened by Countess of Leicester. The following years saw a “Radio Fayre” opened by Auntie Jean of BBC Children’s Radio, and a “Gypsy Fayre” opened by Viscountess Althorp. Rev. Cornelius also arranged for well known personality Sandy MacPherson to visit the church in October 1955, and two recitals were given on a Saturday afternoon and evening. He also attempted, without success, to get the BBC to broadcast a Sunday Morning radio service from Union in 1956.

As well as the painting of the inside of the chapel, it was decided to change the colour of carpet and curtains to blue. The original plan was to have them dyed, but owing to poor quality new ones had to be purchased at a cost of £99.19.0. A board was also dedicated listing names and dates of the past ministers of the church, and a clock was given by two church members. At this point the members discovered that all was not well with the building, there was a serious dry rot problem in the schoolroom, which cost almost £400 to put right. It was writes the Church secretary in his Annual report, “a great shock to our members”. Furthermore, the chapel needed a new roof, and a roof fund was launched in 1956. There were also problems with the Organ, on a number of Sundays it caused all the electric lights to fuse, and the rattling was so loud during the hymns that members could not hear themselves sing!

Each Year at the Annual General Meeting Rev. Cornelius laid out before the members of the church new ideas he had for the following twelve months, he discontinued the early morning summer weekday services which had been begun by Rev. Amos for holiday visitors, they were by now very poorly attended, he changed the date of the Church Anniversary from October to July, so as to coincide with the month when the foundation stone of the chapel was actually laid, he attempted to get the Town Hall as a relay centre for Billy Graham’s Mission in 1956. When that failed, he organised jointly with the Methodist Church for a local mission in the town. Sunday Evening film services were also begun again, and proved to be very popular.

But despite all this activity, congregations remained relatively small, especially during the winter months. Three rows of chairs were removed, and people encouraged to sit at the front. The nature of the town was changing too. Twice it had hosted scooter rallies on a Sunday, both times at the protest of the church. Money was stolen from the church on a number of occasions, and it was decided with regret, that church premises should always be locked in future.

In 1958 Rev. Cornelius informed the church of the decision to move to Clevedon Congregational Church, Somerset and he left Hunstanton in the August of that year. It was at that point that the members decided it was time to unite for some services with the Methodist Church, a practice that has continued, in varying degrees, to the present day.

Chapter VI

**We Will Be Changed** (1 Corinthians 15:5.1)

1958 – 1965

Soon after Rev. Cornelius had left, the church received a letter from the Superintendemt of the Eastern Area of the Baptist Union, Rev. J.H.G. Adam. In it he pointed out that they should seriously consider appointed a Baptist Minister to Union. The Church was supposed to be non-denominational according to the trust deeds, but it had not had a Baptist Minister since Rev. Amos left 43 years previously. The name recommended to the church was Rev. Gerald Ferroussat, who had been trained at Spurgeons College, and was presently minister of another Union Church at Hutton and Shenfield in Essex. He made two visits to the Church at the end of 1958 and the beginning of 1959 before being unanimously called to be its minister, beginning on Whit Sunday 1959.

His time was to be marked by a major change in the church rules and in the way in which the church was governed. Firstly, the practice of quarterly church meetings was revived, a suggestion which had been proposed by originally by Rev. Cornelius, but which had never really caught on. The first was held in July 1960. The minutes record that it was very poorly attended, and the main topic of consideration was how to increase giving in the church.

At the Annual General Meeting in October 1961, the next major change took place it was decided that the committee, the body of twelve who had managed the business of the church for many years, had no traceable origin or authority. Therefore from that meeting it was dissolved. From this point on , the business of the church would be conducted by all its members meeting every month. There was still to be a Secretary and a Treasurer.

The first of the new monthly church meetings took place in January 1962, with only 8 members present. The minutes record “Attention was drawn to the lamentable state of affairs that for a church of the membership of 67 members, only 8 could see their way to being present for a Church Meeting”. By the summer, the average attendance of such church meetings was still only nine, and so it was decided to form a diaconate there would be six deacons, to be elected at the Annual General Meeting. Nominations must be signed by two members of the church, and those eligible must be over 21 and have been members for over 6 months. At that AGM there were 36 members present and three nominations for Deacons. The three were unanimously elected, and held their first Deacons meeting in November 1962.

Diminishing congregational size was still a problem, and a number of novel suggestions were tried to reverse the trend, changing the evening service to afternoon, changing the nature of the services, and it was even proposed that the inside of the chapel be turned 90 degrees.

In 1960 King’s Lynn Congregational Church, which had been such a support to Union in the early days, closed. The church were offered pews and curtains from it, but in fact had only the lectern. Around this time Mr Whomes gave up the Secretaryship after 24 years, due to ill health – he died within a year, and a new lectern was purchased in his memory. The church had wanted to make him an Elder, on his retirement as secretary, but he refused to allow them, he wanted no attention drawn to himself, only to his Lord.

The nature of Worship and Sunday Services was frequently discussed, Rev. Ferroussat felt that the reading of the notices was unhelpful and wanted it phased out, but he was out voted at the church meeting. The Question of hymns and tunes was another controvertial issue “Disappointment has been expressed by members of the congregation that owning to unfamiliar tunes they felt unable to enter fully into worship. It was pointed out that many of the tunes sung to familiar hymns on the radio are not in our hymnbook, there followed a very large discussion”. Fabric was also a major issue. The church changed to oil heating in 1961, and the church was finally re roofed. A new pulpit light was purchased, and a chair fund was opened.

One especially contentious issue arose when the church was invited to take part in a “Flower and Wine Tasting Evening” at the Town Hall. There were very strong feelings on both sides, and when a vote was taken there was only one in it. Therefore, because of the sensitive consciences of some, it was agreed that the church should not be involved.

During the second half of Rev. Ferroussats ministry there was a growing undercurrent of dissatisfaction amongst the congregation, which occasionally came to the surface at meetings. The financial position of the church meant that it was not really able to afford to pay his stipend, there was “a growing feeling that the services had become too automatic even to the point of monotony”, and some members disagreed with what he preached regularly in the pulpit. The issue came to a head not within the church, but within the wider area of the Norfolk Baptist Association. In 1965 Rev. Ferroussat had been invited to become Vice President of the Norfolk Baptist Association, with a view to becoming the President the following year. In his vice presidential address he had made very clear his theologically liberal credentials. Norfolk Baptists have traditionally been very evangelical, and following the 1965 Assembly six ministers wrote to say they would withdraw their churches from from the Association if Rev Ferroussat became President. Before any final decision could be made by the Association Committee, Rev. Ferroussat himself made a decision, he resigned from the pastorate at Union, and from the Baptist Ministry in general. He was to enter the Anglican Ministry, and from Hunstanton went for a period of training at Mirfield.

It was a traumatic time for the church, both for those who supported Rev. Ferroussat and for those who thought he ought to go. As a result, there were two resignations from the diaconate, and seven resignations of church members over the issue. Whatever the future held for Union Church, one thing was now crystal clear, it could now longer afford to pay for its own minister. One final sad note from the minutes of the same church meeting, “All members over 13 had forsaken the Church Youth Club for the new town Youth Centre. It was agreed to close all the Church youth work.

Chapter VII

**That They Maybe One** (John 17:22)

1966 – 1983

In the April of 1966 the Deacons met with Rev. John Buckingham, Moderator of the Easter Province of the Congregational Union. There was a great deal of discussion “as to the present unrest and unhappiness which had occurred in the previous ministry”, and serious questions were raised as to whether the church could afford a minister any longer. It was agreed that what was needed was a close look at the ministry and constitution of Union Church, and “it was definitely agreed that the church required a Congregational minister, not a Baptist”. An application was made to the Congregational Union for financial assistance, and over the next few months a number of prospective ministers were invited to meet the Deacons, and to preach.

In January 1967 Rev. John Buckingham met with the church members, and informed them that churches with less than 100 members were very unlikely to be considered for a minister, unless there were special circumstances. He did, however, have an alternative proposal, what did they think about combining with the Congregational churches at Wells and South Creake, and sharing a minister. It was agreed to pursue the issue, and a meeting was arranged with the members at Wells. Over the Summer months the Deacons of both churches met on a number of occasions, and by the Autumn some details had been agreed. The new Minister would live in the Hunstanton Manse, and the Wells Manse would be let. The money from this letting would be divided equally between the two churches. Apart from this, it was felt that each church should retain it’s own finances. The much smaller church at South Creake would pay what they felt they could afford.

These discussions on unity at a local level reflected the discussions going on at the same time nationally regarding the union of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches. It was first discussed at Union at a special church meeting in February 1966, and continued to be a regular topic on the Agenda. As the National plans regarding for formation of the “United Reformed Church” became clear, there was some concern as to the position of churches like Union, and so a meeting was called in London for all those interested. It was addressed by Rev. John Huxtable of the Congregational Union, and Dr. David Russell of the Baptist Union. Union Church sent two representatives to this meeting in April 1971, but it turned out to be very disappointing, “the heads of the three denominations had met over lunch, and could not reach any satisfactory agreement on the plight of Union Churches”, The Congregational Assembly in May 1971 saw the go ahead of the national union, and it was decided to hold a special church meeting for members to express their views. The following resolution was put before the meeting “That this church resolved to unite with other member churches of the Congregational Church, and with congregations of the Presbyterian Church to form one united church under the name of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales, by the procedures and upon the basis, terms and conditions, and with the ministry structure and councils defined and declared in the scheme of Union”. The motion was carried with 25 votes for and just two against. Thus Union Church, Hunstanton became affiliated to the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church.

Since the beginning of 1966 Flight Sergeant Michael Melvin has been attending Union with his wife. He was based at RAF Marham, but was looking at the possibility of entering the Congregational ministry when he left the Air Force. Union had given him a number of preaching opportunities, and he was very well liked. Minutes in 1967 records “he has made many friends with us, and also shared much joy in our fellowship”. At a joint meeting with the members at Wells at the end of 1967, it was agreed to ask Mr. Melvin to become the minister, part time until his discharge in May 1969, and full time from that point on. He expressed a wish to move into the Manse as soon as possible (and commute back and forth to Marham), and so notice to quit was given to a local Doctor who had been renting it since the departure of Rev. Ferrousat, Once in he began to give some pastoral insight to the church, and also to chair meetings. His induction was arranged for 5th June 1969.

It is clear that the atmosphere within the church had now changed dramatically. From the anxiety and depression of a couple of years previously, there was now a feeling of great hope and optimism for the future. The church purchased a duplicator and 200 new chairs. The question was raised as to when the church would celebrate it’s centenary, and it was decided that 1969 would be the 100th Anniversary. A guest preacher, Rev. Sydney Myers, was booked. There was uproar when at a church meeting two months later, it was announced there had been a mistake, the centenary would actually be in 1970! Fortunately, Rev. Myers had agreed to come then instead. Perhaps the biggest decision made at this time was to purchase a new manse. 74 Church Street was very quickly agreed upon, and with the help of a loan from a church member, Mr. Melvin was able to move in by February 1970. However, the sale of the old manse took much longer, contracts were not exchanged until the summer of 1971.

There were also a number of problems and tensions at this time, the church began to suffer from regular vandalism and burglary, and the members discovered they weren’t insured and “this came as a great shock”. Damp in the schoolroom was a great worry, and there was much discussion as to how it could be remedied. Furthermore, as the date of Mr. Melvin’s induction grew nearer, tensions surfaced between the three churches, now called the North West Norfolk Group.

One of the first actions of the church after the induction of Mr. Melvin as probationer minister (which eventually took place on 14th June 1969) was to adopt the new constitution which the Deacons had been drawing up. At the Annual General Meeting that year all the members of the Diaconate resigned, and a new Diaconate was constituted, made up of secretary, treasurer and six deacons (two of which would stand down each year).

At Mr. Melvin’s first church meeting after the induction a major controversy blew up, it was proposed by one of the members to hold a regular Whist Drive to raise money for church funds. Mr. Melvin expressed his opposition, and there was a very heated discussion. When a vote was taken, there was eight for, four against and four abstentions. “The minutes record, “although there was a majority for, the chairman said this could not be carried as the decision was not unanimous”. Such a summing up did not go down well, one member resigned there and then, because of “the way this majority vote had been disallowed”. An emergency meeting was called two weeks later, at which Mr. Melvin said he had reconsidered his position. He had come to the conclusion that whist was not a game of chance, but one of skill. Therefore, he decided that the matter should be put to the vote once more. This time it was carried, and the member apologised for the trouble it had caused, and came back into church membership. It had raised the issue of the nature of the church meeting. At a further special meeting in September. Mr. Melvin drew out the differences between a business meeting and a church meeting, business meetings and were looking for the views of members, church meetings for the mind of Christ. It was agreed that in future all major decisions should require 75% majority. Plans were well underway for the centenary celebrations in July 1970, there was to be a flower festival on the history of the church through the ages, and a garden fete to be held on the Youth Centre Field. A history of Union Church, entitled “These Hundred Years” was written by a retired Congregational minister in membership, Rev. R.G. Martin. Just two months before the day, the preacher Rev. Sydney Myers contacted the church asking to be excused. A number of alternatives were suggested, but eventually Rev. Clifford Charlton (from the Norwich district of the URC) conducted worship and preached

Over the next few years the congregation grew in numbers, and that growth was reflected in the membership too. A suggestion box was placed in the Apse, which produced a number of interesting remarks! Someone wanted the choir to take a more active part in worship, but it was decided “inadvisable due to the state of the choir”. There was also the suggestion of loud speaker installation, this was rejected as being too expensive, “there are always plenty of free seats at the front of the church”. It was decided to change the title of Deacon to Elder, in accordance with the practice of the new URC, and a Hunstanton Churches Committee was formed (avoiding the title ‘Council of Churches’ because of opposition to the World Council of Churches).

Mr. Melvin finished his study for the ministry at the end of 1971, receiving a “Pass with Credit”, and his ordination was arranged in Wells for March 1972. He presented the congregation of Union with all sorts of new ideas for the future, the layout of the church was to be turned around, with the Apse converted into a Communion area, with the pulpit to one side, a local Festival of Light was to held on the Green in the town, with Cliff Richard as a special guest, another fete was to be held on the Youth Centre Field like that for the Centenary, with a concert in the evening. On the outside, all seemed to be going well, but Rev. Melvin was having family difficulties. He had discussed the situation with the Elders, but it came to a head following a letter in the local press in November 1972. The Elders pledged their support to the minister, but in May 1973 he announced his resignation from the church. 18 months later he was inducted to the pastorate of the Roydon and Harlow group of URC churches in Essex.

The church looked for leadership and guidance at the difficult time to Rev. Martin and he took on the role of moderator, with a local retired Baptist Minister, Rev. Harry Chapman, giving support where needed. At a joint meeting of the Elders of the three churches in July 1973, it was decided to dissolve the group, it was felt that the group itself had contributed to the problems, Hunstanton provided plenty enough work for a minister alone. The AGM that year was chaired by Rev. Martin. He called on the membership to “live for the future and not the past, Go forward in faith and hope, believing God will open up the way”. The members were told that the North West Norfolk Group of URC churches had now ceased to exist, and Union would be “going it alone”. An offer had also been received for the now vacant manse from its next door neighbour. The offer was very tempting, but a letter from the URC moderator dissuaded the church, should the manse be sold he told them, there was no likelihood of ever getting a new minister,

Towards the end of 1973, the name of Rev. John Ballard was recommended to the church. He was currently minister in St. Ives, Cambs, and was looking for a semi retirement pastorate. Following a visit to the church in February 1974, he was invited to be a minister on a part time basis, to begin at the end of July. Fabric concerns seemed to increasingly dominate meetings of elders and church, a considerable amount of work was undertaken at the Manse, including the sale of a strip of land to 76 Church Street to straighten the boundary. The state of the church buildings was causing great worry and it was decided to apply for a grant from the URC to help restore them. A grant was eventually refused, and the church was offered a loan of £250, repayable over 5 years. The church was also rewired and new steps were built at the entrance,

Although the group of churches was no longer in existence, Rev. Ballard did preach regularly at Wells, becoming formal moderator of the church in 1977. The church at South Creake had by now closed, and Union inherited it’s hymn books, along with the interest from the sale of the manse there. Congregation size, particularly on Sunday evenings had declined considerably, and joint services were now held regularly with the Methodists, alternating between the two venues. When at Union, they were held not in the chapel itself, but in the choir vestry. Church meetings became only three monthly, and eventually dropped to being annually.

In the spring of 1978, following a short illness, Mrs Ballard died (a pulpit Bible was given in her memory), and shortly afterwards Rev. Ballard announced his intention to retire at the end of the year. Rev. Chapman agreed to become moderator during the interregnum (Rev. Martin had by now died), and it was decided to proceed with another semi retirement pastorate. After one of two possibilities, the name of Rev. Alan Lloyd Davies was drawn to the attention of the elders. He was currently at Trinity URC, Norwich and following a visit in May 1979, he was unanimously invited to be minister of Union Church (part time).

A number of features stand out from the minutes during his time at Hunstanton. An Old Peoples Day Centre was opened in the town, meeting every Tuesday with a number of Union members as founding figures, a new ramp and entrance to the side of the church hall was constructed, and officially opened in October 1980 by one of the longest standing members Miss Vi Steward, the pew bibles were changed from the Revised Standard Version to the New English Bible (50 were purchased), the Wednesday Coffee Morning and Sale was begun as a regular feature of church life (originally to raise money to pay for the new ramp), and continuing vandalism meant that the stained glass windows had to be covered with wire netting. At the end of 1982 the Rev. Lloyd Davies announced his intention to retire in the Spring. Almost immediately discussions began as to the future of the church and its ministry, the decisions made were to have far reaching consequences.

Chapter VII

**I Will Restore it, Says The Lord** (Acts 15:16)

1983 – 1995

After considering one or two names as possible ministers at Union, in the Spring of 1984, the Church met with Rev. David Harper, General Superintendent of the Eastern Area of the Baptist Union, to consider “Union Church’s opportunity and witness in the Hunstanton area”. At that meeting he spelled out the problems of obtaining a part time minister, and suggested that the church consider looking for a younger full time minister, supported partly from the Baptist Home Mission Fund. A meeting of the Elders shortly afterwards decided that the church could afford half the stipend, and Home Mission would be asked for the other half. The following church meeting unanimously agreed “that we apply for a Baptist Home Mission Grant, and hope we can increase our financial income be various means, so it the grant and the right man are forthcoming we can proceed”. Two visitors came from the Norfolk Baptist Association, to look at the life and work of the church, and agreed to support Union’s application. As such, they began looking for a full time minister.

Despite being in an interregnum, the church was in good heart at this time, and once again under the moderatorship of Rev. Harry Chapman, carried out a number of changes. The church membership grew considerably, as a number of active friends were formally welcomed in, a new constitution was drawn up, which changed the “elders” back into “Deacons”, and increased the number to eight, urgent repair work was carried out on the organ, which was paid for by Mrs. K. Hooper, daughter of Herbert Ibberson, there were also discussions on turning the church grounds into a car park, changing the time of morning service, installing an amplification system, and replacing the church heating system.

In August 1985 the deacons met with Rev. Alun Huw Thomas, then minister at Lambeth in London. After conducting worship one Sunday a couple of weeks later, he was invited to the pastorate, which he accepted, commencing his ministry at the beginning of November.

 Many of the issues discussed during the interregnum were now raised once again, the church did not proceed with the idea of a car park, as it became clear that permission would not be forthcoming from the council, but a new public address system was installed in the church. Furthermore, with the help of anonymous donations the church purchased a photocopier in early 1986, and later that year agreed to change the heating system in the chapel to a radiant heat method. Work was begun on restoring the stained glass windows, some copies of “Mission Praise” were bought to use in Sunday Worship, a church telephone was installed, a children’s corner set up at the front of the church, a fireproof safe was donated, so that the church could be responsible for its own wedding registers, and the Scripture Union Beach Mission based itself at Union, with the aim of a gradual takeover by local people.

Relationships with the Baptist Home Mission Fund were sometimes a little uneasy, as the Fund tried to get Union to reduce the amount it asked to each year. There were big steps of faith taken by the membership, particularly after the first year, it was in 1989 that the church finally became self supporting again.

The numbers coming to morning worship were increasing, and the picture was very encouraging. However, numbers on Sunday evenings had become very small. At a church meeting in May 1987 a “very frank discussion” was held, and after consultation with the Methodist Church, it was agreed to return to the pattern of alternating united services. By the end of 1989, a brief survey revealed that average attendance was only seven. The decision was taken to discontinue evening services “in their present form”, six months later they were discontinued altogether.

In August 1987 the church held a service of Believers Baptism, with three candidates, in the sea. The church meeting minutes note that “in spite of the adverse weather conditions, it was an impressive service, and a great witness to the crowds who gathered.” However, just a week later, Rev. Thomas suffered a heart attack, he was to be on sick leave until March of the following year. During this time, much of the burden fell on the church secretary, Mrs. Sybil Mills, and the Deacons, in particular Bernard Webb, who chaired most of the meetings. One suggestion, put forward by Rev. Bill Gathercole, moderator of the Eastern Area of the URC, was for Union to have a student pastor during the summer of 1988. He had somebody in mind, Geoffrey Clarke, a student in his first year at Northern College, Manchester, and during July and August of that year he preached regularly, chaired meetings, and carried out some pastoral duties. Although only in Hunstanton for a short while, he was very well liked by the congregation. On finishing college, his first pastorate was at Seaton URC, on Tyneside.

In February 1988, the church had a survey carried out on its buildings by the Norfolk Baptist Surveyor, Mr. Chris Cooper FRICS. It revealed extensive dry rot, wet rot, woodworm and rising damp. A further survey by Rentokil only served to confirm the seriousness of the situation. At a special church meeting in June 1988 it was unanimously agreed “that the church accepts the Rentokil estimate to eradicate dry rot at a cost of approximately £12.000 also that Union Church explores within the next 12 months all avenues to replace and improve its present buildings in order to enrich its mission in Hunstanton.” A special committee to oversee the fabric was formed, and Rentokil began the work of eradicating the rot in the hall and the church. But worse news was to come. It was clear that the dry rot had seriously weakened the load bearing beams, and the deacons “all felt unhappy that there seemed to be no end to the work necessary to eradicate the rot from our buildings”. In October they met with Chris Cooper to consider what options lay before the church. There seemed to be two possibilities, either to demolish and rebuild the church at a cost of around £150.000, or to repair and alter the present buildings at a cost of around £100.000, The deacons were unanimous about the latter of the two options, and presented it to a special church meeting in November 1988, the first meeting Rev. Thomas had chaired since his heart attack 15 months earlier. At that meeting two important decisions were taken, firstly, that the church should remain in its present building, but undertake to repair and upgrade its facilities, and secondly that a church Restoration Fund should be established for the sole purpose to pay for repairs and the upgrading of facilities.

A letter was sent out to all members of the church and congregation, and a special meeting was called for January 1989 to discuss possible alterations to the buildings. The meeting is described as “very frank and wide ranging”, and matters discussed included making the church multi purpose, enlarging the apse, putting a false ceiling in the church and turning the choir vestry into a kitchen. The meeting also saw the foundation of a Fundraising Committee, and the decision to hold church meetings monthly, because of the large amount of business now needing to be discussed. The Restoration was publicly launched as part of the Church Anniversary celebrations in July of that year, and one of the first fundraising ventures was a stall at the annual Sandringham Flower show in the same month. The complted alternations were eventually drawn up into an architects plan by the end of 1990.

Any such building work tends to dominate the life of a church but there were many other things going on. A Brownie Pack began meeting at the church in the summer of 1988, under the leadership of one of the members Mrs. Eve Eates. Brownies had last met on church premises in 1953. A pastoral care team was set up, and a new photocopier was purchased. There was also a new PA system installed. At the end of 1989 it was decided to change to time of morning worship to 10.30 am, at least for an experimental period, the experiment was successful, and after a year nobody wanted to go back to 11.00am.

Between the summer of 1987 and that of 1991, Rev. Thomas had been able to do little more than part time work at the most, and had spent a considerable amount of time in hospital. On Sunday 9th June 1991, he announced to the church his compulsory retirement from the pastorate on health grounds, which was received with “shock, a great regret and inevitable sadness”. At the church meeting the following evening, the minutes record the great appreciation expressed for all that Rev. and Mrs. Thomas had done “in building up the church”. They left Hunstanton and moved to Norwich, in November 1991.

For the third time, Rev. Harry Chapman agreed to be moderator during the interregnum, and the Deacons met with Rev. Bill Gathercole (of the URC) and Rev. David Harper (of the Baptist Union) to discuss the next stage in the life of Union Church. It was agreed that Union was a “non conformist evangelical church”, and that therefore an evangelical minister of either denomination would be looked for. After only three months, the Deacons met with Rev. Jonathan Calvert, then assistant minister at Ashley Baptist Church, in New Milton, Hampshire. Following a visit to the church in May 1992, he was unanimously called to the pastorate, to commence in October of that year. At the same time, Rev. Harry Chapman was to be made Minister Emeritus.

Work continued apace as regards the restoration of the buildings, and during the interregnum, the choir vestry was turned into a kitchen, and the old flight of stairs down from the church into the hall was demolished. Not all went smoothly, and emergency meeting held in January 1992 regarding “the disquiet being expressed by some members of the church and congregation regarding the building work being currently undertaken, and the future work.” There was much discussion, but no clear decisions were taken at this meeting. Eventually, the Restoration plans were modified in Autumn 1993 and 1994 was set as the year to complete all the Restoration work. Under God, the financial target was achieved, and it is hoped that all the building work will be completed by the end of 1995.

As for the future, who knows what the next 125 years hold for West Norfolk? But whatever they do, and whatever changes in the church’s mission they bring, one thing is certain, that Hunstanton will need an evangelical church, proclaiming the Gospel in this “pleasant village and bathing place.”

Appendix 1

**Ministers of the Union Church**

Richard Athol Cliff 1889 – 1892

W.Colin Bryan 1893 – 1899

Richard Athol Cliff 1899 – 1911

James Amos 1911 – 1916

Arthur A. Bourne 1917 – 1925

Arthur W. Wright 1926 – 1930

Stanley R. Green 1932 – 1940

Clifford H. MacQuire 1943 – 1946

George O. Cornish 1947 – 1952

Dennis W. Cornelius 1953 – 1958

Gerald P. Ferroussat 1959 – 1966

Michael J. Melvin 1969 – 1973

L. John Ballard 1974 – 1979

Alan Lloyd Davies 1079 – 1983

Alun H. Thomas 1985 – 1991

Jonathan H. Calvert 1992 -