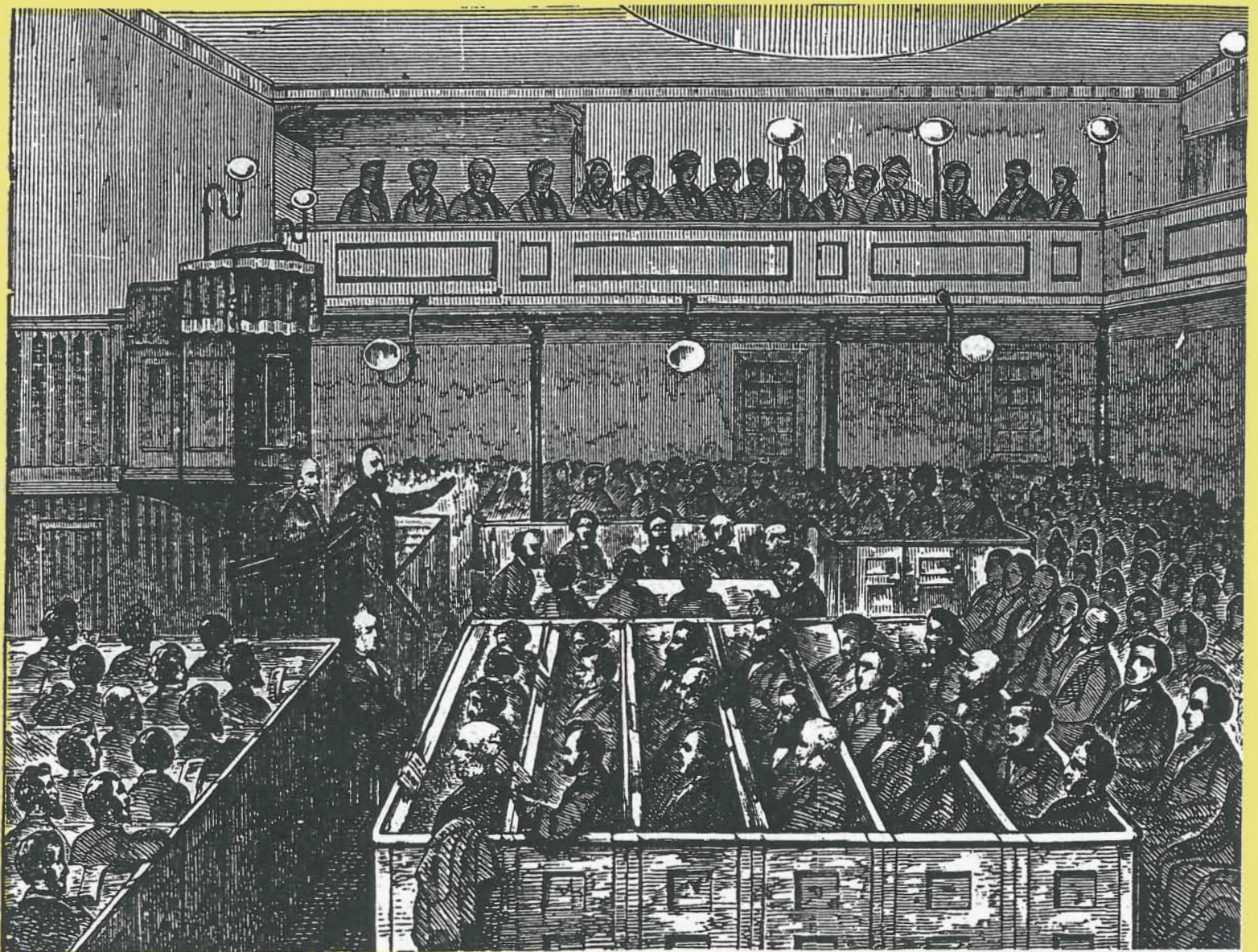


A Wide & Fast-Flowing River

Unitarians Together in London
and the South East from 1850-2000



Alan Ruston

London and South-Eastern Provincial Assembly.

(M) Rev. T. E. M. EDWARDS, Minister-at-Large, 31, Madeira Road, Streatham, S.W.

PREACHERS' PLAN, JULY 1904.

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF PREACHERS.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Mr. E. CAPLETON, 113, Highbury New Park, N. | 12. Rev. F. SUMMERS, 4, Dutley Road, Stamford Hill, N. |
| 2. Mr. A. J. CLARKE, 12, Stanfield Road, Stockwell Road, S.W. | 13. Rev. W. H. ROSE, 44, Ravenswood Road, Walthamstow. |
| *3. Mr. R. M. COOPER, Brentwood. | *14. Mr. J. T. SALT, 3, Ulverstone Road, Walthamstow. |
| 4. Mr. T. ELLIOTT, 44, Despard Road, Highgate, N. | 15. Mr. E. WILKES SMITH, 2, Waldegrave Gardens, Strawberry Hill. |
| 5. Mrs. F. LAWSON DODD, Tunbridge Wells. | *16. Mr. G. SKELL, 39, Fairlop Road, Leytonstone, E. |
| *6. Mrs. ELDERKIN, Watford, Herts. | 17. Mr. W. H. SHREBSOLE, F.G.S., 173, Brownhill Road, Catford, S.E. |
| *7. Mr. H. TITFORD, Highbury, N. | *18. Mr. A. PHAROAN, 489, Old Kent Road, S.E. |
| 8. Mr. W. J. HAWKINS, 147, Fawnbrake Avenue, Herne Hill, S.E. | 19. Mr. C. W. TUBBS, Tunbridge Wells. |
| *9. Rev. F. H. JONES, B.A., Gordon Square, W.C. | 20. Mr. G. WARD, 101, Effingham Road, Lee, S.E. |
| 10. Mr. A. MIDLANE, 11, Grafton Square, Clapham Common, S.W. | S. Supply. |
| 11. Mr. J. C. PAIN, 26, Southampton Street, Camberwell, S.E. | |

* Not Members of the Lay Preachers' Union.

PLACE.	Hours of Service.	JULY.					SECRETARY.
		3	10	17	24	31	
CHELMSFORD ...	11 a.m. 6.30 p.m.	S	S	20	S	S	Mr. A. R. HICKLEY, The Friars, Chelmsford
HALSTEAD ...	6.30 p.m.	17	—	M	—	20	Mr. J. TAYLOR, 40, New Street, Halstead.
NORTHAM ...	3 p.m.	—	—	—	—	19	Mr. A. COMFORT, Northam.
STRATFORD ...	11 a.m. 6.30 p.m.	11 10	6	B	7 9	15	Mr. W. J. NOEL, Briarwood, Grove Hill, Woodford.
SOUTHEND ...	6.30 p.m.	3	9	4	17	12	Mr. LAURENCE E. ALLEN, Kenley, Cossington Road, Westcliffe-on-Sea.

You are cordially invited to attend the
UNITARIAN SERVICES
at "CRIX," WOODHALL AVENUE, PINNER.

On the last Sunday in each month at 11 a.m.

Addresses will be given by

Mr. H. G. CHANCELLOR (ex M.P.)

as under:

September 30th. "Who are these Unitarians."

October 28th. "God's Hunger Cure."

November 25th. "The God Within."

December 30th. "The Meaning of Christmas."

HYMN BOOKS ARE PROVIDED.

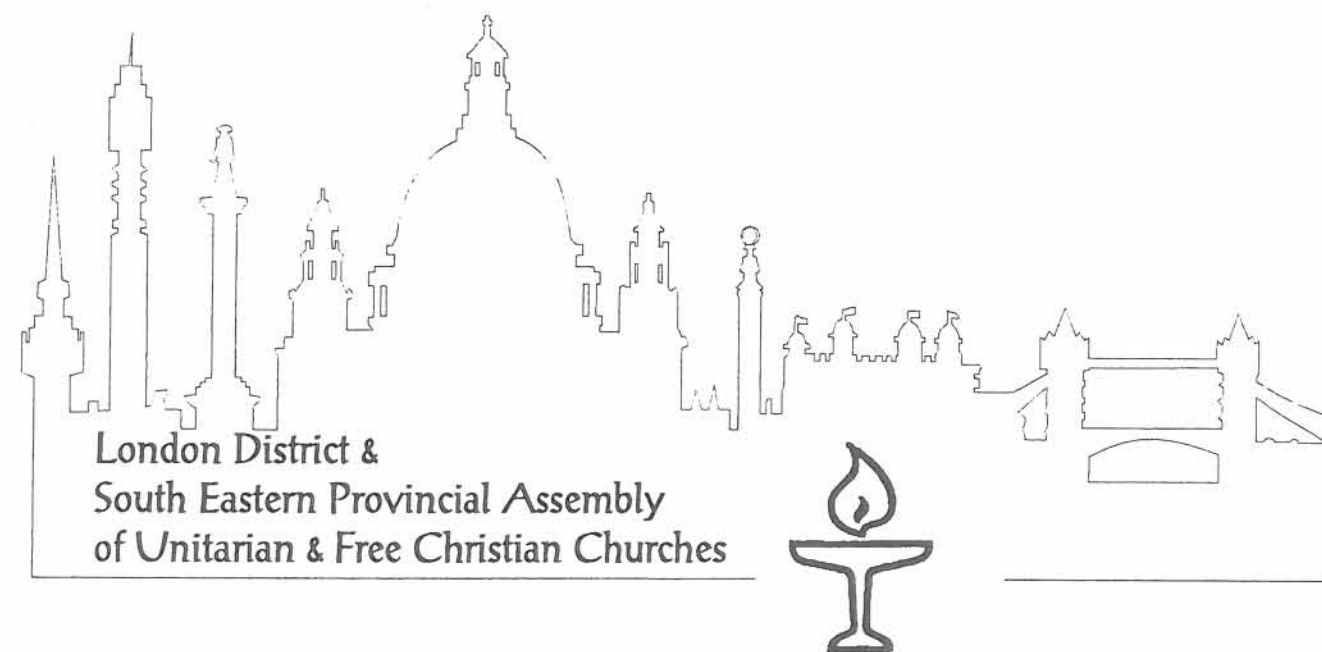
COME AND BRING A FRIEND.

(circa 1930s)

A Wide & Fast-Flowing River

Unitarians Together in London and the South East from 1850-2000

by
Alan Ruston



London 2000

Document Library



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PREFACE

The history has been prepared to mark the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the London District Unitarian Society in May 1850. John Ballantyne wrote a similar booklet to mark the hundredth anniversary in 1950, entitled *Pioneers: The Story of the London Unitarians and their Churches*. That publication took a wider view of Unitarianism in the area by covering the history of the churches from the seventeenth century as well as the activity of the district organisation. The present work is the first to deal specifically with the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, to give the LDPA its full title, and its predecessor bodies.

Sources used in research have not been quoted as this is not intended as a scholarly work. It attempts to show in as simple and straightforward way as possible what Unitarians have achieved in the District, their failures and successes. The *Inquirer* has provided a great deal of information for the whole period, but so have annual reports, personal information and Ballantyne's excellent booklet to which I have already referred. It is difficult to write objectively about contemporary events and people, and while names are mentioned the list is not exhaustive; not everybody can be named. Some of the 'characters' have been described, the story of vivid people from the past can make the recital of

The cover illustration depicts the interior of the old Essex Church (Essex Hall now occupies the site) at the Centenary service in 1874.

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seemingly dry events come alive. I have been connected with the LDPA since the mid 1960s so many of these personalities were known to me.

The illustrations centre on people rather than buildings. Choosing appropriate photographs of sufficient quality to be reproduced has proved difficult. They come from numerous sources, and thanks must go to Steve Dick, the present District Minister, who has arranged the text around them to produce the final product ready for printing. Few histories of Unitarian District Associations have appeared in print even though most were formed in the nineteenth century. The mundane but vital work they do has not engaged the interest of historians of Unitarianism. The LDPA has long been recognised as one of the most active and successful Associations measured in terms of the range of its activities and the service provided to member churches. It is unique amongst the District Associations in being continuously served by its own District Minister since 1907. In this millennial year the LDPA Council is as conscious as it ever was in the past, of the need to seek ways to expand Unitarianism in the south eastern corner of England. This is done rather differently from the pioneers of the 1850s, but the sense of commitment to spreading the Unitarian faith is the same.

Alan Ruston

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Nearly 900 Unitarians from over 30 congregations in London and the South East braved bad weather in June 1967 for a garden party held at the home of Captain Evelyn Broadwood, a member of the Horsham congregation. Lord Sorenson of Leyton opens the event in the top picture.



THE FIRST LONDON DISTRICT

How it started

The first mention of the proposed creation of a London District of Unitarian churches appeared in the *Inquirer* (where else?) in the issue of 13 April 1850 as an advert. It stated:

“For several years there has been felt by Unitarians of London a desire for a more cordial co-operation among members of the different congregations and a better organisation of the body: by means of which zeal might be quickened, religious earnestness increased and more active efforts made for the diffusion of Scriptural views of Christianity. This feeling has sometimes found expression in complaints of the want of vigour on the part of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association (B&FUA)...but its work is general not local. How could the B&FUA fully service the London Metropolis?”

This was a call for action to create a District association of Unitarian churches. Few new associations amongst the churches had been created in the previous twenty years due to the legal controversy over whether the Unitarians had the right to be trustees of the old Presbyterian congregations. As Unitarianism was only legalised in 1813, the orthodox argued that the chapels and meeting houses formed before that date belonged to believers in the Trinity. It looked in early 1844 as if the Unitarians would lose all their old buildings, but the government stepped in and after some furious lobbying by leading Unitarians (nothing like it has been achieved since) the Dissenters' Chapels Act was passed the same year. There was a great sigh of relief and Unitarians for the first time for decades started to look for growth. So relieved were they that a big sum was raised and University Hall in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, which now houses Dr Williams's Library, was built as a thank offering. Unitarianism was now on its way, and the first district association formed in this first flush of enthusiasm was the Western Union in 1845.

The 1850 advert went on to describe what was proposed:

“The objects of the Society will be to arouse among the Unitarians of London, a determination to make increased exertions on behalf of the faith they profess; to promote a close bond of union amongst the members of different Unitarian congregations, so that a unified effort

may be made for the diffusion of Unitarian views, and for laying before the people of London the Scriptural evidences in favour of Unitarianism, and its adaptation to the wants of society."

An organising committee had been meeting for upwards of a year, and the first meeting setting up the London District Unitarian Society (LDUS) was held at the London Tavern, Bishopsgate Street on 2 May 1850. The main concern before this date was whether the B&FUA might conclude that the new Society was treading on its toes; however, following a get together of the key people, the B&FUA welcomed the prospect of the new Society, though some still felt that it was not needed. It turned out that this apprehension was entirely misplaced as the committees of both bodies consisted of very much the same people, and so it continued for the rest of the century. Most of the funds of the B&FUA came from the London area but most of its grants went elsewhere, so a London area initiative could hardly be refused.

Social meetings and discussions were held during May—a soiree gathered in new subscribers, and the first Quarterly Social Gathering met in August 1850 when Unitarians could become more generally acquainted with each other and offer suggestions on spreading the faith. These included courses of theological lectures for those interested in becoming Unitarians, activities to involve young men (no mention was made of women) searching for religious truth, the distribution of tracts and to provide an opening for the sale of Unitarian books. Starting on September 12, a course of seven lectures was quickly arranged and held in the Lecture Rooms, Mortimer Street; enthusiasm was high. For the rest of 1850, the *Inquirer* had an item on the LDUS almost every week, including the letters that we know so well from present times, of the "doubting Thomas" variety. Clearly many Unitarians throughout the country were looking at this new venture, and wondering whether it would be the pattern for the future. The new Society however had to rely on the financial support of B&FUA for some years to carry out many of its activities, although by the end of its first year it had 250 subscribers.

The early work

The main vision of the new body centred on missionary work, a phrase which Unitarians did not shy away from in the 1850s. They saw themselves in the "Battle of the Churches", and felt that the Unitarian position was sadly misrepresented, and that members of the churches should be united in a common object. Victorian religious seriousness held the public imagination, and Unitarians were not exempt from its influence. They wanted "their place in the sun" on the same basis as the other churches who were in the main very unwilling to give it to them.

The dominant force behind the creation of the LDUS was the Lawrence family, and their push, dynamism and financial backing. William Lawrence senior and three of his sons (William, James and Edwin), were dominant forces in its life until 1914. Indeed they played a dominant role within Unitarianism and their names will be seen near the top of most subscription lists for new Unitarian chapels all over the country, though they were no supporters of the "Free Christian" version.

The family were house builders, amongst the most successful in London at the time of its great growth, and in consequence very rich. William Lawrence senior, then Sheriff of London, was the first President of the Society, and his son James Clarke Lawrence the honorary secretary. The family held to the Bible-based view of Unitarianism which was at that time being undermined by the more generalised religious views of James Martineau. Unitarianism for them equalled the Bible, their one and only text through which everything was either proved or disproved.

As far as they were concerned the LDUS was formed to present a specific view of Unitarianism, expressed on their behalf by James Lawrence. New lecturing stations were set up all over London, a lending library of Unitarian works had been created by the mid 1850s, and new causes were formed at Stratford, Woolwich and Clerkenwell. The dormant Stamford Street Chapel in Southwark was reopened, and thousands of leaflets and booklets were given away through the Society's bookseller, Whitfield's, in the Strand who also ran the library.

In 1857 the first London Unitarian Register was published which appeared intermittently for the next decade or so. The 1859 edition includes sixteen places of worship plus other "Unitarian stations", and lists the numerous daily activities that each undertook. The Register was the first published list of Unitarian churches in London, aimed at

newcomers and visitors to the metropolis to attract them to attend a church. In 1852, the London churches were divided up into districts, each with a local committee and secretary to co-ordinate to the central LDUS committee. The aim was to organise local lectures more efficiently but the system did not work very well and was discontinued, to be brought back decades later.



Sir James Clarke Lawrence, Baronet
- from a photograph at the time of his marriage, by Bradnee

James Clarke Lawrence (1820-1897)

James Lawrence was one of the chief figures of London Unitarianism for four decades. He was ubiquitous, not only in London but elsewhere, and without fail spoke at length on every occasion he could. He was pompous and assertive and many felt that he should be silent on occasion; for nearly fifty years his spoken words appear endlessly in the denominational press though he himself wrote little. His energy was enormous, as with his brothers he ran the family firm until the 1880s when they gave it away to their employees, a unique action commented on at the time in the national press. On top of this he and his brother William both became MPs and Lord Mayors of London and in consequence baronets. Their younger brother Edwin also became an MP and a baronet, taking the Lawrence tradition in the London district into the twentieth century.

James in particular was theologically assertive for the Biblical based variety of Unitarianism which he and the majority of LDUS supporters espoused, and was generous with money in its support. There was nothing it seems within the movement on which he did not have a strong opinion, and the views of James Martineau who based his unitarianism rather on conscience and a wider religious view, were an anathema. Lawrence saw the *Inquirer* as little more than a Martineau rag and in 1876 paid for the setting up and support of the weekly *Christian Life* to present an opposite view.

The existence of Essex Hall in Essex Street off the Strand is very much due to the financial support of the Lawrences. The moving out of the now tiny Essex Street congregation in the 1880s to join with the successful iron church at Kensington was only made possible by bridging finance from the Lawrences who then became major contributors to the building of Essex Hall (destroyed in World War 2). As a consequence the Lawrence family required that the LDUS would always be able to use Essex Hall whenever requested and without significant charge. This treatment is still accorded by the Essex Hall trustees to meetings of the LDPA today and is one of the main reason why Essex Hall continues to be at the heart of London Unitarianism.

THE ADVENT OF ROBERT SPEARS

The Lawrence family determined that like the London Domestic Mission Society, founded in 1835, their LDUS needed a missionary to take a lead and co-ordinate the expanding activity. Missioner was a more appropriate name than District Minister in those days because the role was seen differently—it was almost entirely to expand Unitarianism through new stations, as they were called, and to enthrone layman to go out and preach the faith. James Clarke Lawrence was willing to pay the salary of the missionary, and in 1861, on the advice of Rev Robert Brook Aspland, secretary of the B&FUA, the LDUS appointed Rev Robert Spears (1825-1899) to the ministry of the small congregation at Stamford Street, Blackfriars but with a wider remit.

The appointment was a risk for both sides. Spears was self taught, with a strong Northumberland accent (which he never lost) and had hardly visited London, let alone lived and worked there. Spears was going into work for which he had neither experience nor background, amongst the rich, an untutored enthusiast amongst highly educated and sophisticated London Unitarians. However he had built up large congregations at Sunderland and Stockton from nothing with drive and determination, and a total commitment to a Bible-based Unitarianism that he knew was the faith of the future. Despite all the odds against it the experiment worked brilliantly.

John Ballantyne in his account of London Unitarianism of 1950 said of Spears. "His first report delivered in 1862 reads like a romance. He was conducting a revival on Unitarian lines. A veritable passion for the faith possessed him. Not only as LDUS missionary, Spears also revived Stamford Street and delivered 10,000 pamphlets from door to door in one year and was chiefly instrumental in starting causes at Forest Hill, Croydon, Peckham, Stepney and Notting Hill." Spears later put his achievements in even clearer terms: "In my ministrations at Stamford Street I made open profession, exposition and defence of Unitarianism, and in seven years we had one of the largest congregations in London. There was no dilly dallying about the name Unitarian."

Spears seemed tireless with unlimited commitment and helped found congregations not only in London but further afield. He was in many ways quite an impossible man as he saw his version of Unitarianism as the right one and would argue with anyone in the defence. Personally he was affable, ever present at Unitarian gatherings instantly recognisable

with big thick beard. He bore no grudges despite the strength of argument with opponents. In 1867 he became the Secretary of the B&FUA and although he gave up both Stamford Street Church and LDUS missionary in the 1870s, he went on to found the congregations at Highgate, Walthamstow and Southend in the 1880s and 1890s. The LDUS did not appoint another missionary after Spears - they did not need to as he did the work for them and for nothing.

He was of course a contentious figure—he stated that he read his Bible on his knees, and could find no trace of the Trinity. He attacked every belief which was at variance with scriptural truth and proclaimed that Unitarianism is the religion of the Bible. This did not accord with the views of James Martineau and his followers who believed that the word unitarian could not be attached to churches as it limited the potentiality for development, and the continued existence of national bodies like the B&FUA was almost a contradiction in terms. Readers who want to know more about this great argument which lasted for the rest of the century, and about Spears "the Unitarian dynamo", need to look elsewhere in the Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society. But it was clear to everyone where the leaders of the LDUS stood—they were definitely on the side of the King James version of the Bible!



The Sunday School of the Billingshurst congregation around 1920. The gentleman at the left is the Rev Harry Maguire and to his right is Lizzie Evershed.

The expansion

Unitarianism expanded in the London area between the late 1850s and the early 1890s, not only due to Spears but also because there was an increasing number of people who were willing "to proclaim the faith". The growing denominationalism of the period, while it had its down side, heightened awareness amongst many that they needed to stand up and be heard.

The organised Lay Preacher movement within Unitarianism basically started in London in 1869, again with Sir James Lawrence in the forefront and Spears in the background. A Lay Preachers Union was formed and by 1870 "thirty gentlemen have been secured as lay preachers and during the past year they have conducted in various chapels, halls and schoolrooms, in and around London. upwards of 250 services"; their number soon grew to 44. Women members did not come until the new century. The B&FUA stated in the early 1870s that there were more recognised lay preachers in the London area than in the rest of the country put together.

These preachers were not there in these early days to fill existing pulpits, except for the smallest congregations, but to argue positively for Unitarianism against all comers, to persuade the waverers in dark and often gloomy halls and rooms in some of the poorest areas of London. In the main, they saw Biblical Unitarianism as the faith that could appeal to the masses and not just to an intellectual few as others claimed. The aim was to present it as a warm living faith, not the unemotional one that orthodox Christians claimed led nowhere.

They preached, and often helped set up worshipping groups, in an amazing number of places—Peckham, Walworth, Clerkenwell, Shadwell, Mile End, Stratford (then known as New Town centred on the rail works), Kentish Town, Acton, Limehouse, Hoxton, Somers Town near King's Cross, Poplar, Deptford, near the Cattle Market Islington, Kensington, Pimlico, Westminster, Battersea, Greenwich, Woolwich. All this work was backed by the distribution of vast numbers of handouts and pamphlets now being produced by Spears at the B&FUA. Some of their efforts were successful and grew into congregations; other quickly disappeared. If the numbers attracted were of say between 50 and 100 people then that was considered a reasonable start to a new venture.

Ballantyne describes these successful ventures:

"When the LDUS was formed in 1850 there were thirteen ministers and two missionaries (of the London Domestic Mission Society). After twenty years, in 1870, there were twenty-six churches with ministers and three missionaries. The total average attendance per Sunday was estimated at 2,500. There were sixteen Sunday schools, with 270 teachers and an average attendance of 1,240. How heartening it must have been!"

It will come as no surprise that the LDUS had its critics to be found as always in the columns of the *Inquirer*. The main criticism was that while lay preachers helped to create new causes they could only foster weak ones, and a leading figure in London Unitarianism pointed out in 1874 that the LDUS "had been working nearly twenty-five years and yet they had not promoted a single church which could stand alone." This failure combined with the regular financial deficits led some people to ask whether the LDUS had failed in fulfilling its original objectives. The series of assertive campaigning Unitarian lectures ceased in 1864 and when taken up again a few years later they were never as successful as in the earlier period. However there was greater harmony and contact between the churches and their members, an achievement which was chiefly due to the work of the LDUS.

The 1870s are generally reckoned to be the high watermark of church attendance in England, and by the 1890s a distinct decline was discernable. Unitarianism, as exemplified by the churches in the LDUS, did not expand in the closing decades of the nineteenth century as it had done in this early period, although in the 1890's Spears was still forming congregations from nothing. Sir James Lawrence maintained his deep interest in the LDUS but in 1872 he handed over the treasurership to a new figure who was to greatly influence its affairs—David Martineau (1827-1911). One of the sugar refining family and a relation of James he was treasurer for thirty years.

It was essential that whoever held this post should be a man of means as the finances were often precarious and the treasurer needed to make up the short fall personally; the deficits were not always fully made up in subsequent years. This was no problem for Lawrence or Martineau; without them the LDUS could well have foundered before the twentieth century. The *Inquirer* on David Martineau's retirement in 1901 pointed out "time after time he has borne the heavy deficits", and his obituary in 1911 stated that "acting as chairman of the committee he was distinctly the mainspring of the machine." This financial life line provided over decades by both men meant they played a dominant role in the Society.

THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY

The area covered by the LDUS was of course London only but even in the 1880s it was not always easy to define the limits of the metropolis, particularly before the advent of the London County Council and an effective local government system. The congregations outside the area were often General Baptist in origin and had their own assembly, while sometimes the remit of the LDUS reached out to other small scattered groups who needed support. It was never possible to limit the activities of Spears who operated nationally in forming and fostering new churches. Congregations in the south east of England not covered by a district association had felt since the 1870s that a co-ordinating and unifying body was needed to serve their needs. The opportunity was provided by James Martineau in 1885.

The “grand old man of Unitarianism” had spent nearly sixty years trying to organise the unitarian movement into the way he believed it should go. He did not like the use of the capital U for congregations and over this he clashed with Spears and the B&FUA, whose executive committee during many periods had much the same membership as that of the LDUS. The Unitarian movement rarely accepted Martineau’s proposals for change in its outlook and organisation, and even he and his supporters were not always on the same wavelength when it came to deciding how to organise.

At the age of 84 Martineau decided to make one last attempt to mould the movement as he wished it, which he did in a long speech made to a representative gathering at Leeds. This is not the place to go into detail of what he proposed, except to point out that he considered district associations to be too denominationally minded and should be replaced by Provincial Assemblies, which would provide a closer union of Free Christian Churches and be able to help the weaker congregations.

Because he was held in so much respect, even awe, Unitarians went away to discuss his proposals, which yet again were rejected except in the south eastern counties. The reasons for this are many; the presence of numerous General Baptist churches who wanted to take their own line apart from the LDUS was one, and another was the feeling held by many country congregations, that the LDUS was too assertive. All felt however that some closer association was needed. After detailed preparations, the Provincial Assembly of London and the South Eastern Counties (PA) was founded on 14 May 1889, with Dr Martineau in the chair. W Blake Odgers late in 1889 put the aims of the new body

clearly—“our free churches are too loosely organised, and we should close ranks and cultivate the feeling that we are members of one army, and to support weaker and poorer congregations.” In addition there were two fears—“dogma and the imposition of belief and the interference in congregational independence.”

There was no mention of Unitarianism, although the term non-subscribing was in the background. Unitarianism was an unstated presence in a sea of Free Christianity, and unlike the LDUS it was admitted from the start that the work of the Assembly had not been precisely defined. It was historically justified by the London Provincial Assembly founded in the mid-seventeenth century but was modelled on the successful Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire. There were 44 member congregation, made up of 22 from London (virtually all of whom were also members of the LDUS), 2 from Essex, 3 from Surrey, 7 from Sussex and 6 from Kent. For the London congregations it was very much a case of going to the LDUS for Unitarianism and the PA for the Free Christianity; for them it was like having two district associations except that this was not the designation used by the PA. Spears was there, sparring as ever with Martineau, arguing how could something be called provincial when most of the body consisted of London congregations.

There was continuing support for the PA which clearly met a need. Relations between it and the LDUS were friendly and strong efforts were made by both sides well into the new twentieth century to keep it that way. The deaths of Spears (1899) and Martineau (1900), both representative figures for their form of Unitarianism, meant that thereafter much of the sting went out of the theological dispute, and the two bodies could work together.

The PA was quite innovative and appointed the first district minister, or as he and subsequent holders of the office were called, Ministers-at-Large, in 1891. Rev T W Freckleton (1827-1903) was appointed first, to be followed in 1894 by Rev Thomas DM Edwards (1840-1918). He was an experienced Congregational minister who in his fifties had changed denominations and took the job as his first, and only, appointment within Unitarianism. Edwards went about encouraging the churches, running the preaching plan, opening new causes and much else that has become associated with the job of being London District Minister. He was successful in bringing a new spirit into country congregations, but it was difficult to see where the LDUS started and the PA finished and vice versa. For example a new cause was initiated at Sydenham in the

1890s by the PA (it disappeared in 1901) which could equally well have been sponsored by the LDUS. In 1901 the LDUS stopped giving a grant to the cause at Bermondsey which the PA took over. By this time work on behalf of the LDUS was taking a twelfth of Edwards' time.

The PA had an Advisory Committee which helped to address congregational problems, another committee co-ordinating 21 Sunday Schools with over 850 scholars, an Auxillary Fund to augment minister's salaries and a Postal Mission. Of particular interest was the Public Questions Committee which gave an annual report "on moral and religious issues of national questions." I have not been able to locate any of these reports.



This LDPA Ministers' Gathering in 1967 included (from left to right): the Rev Eiron Phillips, the Rev John Kielty, the Rev Peter Hewis, the Rev John Rowland, the Rev Graham Short, the Rev Sydney Knight, D G Hutley-Bull, the Rev Jack Robbins, the Rev J M Hall, the Rev Lord Sorenson, the Rev Ben Downing, the Rev Arthur Peacock, the Rev Dudley Richards, the Rev Basil Viney, the Rev Derek Stirman, the Rev David Skelton, the Rev J Reece Walker. (Not in photograph: the Rev H L Short, the Rev Geo Cook (USA))

THE NEW CENTURY

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Unitarian churches were not always hives of activity intent on spreading the Unitarian witness, especially in rural areas. In a Provincial Letter of March 1901, published in the *Inquirer*, Edwards wrote:

"The majority of our members prefer to be like sleeping partners of a firm, in whose transactions they take no active part, but they like to share the credit of success, but not if there should be any failure. We have also to face the fact that we are losing many of our young people. Why? Partly because they are not early listed in the ranks of the workers; and partly because our services are often a weariness to the flesh and a crucifixion to the spirit...our services may be very correct, but devoid of spiritual power...if we are to go forward as churches, we must get rid of the conventionalism which prevails."

Strong words indeed from someone who worked hard for the cause, probably echoed by Rev John H Wicksteed who was appointed as Missionary Minister to the LDUS in October 1902, the first equivalent of a District Minister that it appointed. Spears had been in practice, if not in theory, the Minister-at-Large often it seemed for the whole country, and was irreplaceable. Wicksteed did not attempt to fill his shoes, was not happy with what he found and had left by 1904 (and out of the Unitarian ministry). However he pioneered a monthly *London Unitarian Letter*, which only lasted a short time but was the first of its kind. He was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Layman's Club in 1903 which continued until the 1950s to provide a social gathering over a meal for the leaders of London Unitarianism.

In January 1904 Edwards started the monthly *Provincial Assembly Messenger*, but from the few known issues there is no evidence that it continued beyond that year. One issue contains Edwards' strong words that "we must move on if we want to live", and probably for the first time in a monthly publication, a copy of the preaching plan covering Chelmsford, Halstead, Northiam, Stratford, Southend, Walthamstow and Bermondsey was included.

Much of the activity of the LDUS centred in these years on the Sunday Schools, supported by bazaars run by the richer Unitarians. These Bazaars were big affairs, run in a large London hall or at the home of Sir Edwin Durning Lawrence (1837-1914) at Ascot. They were regular big efforts and were well attended, raising large sums. However there was

much social elitism about, and activity and power was exercised by and for the middle classes. Events held at Ascot were usually a great success. The big booming bearded Sir Edwin, the last of the Lawrence brothers, whose claim to fame as an MP was to be the last man to regularly wear a silk top hat in the chamber of the House, was larger than life. At one of these events he is supposed to have said to Ion Pritchard of Newington Green, about his own age, "Have you got your own teeth? (Edwin had), and was disconcerted to get the reply, "Yes, I have paid for them."

A new movement of a very different type came onto the scene at this time which affected the churches. The Unitarian Van Mission was exactly that, a horse drawn carriage with the word "Unitarian" prominently displayed with a preaching station at the back from which the missionary spoke. There was more than one van in operation and they went all over the country, including much activity in the south east. It was while a van was working in Hertfordshire that Rev John A Pearson (1870-1947), minister at Oldham, took over the moving pulpit for a short while.

The LDUS were looking for a new Minister-at-Large but were not being successful. Pearson, although his experience of southern England was very limited, saw opportunities for his talents, and was appointed in 1907. Pearson held the office for 37 years and largely created the London District as we know it today. He was a very methodical man and made the London District ministry into an office-based occupation. For example he kept a ledger, which can be seen in Dr Williams's Library, from the early 1890s until his death, listing every service he took or attended, with details of hymns, prayers, length of sermon, attendance and much else. He was a natural organiser and helped soften the class basis of London Unitarianism, dominated as it often was in the period before the First World War by members of the Layman's Club and the London Ladies Sewing Circle, based at Essex Church.

He took over the Van Mission activity in the London area, and when the Order of Pioneer Preachers became almost entirely Unitarian in 1911, he assumed the running of the hostel in Highbury until it closed in the early 1930s. The story of the Pioneer Preachers has been told elsewhere—a group of young men, with two "lady workers", operating like a monastic order working and serving the London churches. Without their devoted work, often going to the same pulpit week after week and doing everything including stoking the boiler, many smaller Unitarian churches would have disappeared during the maelstrom of the First World War. The organisation, instruction and sending forth of the Pioneer Preachers was Pearson's responsibility.

Pearson's arrival, and Edwards retirement in 1909, meant that the initiative had shifted to the LDUS. Rev W H Drummond (1863-1945) became Minister-at-large in the PA area, combining the job with editorship of the *Inquirer*. Pearson and Drummond worked together on a number of issues, the first time this had happened to any extent. The presence of Pioneer Preachers led to the withering of the Lay Preachers Association, which had been active in the 1890s because of the declining number of ministers. In 1911 in association with Drummond the lay preacher activity was reorganised so that besides conducting services at churches they participated in the Van Mission in what was termed open air work. "They are arranging to take charge of the Van for a fortnight to be spent at Leytonstone and Woodford." (1913)

The First World War had a major impact on both bodies, not only because of the number of members going to serve in the forces and the shortage of ministers, but also the drop in financial support. Without the Pioneer Preachers organised by Pearson, many of the small causes would have closed for ever. The Walthamstow church founded by Spears gained notoriety in 1917, where a Pioneer Preacher, Reginald Sorensen (1891-1972), was then in lay charge. He was later a Labour MP, a Unitarian minister and in the 1960s, as Lord Sorensen of Leyton, a government minister in the House of Lords. Sorensen successfully argued before a tribunal, with the support of the B&FUA and Pearson, that he should not be conscripted into the armed forces under the Military Services Act because he was the minister of a recognised church.

The majority of Unitarians were solid supporters of the war effort, and Drummond at the *Inquirer* (where the Sorensen incident was not even mentioned) was a rabid supporter of the war effort. One commentator said that in relation to the War, Drummond made the *Inquirers'* outlook very like the jingoistic *Daily Mail*. In contrast H. G. Chancellor (1863-1945), closely connected with the LDUS for many years and Liberal MP for Haggerston, was hooted down at Unitarian meetings for his radical criticisms in Parliament and elsewhere of the government approach to the War. These opposing stands created controversy and resignations of officers within the organisations of the LDUS, the PA and the Pioneer Preachers. The young men, most of whom became the leading Unitarian ministers of the 1930s and after, who served as Pioneer Preachers (superintended by Pearson) were in particular seen by many Unitarians as pacifists and war resisters.

It was during the War that a long running dispute was resolved between those churches who were members of the General Baptist Assembly who were Unitarian in belief, and those who were orthodox Baptists. In an agreement between the B&FUA and the Baptist Union in 1915 those churches, whose members were mainly orthodox in belief, left the Assembly and joined the Baptist Union. The remainder, the majority, which constituted the Assembly were now free to take a wider part in the Unitarian movement and the agreement took them closer to the PA.

While a decline in attendance at services had been clear from the turn of the century, the war greatly accentuated this trend. Many young men did not come back and more were affected by the decline of the old certainties. Unitarianism had been a faith of optimism, affirming its belief in the primacy of conscience and the perfectibility of humankind. The war dealt this belief a savage blow from which it has not recovered.

20th APRIL, 1968

THE INQUIRER



Dr. Homer Jack of the U.U.A. with Rev. Arthur Peacock and Alan Ruston at the Social Responsibility Workshop at Essex Hall in December 1967.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE LDPA

There was without doubt a feeling of drift in the early 1920s. Drummond had left the service of the PA in 1918, and the two bodies continued to carry out their overlapping tasks often with the same churches. They represented different trends in thinking—the LDUS was clearly denominational wanting to stress the Unitarian name, while the PA was less denominational in character, not mentioning Unitarian in its title and more in tune with the Free Christianity ideal as defined by Martineau. However it was clear from about 1910 that the continuing distinction between the two bodies was becoming a hindrance, but not until 1922 was it suggested they should come together.

The idea came, as well as the pressure, from Agnes Wallace Bruce (1864-1943) who with her husband was amongst the most dynamic forces at Essex Church. She was involved in everything Unitarian and much else as well. She pushed for a joint committee to be set up between the two bodies; this was formed in late 1922 and which she chaired from the outset. In April 1923 the Inquirer reported that there is "good reason to hope that before long the LDUS and the PA would be practically united in one body." As with similar ventures within Unitarianism the idea was not welcomed at first, as some believed that the aims and constitutions of both bodies were too different.

By April 1924 however this had been resolved and the Inquirer reported a LDUS meeting that concluded "it was to Mrs Wallace Bruce, who had suggested the change, that warm congratulations were due on the success the negotiations." Mrs Bruce had a long obituary in the Inquirer in 1943 but her signal role in creating the LDPA was not even mentioned. The two societies, it had been pointed out, stood for two different ideas, which had not been given up but who would now work together. The Secretary of the B&FUA even hoped that the new LDPA might aim to keep an open door for other neighbouring districts to come in if they desired; this never happened. Arthur Pearson was now the full District Minister who spread his work over the whole south eastern corner of England. An editorial in the Inquirer was clear as to what was expected, "We trust the movement in the south east will now definitely grow... the tone is more promising than we have had for a long time."

The amalgamation, which took place on 28 May 1924, was reflected in the wider movement by an increasing fusion between the National Conference and the B&FUA, which "would have seemed incredible fifteen or twenty years ago." The creation of the LDPA was seen an

important precursor to the moulding together of these two bodies to form the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in 1928. It was the widely recognised within Unitarianism that the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (an amalgam of the titles of the two bodies as well as the concepts behind them) in the period 1924 and 1926 could be applied on a larger scale and showed the way for the national Unitarian movement. The acronym of LDPA or London District was soon adopted.

The main concern at the coming together was in the potential of loss of financial support. There was a dip at the start but after a few years the LDPA was clearly running well, a tribute largely due to the methodical Pearson. What was the LDPA like at the start? Above all it provided funds and help, for as Pearson pointed out in January 1925 "about twenty of the fifty-three congregations on the roll of the Assembly needed financial help to keep in being.". This role has not changed over the years, and remains essentially the same in 2000. There was an Executive Committee of twenty people, with four sub-committees (finance, London churches, churches outside the London area, and propaganda). The long and powerful connection of Harold Bailey with the Assembly now commenced with his appointment as Treasurer.



Left: The Rev Richard Boeke shares a happy moment with Esther Dick and Olive Poole. Right: GA General Secretary Jeff Teagle (in foreground) and Norman Smith are leading members of the Godalming congregation.

THE NEW ORGANISATION

Quarterly meetings held at a local church were instituted which have remained a main feature of the Assembly activity. In the 1920s they were held mainly on a Wednesday and took all day; in those more leisured days this was possible. Typically there was a service about 12.15, followed by lunch, a business meeting at 2.45, tea at 4.30, with a public meeting and a speaker at 6pm. What a long day for those who travelled to and attended the first Quarterly meeting at Maidstone of 19 September 1925! By the late 1930s quarterlies had become Saturday afternoon events, with an evening open gathering. This pattern continued for the rest of the century but without the evening slot after the 1940s.

There had been a tradition in the LDUS to divide London into areas (up to ten in the nineteenth century), and for the churches within each area to meet together for mutual support. Some groupings were successful, as in south London, others were not. This policy continued under the LDPA. The main success in the period up to 1939 was the east London group that besides meeting held joint special services. Weekday services at lunch time at Essex Hall for office workers were started on a regular basis in the 1930s; the success of these services was variable. They were often discontinued and recommenced a few months later.

Services for Welsh speaking Unitarians were first held in Islington in 1895 but these failed, it was claimed, through lack of LDUS support. The LDPA set up regular services for Welsh speakers in 1937 at Stamford Street Chapel, a venture which turned into a congregation that continued until the 1970s. London Ministers' meetings were set up from about 1920 through the financial support of Ronald P Jones, who paid for regular retreats at Mansford House, Birchington, Kent in the 1920s and 1930s.

The number of ministers within Unitarianism had declined sharply because of their altered social position, the drop in the size of congregations and the poor level of pay. The Pioneer Preachers ceased in 1934, and the full brunt of filling pulpits fell on the lay preachers and their association. The preaching plan had been a quarterly production since the 1890s in both bodies, and since 1924 its preparation had become a significant part of Pearson's work. In 1935 lay preachers, which included women since about 1900, conducted over 700 services in the district. Initiatives to commence new causes in the fast expanding suburbia both north and south of the Thames, for example in Pinner, by both ministers and laymen did not result in new permanent congregations.

By the late 1930s Pearson (or JAP as he was universally called) had been the District Minister for thirty years, and there was growing feeling that he should retire and let someone younger and with a fresh vision take his place. He had become known as Mr London in Unitarian terms, and called (out of his hearing and to his consternation) "The Bishop." He had been about for so long with his methodical concentration on the task that it was difficult to think of the LDPA without him, being driven round in his car to churches and meetings by his daughter. Pearson steadfastly refused to retire, and only went in 1944 due to ill health and the impact of the Second World War.

A family which had a significant influence on London Unitarianism between the wars were the Tarrants. William G Tarrant (1853-1928) minister at Wandsworth was one of the most well known Unitarians of his day whose hymns have left a long legacy. His children Dorothy and Alan (always known as AG) who both had distinguished public careers were ever present both as lay preachers, in the Sunday schools and in the administration of the LDPA. Their significant role continued well into the 1960s. Dorothy was an institution, the first woman professor (in classics) in the University of London with a mind like a rapier. She could be kindly and understanding but was also a forbidding and awesome figure especially towards anyone who crossed her. She was devoted to her church at Wandsworth, the Women's League, the LDPA and the cause of teetotalism. Towards the end of her life she tutted very loudly whenever anyone got up to speak of whom she disapproved. As a young man in the 1960s I was approved of and so never received this treatment! Alan Tarrant had a distinguished war career and whenever he took a remembrance day service wore all his medals and saluted the congregation military style. Characters indeed!



A window marking the 350th anniversary of the Horsham congregation (1998)

THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

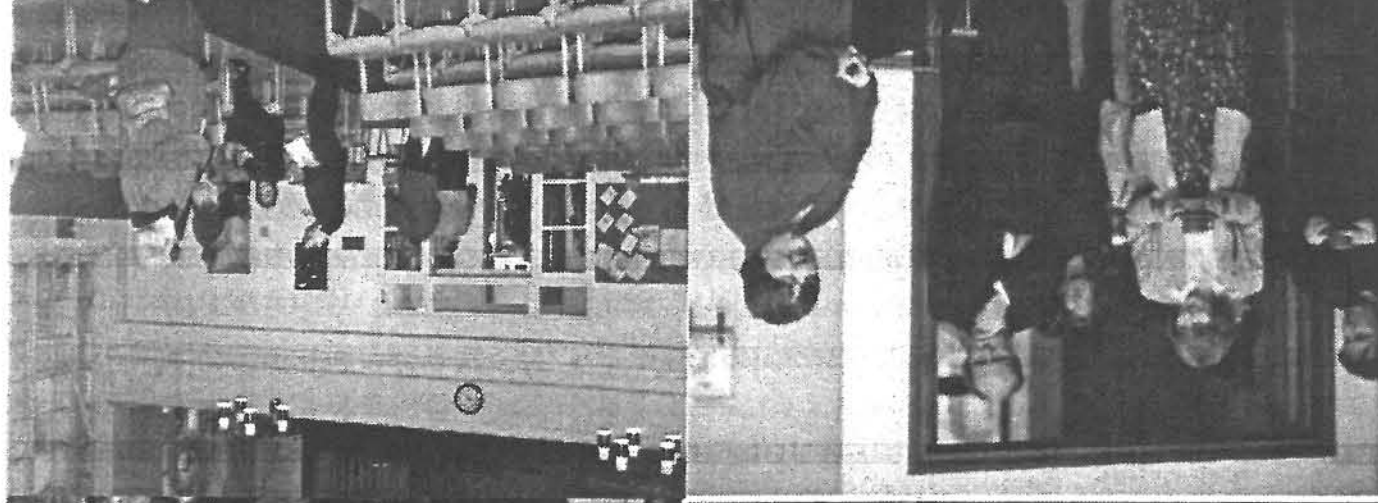
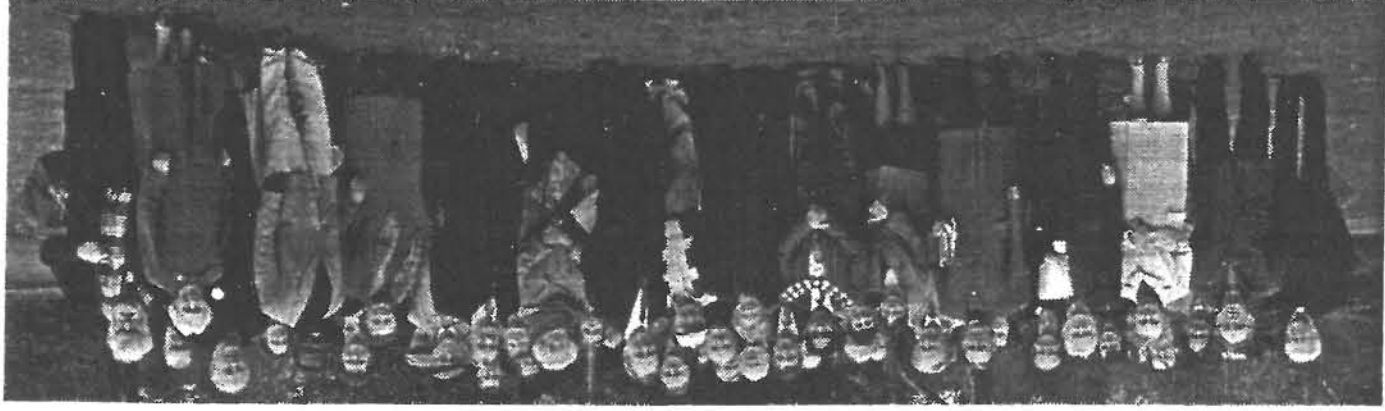
Unitarianism in the LDPA area altered little during the 1930s and new ideas and initiatives were few. Mrs Sidney (Edith) Martineau was a dominant figure in both the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (formed in 1928 - GA) and the LDPA in the 1930s and her financial support was not given to anything that disturbed the status quo. Pearson suited her and the leading figures of the LDPA, because he had been in place so long and was naturally conservative. He did wonders in saving churches and refusing to let them close. A good example is Richmond church that for many years had only three attendees, and which Pearson kept open personally almost for decades when most wanted to close it. By the 1980s it had one of largest congregations in the LDPA.

The Second War had a disastrous impact on London Unitarianism. Many churches were bombed, either being destroyed completely or put out of action. The destruction of Essex Hall in 1944 removed the focal point for the gathering of London Unitarians. Dr Williams's Library, to which the GA migrated until the new Essex Hall was opened in 1958, could not provide the same focus or meeting places and the cause of London Unitarianism suffered as a result. John Ballantyne with these events so recent in mind summarised the position:

"More than half our church premises in the London district suffered major or minor damage; the Peckham, Bermondsey, Brixton, Lewisham and Islington churches were completely destroyed...Except at Peckham and Bermondsey, where the congregations were very small, services were continued locally without interruption. The major damage inflicted upon the premises at Croydon, Hackney, Kilburn, Leytonstone, Newington Green and Wandsworth left some part of the buildings in which worship could be maintained, but at Ilford the congregation suffered exile until 1949."

In the midst of this a new District Minister, Magnus Ratter (1899-1993), was appointed in 1944. He was very much Pearson's protégé, having been a pioneer preacher with a wide experience of the ministry including a period of service at Peckham. Ratter was not everyone's choice, particularly not that of Edith Martineau, and he came facing a divided Executive Committee on his appointment. The war had reduced the LDPA to small proportions particularly in London itself. The LDPA Annual Report for 1944 stated that the average total attendance in 1904

"At a time when church attendance is notoriously on the decline, how do our London churches fare? The answer must be that they fare badly. But it is no new phenomenon...Essex Street Chapel in the Strand saw their members declining in number until the services had to be discontinued, but the few remaining members combined with the thriving movement in Notting Hill, with its iron church, and the tradition was carried on in strength...When Dr Sadler took over the pastorate at Hampstead in 1846, one record ran 'five persons present today'...But gradually the congregation grew; the chapel had to be enlarged twice and a gallery added...There is no cause of despondency."



From Bethnal Green to Billingshurst to Brighton to Brixton to Chatham to Croydon to Ditchling to Dover to Enfield/Barnet to Godalming to Golders Green to Hampstead to Hastings to Horsham to Islington to Kensington to Lewes to Lewisham to Loughton to Maidstone to Newington Green to Northiam to Reading to Richmond to Sevenoaks to Southend to Stratford to Tenterden to Watford to Worthing--the people are the LDPA!

had been 1491 in the morning and 1553 in the evening; in 1944 the figures were 220 and 142 respectively.

Magnus Ratter set about his task with gusto, and he attempted to build on the recommendations of a report on the state of the London churches published in 1946. His reports in the Inquirer written in his distinctive style emphasised that it was impossible to carry on as before. "The premises at Acton, Finchley and Woolwich although not damaged were not fit for use, yet we did nothing about it." He did not blame it all on the war but the problem, "our present sickness", was of a longer duration. There were protests at his outspoken words, but he attempted to emphasise success and not to rely in a distinguished Unitarian past. United services were held at Dr Williams Library towards the end of the war which encouraged people with large numbers attending, but for a variety of reasons these were discontinued. He was responsible for the founding in 1947 of the first Unitarian Fellowship in the UK at Watford, based on experience in the USA. In succeeding decades Fellowships were set up through local initiatives all over the country although only a few had much success in the LDPA area.

In 1949 Ratter decided that he had had enough, and his resignation resulted from some push from the Executive Committee but also the pull of a settled ministry. Not for the first or the last time, a District Minister had found that it is a lonely job, geared to an office situation with the need to cater for all the churches, with often only limited thanks for his efforts. Pearson, whose entire correspondence has come down to us intact (most is in Dr Williams's Library) regularly received letters castigating him for something outside his responsibility; his replies were unfailingly courteous. The same pattern has been experienced by each of his successors, and most ministry problems that arise in the area are placed before the District minister with the expectation that he will resolve them. The same expectation sometimes arises over church buildings that have become quite impossible to maintain. It can be a tough life!

New church premises were erected during the 1940s and 1950s out of war damage compensation although closures continued also took place. John Ballantyne writing in 1950 on the hundredth anniversary of the LDUS looked at past and future:

THE LAST HALF CENTURY

Wilfrid Waddington (1901-1960) was appointed District Minister in 1950. A competent administrator, he was a "safe" figure in comparison with the insistent and mercurial Ratter and the 1950s was essentially the same as before. The opening of the new Essex Hall in 1958 provided a fillip for the LDPA area and it was used extensively for meetings as it had been before the war. A new congregation, the Strand was formed to meet there which had initial success but disappeared in the late 1960s. Waddington died in office, and in 1961, Evan D Davies (1911-1975) from Sheffield was appointed in his place.

The 1950s were a static time, and the churches were still affected by the war and its aftermath. The 1960s not only saw a radical change in British society but also in Unitarianism. The theological and organisational views were changing, and the movement as a whole became more open and friendly and far less formal. This was reflected in London Unitarianism and Evan D Davies (1911-1975)—he preferred to be called David and was also known widely as EDD—was in a different mould.

With supporters, which included myself, new causes were opened in a variety of places in the suburbs, like Wembley and Dorking but unfortunately few had a life beyond a few years. Notable exceptions were the Fellowships formed at Enfield and Barnet in 1963 and Worthing in 1964, both of which continue into the new century. There were closures like Kilburn, Highgate and one of the most historic and important churches, the New Gravel Pit Chapel, Hackney. There was a feeling however that Unitarian gatherings (41 congregations with an average attendance at services each week approaching a thousand), although less numerous and smaller, had a livelier and more committed membership.

Communication with churches and members has been a continuing issue for the LDPA and its precursors since the late nineteenth century. Newsletters and circulars have come and gone, and their length and content has varied enormously. In the 1960s, "News and Views" was started on a quarterly basis as a booklet of twenty to thirty pages or more prepared by the District Minister. Over time this proved to be an important link, but its appearance was intermittent. In 1997, it was entirely revamped under the title "The Lantern", which has been made freely available to the churches and their members as an essential service of supplying information on a regular basis.

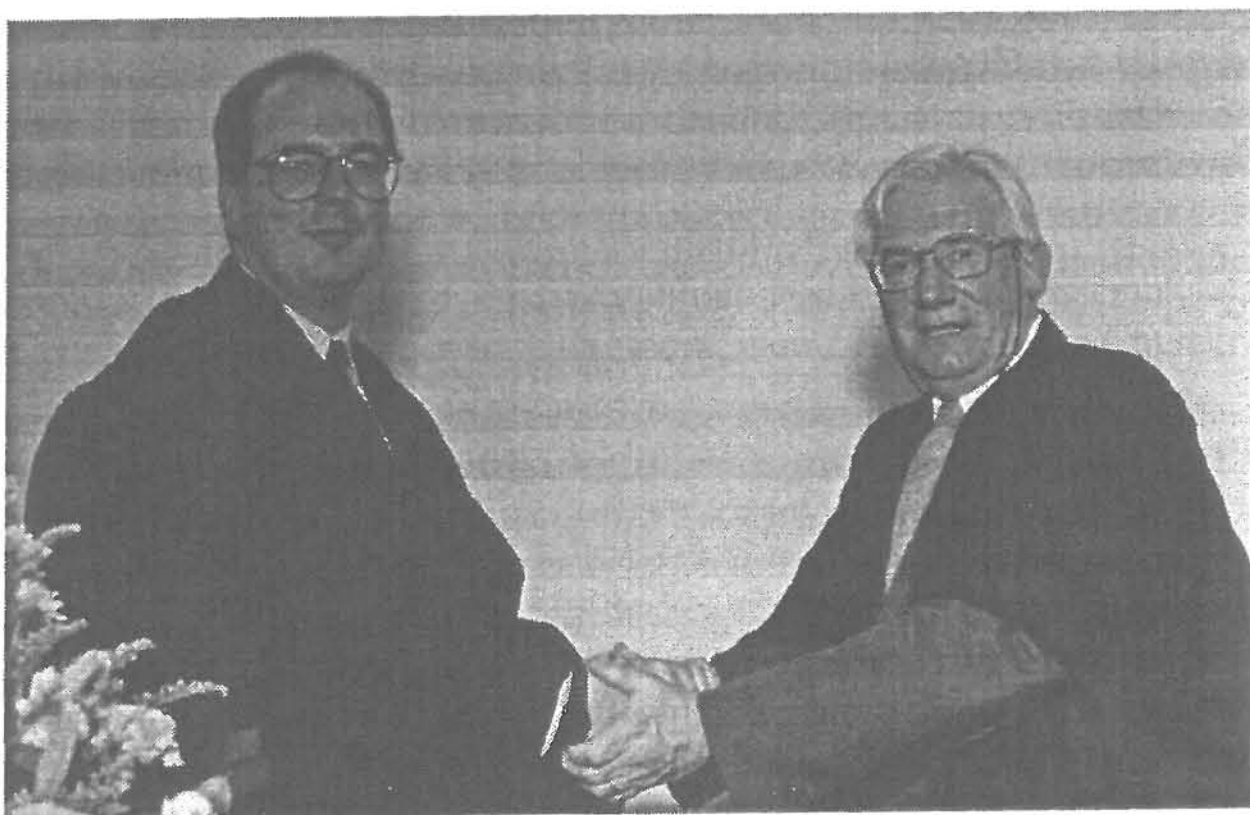
The LDPA gained financial resources from the closures in a period of rising property values, as well as benefiting from the results of prudent investment. This meant that many churches and their ministers could be supported on a scale that had been impossible in the past, and individual ministers received more than a low and deficient stipend. The LDPA was an efficient operation and remains so to this day, and is acknowledged as one of the most active district associations in the country. This was aided in 1961 when the LDPA became an incorporated body, which enables it to hold property and act in trusteeship to the churches in the district. For the first time members of the Executive Committee were company directors! There was a widespread determination that further decline must be halted and a commitment to spread a new and more open brand of Unitarianism, not necessarily based on a Christian-centred message.

The London District had numerous personalities involved in its affairs. Mary Butcher (later Thomas) was secretary for almost thirty years, and for many it was impossible to think of the LDPA without her. Eric Veillard was treasurer for a long period, and was responsible after the Charities Act 1961 for much of the wise investment of LDPA funds. One of the most vivid figures was Arthur Peacock (1905-1968), the last Universalist minister in the UK, who joined the Unitarian ministry in the early 1950s. He remained a key figure in the LDPA until his death. Rather ugly with hardly any teeth, wearing a broad hat and sometimes a flowing cape, he was a flamboyant personality who had in past had been the editor of a London daily newspaper, and secretary of the London Trades Union Club. Walter Long (1893-1983) and his wife Amy were involved in the ministry of London churches and missions from 1918, and were members of the Executive Committee for decades. Their care and concern for people was always obvious. George Prentice, Leonie Hosegood and Gabor Kereki were other well known London figures who were committed to the work of the LDPA for many years.

David Davies died suddenly in November 1975 in his year of office as President of the General Assembly, and in the following year Sidney Knight took over until he retired in 1986, to be followed by Peter Godfrey until his retirement in 1996. For the last few years of the century Stephen Dick (always known as Steve) has occupied the office. All have worked hard for the Unitarian cause in the South East, supported in the closing years of the twentieth century in a restructured organisation by a Council rather than an Executive Committee, now of smaller size than in the past.

Without the LDPA many of the churches would have disappeared in the difficult conditions for churches of any description in the metropolis. Many tend to ignore the LDPA but it is called into action as soon as something goes wrong. There is an increasing awareness that churches cannot stand alone if they are to grow. This was clearly stated in the nineteenth century and is at last coming to be widely recognised and put into practice. Churches now welcome official representatives to their annual meetings, and after a period of declining numbers, there is increased support for district events. Unitarianism, while a tiny group in London and the South East with its 30 congregations, is not about to disappear. The means and manner of its expression may change in the twenty first century but it is in good heart. The changes in fortune which I have described as taking place over the last 150 years, is best seen in a longer time frame. It is perhaps best summed up in a paragraph towards the end of John Ballantyne booklet on the history of our churches since the seventeenth century:

“We have seen a wide and fast-flowing river, we have seen it disappear beneath the ground; we have seen it by candlelight, as the dark, swift water flowed through underground passages and caverns; and we have witnessed it as it reappeared gleaming and sparkling in the sun. Great causes are often like that; and our cause of liberty, truth, justice and unfettered communion with God has at its heart abiding realities; these for a time may seem to be submerged, but they rise again and can never die.”



LDPA District Minister the Rev Steve Dick and LDPA President the Rev Ashley Hills welcome the new century with faith in the next chapter for Unitarians in the LDPA.



ESSEX HALL FRONTAGE, 1920



ESSEX HALL ENTRANCE, AUGUST 1944
(WRECKAGE PARTLY CLEARED)



ESSEX HALL, 1958

Alan Ruston is the author of a number of books on history including *My Ancestors Were English Presbyterians/Unitarians, Obituaries and Marriages of Dissenting Ministers in Gentleman's Magazine in the 18th Century* and *Stockton's First Dissenters*. He also edits the journal of the Unitarian Historical Society.

As an accomplished lay preacher, Alan has conducted worship in many of the Unitarian churches and chapels in this country.

His service on countless committees and trusts in support of liberal religion is legendary. Alan has been the President of the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly of Unitarian Free Christian Churches and soon he will become Chairman of its Council.

He is soon to retire from a distinguished career in the civil service to devote more time to Unitarianism and other pursuits.

Alan has been nominated to serve as President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches from 2002 to 2003 (after a year as Vice-President)—a sign of the esteem in which he is held throughout the Unitarian movement.

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