

The Rise of Non-conformity in the Ramsdean, Langrish and Stroud Tithings of East Meon in the 19th Century

This short paper examines the discovered evidence, documentary and physical of the origins, growth and practice of Non-conformist congregations in the eastern tithings of East Meon viz. Ramsdean, Stroud and Langrish, subsequently separated into the Administrative Parish of Langrish in 1894. A companion paper on the congregations and chapels of the village of East Meon itself is under preparation. These tithings are currently in the Ecclesiastical Parish of East Meon. Inevitably, given the ecclesiastical and governance unity of the parish in the 19th century until 1872 when St John the Evangelist Church at Langrish was built there is considerable connection/overlap with developments in East Meon.

Two factors that to some extent differentiate Ramsdean and Stroud from East Meon proper are their greater proximity to the local market town of Petersfield and their distance from the parish church of All Saints at East Meon itself. The latter is highlighted by the very unusually chatty enumerator's (Mr. Walter Goulding) preamble to the 1861 Census of the tithings which reads "Whilst this is a matter of congratulated [improvement in education and soil fertility], the want of Church accommodation in this district is to be much lamented; the nearest church is more than a mile and the majority of the houses more than two miles & many three miles." He follows on with that despite the large tithes paid there "...is not one family in five that attends any church, so that most of the advantages of education must be lost from the want of ministerial institutions..." Obviously, a significant issue. Stroud and Ramsdean lie approximately equidistant from East Meon Village and Petersfield being 3 and 2 miles from East Meon and 2 and 3 miles respectively.

Whilst the tithings are variously combined¹ in successive censuses the population of the tithings was approximately as follows.

Year	Occupied Dwellings	Total Population
1841	90	606
1861	80	381
1891	118	516
1901	114	476
1911	114	477

Given the proportionally large numbers attending Ramsdean Chapel (see later) they were clearly not attending church but chapel! Ramsdean is an almost entirely agricultural hamlet with a number of small fertile tenanted farms, whilst Stroud, built on poor "stroud" land (very wet clay/sand and relatively infertile Wealden terrain) was largely common land. Stroud also had a significant brick works established in 1602 but greatly extended in the late 19th century accounting for the substantial increase in occupied dwellings at Stroud.

The bulk of land in East Meon was owned by the Bishop of Winchester, who was also Lord of the Manor and held the advowson of the church. During the mid sixteenth century the vicar appointed, Robert Moore, was both vicar of West and East Meon and had also been a prebendary of both Winchester and Chichester Cathedrals thus undoubtedly sympathetic with the Royalist/Laudian

¹ Omitted years are where irrelevant tithings are grouped in census returns

polity. Two small but significant country estates existed at Langrish and Bordean, both generating “model farms” in the 19th Century.

Interestingly, both these estates were owned by significant Parliamentary gentlemen at the time of the English Civil Wars and Commonwealth.

Sir Hercules Langrish (probably then resident at Manor Farm, Langrish, and London) raised a Troop of Horse for Parliament and after disgrace for his part in the Fall of Bristol his son regained the family fortunes with Cromwell in Ireland. Their religious views can only be guessed. However, Sir William Lewis of Bordean was a prominent Presbyterian. He raised a Regiment of Foot at the outbreak of Civil War in 1642, subsequently besieging and taking Portsmouth with William Waller for Parliament on the 28 August 1642 and became Governor (1642-43). He was removed from Parliament in 1649 in Pride’s Purge and imprisoned until 1651 for being an advocate of moderation. He became influential in the Restoration of the Monarchy and the “Cavalier” Parliament. His personal commitment to Puritan and strict Presbyterian values can perhaps best be judged by the clause in his will “...that my body may be buried decently without funeral in the vault provided at Froxfield there to wait for the time of my resurrection” (Sir William Lewis, Will 1677).²

The Rev. Robert Moore died in 1642, and his successor, John Shrigley, must have been acceptable to the new puritan dictat as he held the position until his death in 1660. The position of perpetual vicar was then filled by three successive members of the Downes family for more than 80 years providing a perhaps significant continuity until 1733.³

However, one would have thought that such gravitational pulls towards the non-conformist theology and practice in the Commonwealth era would, as in many places, have resulted in the continuance of a dissenting tradition in the parish. This is clearly not the case. The Bishops of Winchester conducted three visitations of their see: Bishops Richard Wills in 1725, John Thomas in 1765, and Browning North in 1788. Consistently one of the (nine to thirteen) standard questions they asked the incumbent was of the existence of ‘protestant dissenting congregations and persons of that persuasion in their parish’.

For “East Meon with Froxfield and Steep” in 1725⁴ embracing the Ramsdean, Langrish, and Stroud tithings the Rev. John Downes⁵ replied “No meeting of protestant dissenters in Eastmeon, nor Froxfield, nor Steep”. In 1765 for “East Meon with chapels”⁶ the Rev. Andrew Lewis Boisdaune⁷ replied “There is no meeting-house or place of worship for dissenters; and there are very few if any in the parish”. Whilst in 1788, again Boisdaune⁸ replied for “East Meon, Froxfield and Steep”: “Dissenters - there is nothing of the kind in any of the parishes”.⁹ Thus we can assume East Meon was for the bulk of the 18th Century a “dissenter free” parish. In Petersfield and its mother church at Buriton the Bishop’s Visitation of 1725¹⁰ records “... there is a meeting of dissenters lately set up [in Petersfield]...”, but this seems to have no longer existed by 1765.

The earliest reference found so far to the emergence of non-conformity in the ‘larger’ East Meon Parish to date is a ‘Dissenting Certificate to preach’ issued to John White, a cooper, on 1st August,

² National Archives, Kew

³ CCEd @ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/locations/DisplayLocation.jsp?locKey=14911>

⁴ Ward, 1995, pp.46-47

⁵ HRO, 21M65/B1/61/1 (Exhibition Book) and HRO, 21M65/B1/66 (Liber Cleri)

⁶ Ibid, p179

⁷ HRO, 21M65 A2/2 (Thomas Act Book) (Act Book)

⁸ HRO, 21M65 A2/3 (Act Book)

⁹ Ibid.p.271

¹⁰ Ibid., p.30

1800. No denomination is specified. More specific to our research the next dissenting certificates include one to “Rob Green, Minister, of Ramsdean”¹¹ on 29th July, 1808. As an R. Green was the manager of the Independent Chapel at Ramsdean in 1851 this is certainly the probable forerunner of that chapel (discussed later). The broader picture of the very rapid spread on non-conformity, especially evangelical non-conformity is outside of the scope of this paper. However, many of the salient forces (a moribund Church of England, detachment and lack of empathy of clergy aligned with hierarchical privilege and not adapted to the working or emerging middle classes, the forces arising from radicalism, epitomised by the French Revolution, and the concomitant reactions and cultural cross-currents, agricultural poverty, etc.). Two local factors may have contributed to its rise in the parish. Firstly, the vicars were often absent and most particularly in the case of Rev. Thomas Cooke Kemp (vicar of East Meon 1826-1868) who successfully alienated all strata of local society with his avaricious pursuit of maximum financial yields from his tithes¹². In the Swing Riots of 1830 East Meon was surrounded by outbreaks of violence often directed at the vicars and their exploitation of the tithe system that continued to draw in extortionate sums in a failing agricultural labour market. Some vicars (e.g. Rev. William R. Cobbold at Selborne) were coerced into substantial reduction of the tithes. Secondly, Petersfield was a ‘rotten borough’ and particularly acrimonious disputes arose on the question of ‘Political Reform’ often involving East Meon land-owners.

To return to the specific origins of the two Ramsdean / Stroud chapels it is sensible to consider the growth of non-conformity nearby. Petersfield saw the establishment of an Independent Congregation on 18 November 1795, when a Meeting House was registered under the name Joseph Eames in Cowledge Lane (now Station Road). Described “as of the Independent persuasion”¹³. The chapel flourished under a series of evangelists and ministers drawn from the Village Itinerary Society¹⁴ at Hackney College with one of them, Richard Densham, being ordained minister in 1797. Their influence and reception in East Meon and neighbouring Steep (and no doubt are tithings which they passed between the two) are graphically illustrated by two excerpts from his journal:

“June 11th 1799. At Steep two of the persecuting farmer, on my giving notice to preach, swore they would throw me to the dogs, or into the pond. Though they had their great dogs, and I am naturally afraid of them. I preached without fear” and

“August 2, 1800. Preached at 7 this morning at Harting to about 90 serious persons; at 11 am at Petersfield; at 2 pm at East Meon. Rode to Rogate, nine miles from East Meon and preached the first time in the street to near 500 people. Persecution raged, and I got pelted with rotten eggs, of which they threatened us with a whole bushel. Soon after I had read my text an egg struck me on the back of the head and ran down my gown. The stench was almost intolerable, but blessed be God, I never felt more comfortable”.¹⁵

In the next few years Independent Chapels were ‘planted’ at Harting, Liss, and Sheet....and it would seem a sensible conclusion to infer at Ramsdean too. Certainly by 1820 onwards under the ministry of Joseph Greenwood (another student of Hackney College) the first Sunday School in Petersfield was established by the Independents (together with Night Schools and Benevolent and Saving Society) and was being attended by inhabitants of the Langrish area¹⁶. We know from the 1851

¹¹ The Religious Census of Hampshire, 1851, p.155

¹²Journal of the House of Commons, Vol.19, 1835

¹³ Leaton (Ed.), 2001, p.41

¹⁴ American Educational Trust: A Short History of Hackney Theological College, 1839, p.67

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Religious Census that Ramsdean Independent congregation started in 1830. However two additional (and rather obscure) pieces of evidence suggest the situation might be more complex. In the rather complex legal exchange of documents generated by the lengthy sale of the then closed chapel in c.1963 and confusion over title, the then Treasurer of Petersfield Congregational Church was categorical in his understanding that Ramsdean had never been a direct off-shoot of his church, despite obvious close working relationships (of course, he may have been wrong). However, in my opinion, the 'seed' is likely to have been planted by the work of the Hackney College's itinerating evangelists. An even more intriguing discovery is a petition of 1830 to both the House of Lords and Commons in support of the Bill to abolish slavery. The petition was tabled in the Commons on 12 November 1830 and the Lords on 16th November 1830. The entry in the official record for the latter reads " Also, Upon reading the Petition of the Members of Ramsdean: a Society and Congregation of Wesleyan Methodists worshipping at the Wesleyan Chapel, Ramsdean, in the County of Hants, whose Names are thereunto subscribed : ... ". The record does not contain these names or the exact wording of the petition (there were some hundreds 'placed upon the table of the House' that day) but the context makes it clear that it conformed to earlier petition wordings that were recorded that day, viz. for total abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.

It seems to imply a building. We can only wonder if this was a Society which quickly ceased to exist (there was no Wesleyan Methodist meeting in Ramsdean in 1851) and perhaps subsumed into either of the other two chapels we are considering, or, if there was a change of 'affiliation'. There were Wesleyan 'causes' at West Meon and Froxfield at the time, but generally Wesleyan Methodism did not thrive in our area and the Petersfield Wesleyan Circuit dwindled being shifted to leadership from Alton.¹⁷ Richard Pink draws our attention to possible connections in Dissenting Licences that may mark out James Pink who had moved to Ramsdean by 1841 as its leader: "A James Pink of East Meon applied for a dissenter's meeting house certificate on 16th February 1828 (also Robert Pink of East Meon applied for his house to be used as a dissenting meeting house in 1844)." James was earlier described as "Maltster"¹⁸ and son of William Pink, the village, surgeon/doctor. By 1851 he was an "agricultural labourer at Rookery Farm, Ramsdean"¹⁹ He notes that two of James children were baptised at All Saints Church around this time and the other later children were not suggesting a defection to non-conformity. Of further significance is the sole entry for East Meon in "England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1970"²⁰ which records that on 10th March 1803 a William Pink, son of William Pink and Sarah, daughter of William Minchin was baptised. The denomination is not given, but one of the witnesses, John Purkis, was an office holder at St Andrew's Chapel, Portsmouth - a Wesleyan Methodist Congregation. It looks highly probable that William Pink the surgeon and his family were Methodist.

The Religious Census of 1851 at least provides much clearer evidence of non-conformity in the tithings and in the case of the Independent Chapel at Ramsdean its very substantial growth. It states that the Chapel at Ramsdean (as previously stated) was founded in 1830 and had 110 seats of which 100 were "free". On the day of the census the morning Sunday School had 51 scholars, whilst 141 adults attended the afternoon service in two sittings, The evening service was attended by 81. A remarkable number given the size of Ramsdean and obviously drawing on East Meon proper as well. There is a final note "As the Chapel will not hold the People, arrangements are already made & it will be made just double the size this summer if nothing unforeseen prevents". Well something did as

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ East Meon Parish Records

¹⁹ 1851 England Census

²⁰ Entry 1763

the chapel was not enlarged until 1887.²¹ Even then there was no increase in the seating capacity, the Congregational Union Annual Reports showing capacity remained at 100 seats for many subsequent decades²². The completing church officer of the return is “R.Green, Manager, Ramsdean, Petersfield.” Montgomery²³ assumes this is the Robert Green of the earlier Dissenting Certificate, but a stronger case can be made for his son Richard, who was minister at the time of its enlargement in 1887. The chapel was granted a 999 year lease by John Bonham-Carter but inspection of the 1853 tithe map shows the chapel is in the centre of Richard Green’s leased holdings from Bonham-Carter and adjoining his farmstead (now Chapel Cottage).



Ramsdean Congregational Chapel 2015, watercolour© David Hopkins 2015

Most likely is that the congregation divided and a substantial proportion was drawn to the new Congregational Chapel in East Meon itself. It was initiated in 1870 as an “Evangelising Station” by the Hampshire Congregational Union who funded a full-time evangelist, Mr. T. W. Castle and his successor William Thomas probably building up a congregation at Zoar Chapel (probably purchased from another group, possibly Baptists) and held “cottage meetings” in many of the titheings surrounding the village including Bordean and Oxenbourne within a mile of Ramsdean.²⁴ Non-conformist seemed to happily co-exist with the Church of England at this time with the curate (Begbie) and the local non-conformists having “fraternal feelings” and holding joint prayer meetings fortnightly, and even a “tent meeting” in the summer of 1889 and jointly planned to open a reading

²¹ Victoria County History

²² Hampshire Congregational Union Annual Reports 1853-1932, HRO

²³ Montgomery & HGS, Undated, p.7

²⁴ Ibid., 1876

room in the village.²⁵ The arrival of a new vicar, the Rev. Charles Patten Good, in 1882 radically changed this situation with the report of the Hampshire Congregational Union that he “used every inducement to draw away the people. This vicar loudly condemns Dissenter, as he uses every inducement and is very kind to the poor in ways not available to our Evangelist, Dissent suffers.”²⁶ Given the settlement of the curate of East Meon, Rev. Edward Paine as the first vicar of Langrish in 1871 the effects must have impacted Ramsdean. Further troubles seem to have surrounded the Ramsdean “enlargement where there are suggestions of acrimony and financial mismanagement of the £200 raised “by public subscription” in the Minute Books. Certainly the growth days of 1851 where more than 100 people attended services had fallen to much smaller numbers by the late 19th century.

The chapel was being financially supported by the Petersfield Chapel, and by as early as 1884 the Union was seeking to persuade Ramsdean and East Meon to join together (resisted by East Meon).²⁷ By 1895 the obstructions had been overcome and Ramsdean and East Meon were contributing towards a shared evangelist (a Mr. Chapman) who also worked with the Bishop’s Waltham and Emsworth congregations. From then on statics are always provided by the Hampshire Congregational Union as combined for East Meon and Ramsdean, and there is mention of their deeds being rewritten. As part of this process the trustees of the chapel were changed on 29th July, 1898.²⁸ The outgoing trustees were

Rev. William Isaac	Minister of Petersfield Congregational Chapel	Petersfield	
John Osmod	Yeoman	Steep	
George Holder	Carpenter	Sheet	
Geo Holder (Jnr.)	Carpenter	Sheet	
Richard Green	Farmer	Ramsdean	
Henry Calvert	Draper	Petersfield	
Thomas Minchin	Gentleman	Sheet	

Interestingly, Rev. William Isaac, “Independent Minister at Petersfield Chapel”²⁹ had moved on from Petersfield to Ealing Congregational Chapel well before 1861 and died in 1877³⁰, whilst Thomas Minchin (of Heath Farm) died in 1859.

The new trustees were

Richard Green	Farmer	Ramsdean
Andrew Gammon	Coal Merchant	Petersfield
William Joy	Music Seller	Petersfield
Arthur Sanders	Plumber	Petersfield
John Price Blair	Photographer	Petersfield
A E Shallind		Southsea
F Blake	Gentleman	Havant
W Blake	Commercial Traveller	Gosport

²⁵ Ibid., 1879, 1880

²⁶ Ibid., 1882-3

²⁷ Ibid., 1884

²⁸ Memo of Choice and Appointment of Trustees, 1898, HRO

²⁹ 1851 Census of England

³⁰ England and Wales Death Register, Oct-Dec 1877

Given the distance particularly these late trustees lived from Ramsdean this must be indicative of networked governance rather than local leadership/membership.

By 1902 Ramsdean had been incorporated as a Charity and a lease of 999 years was granted by John Bonham Carter to “Richard Green and eight others”. By 1899 there were 16 members and 25 scholars for both chapels³¹, but the attendances rather than “members” may have been substantially greater as in 1912 joint attendance was 65 at service with 15 scholars and was noted as “a decrease”.³² At this stage the chapels had no minister or evangelist, but being “superintended Rev. T. Lee Histson. Certainly, there is in living memory from the 1930’s the evidence that families “mixed and matched” attendance between church and chapel depending on convenience and attraction.³³

The second congregation recorded in the Religious Census³⁴ is that of the Primitive Methodists located a mile north of Ramsdean at Stroud Common. Founded “about 1842” the form, completed by “William Heath, Preacher, Stroud Common, Petersfield” records that it met in “Not a separate building [and] not used exclusively for worship” and indeed states “the meetings are held in the kitchen of my cottage, built by myself on Steep Stroud Common. There was “standing room for about 25” and attendance on Census day of 15 in the morning and 16 in the afternoon. It built the chapel in 1867 partially coinciding with rapid growth of the Stroud population resulting from expansion of the brickworks.



Stroud Primitive Methodist Chapel 2015, watercolour © David Hopkins, 2015

³¹ Ibid., 1889

³² Ibid., 1912

³³ Dosh Deadman interview, September 2015

³⁴ The Religious Census of Hampshire, 1851, p.152

What was the complexion of these two geographically close congregations? In the absence of few primary sources the nature of the Independent Chapel is perhaps conjectural, whilst much clearer evidence exist for the "Prims".

The Village Itinerary Society and Hackney College had a shifting and complex relationship at the turn of the 18th and early 19th Centuries with the Hackney College undergoing replacement of sponsors following financial difficulties. However, in the 1790 it had such famous and controversial lecturers as Rev J.B. Priestly and Rev. Richard Price both outstanding Enlightenment academics considered leading radical moral philosophers, agents of political change (even being accused of being "Jacobins") , as well as theologians and Priestly a ground-breaking scientist. They tended to Unitarianism and placed radical social, educational and political reform at the heart of their perception of the Christian Gospel. To what extent this was still the flavour of the "independents" in and Petersfield by the mid 1800's and particularly Ramsdean is uncertain, but that the Petersfield Congregation started the British School in the Town, and fostered saving and benevolent societies suggests its continuance. A fascinating shred of evidence exists for Ramsdean. In late April 1841 they hosted a lecture by the public speaker and Editor of "The Herald of peace and international arbitration", the Rev. Wills on the concept of setting up the machinery for International arbitration and the abolition world wide of armed forces. The tone of his lectures and writings was very anti-establishment. He normally addressed public meetings in town halls , but that Ramsdean attracted his services suggests a degree of sophistication in the congregations social and political debates. His itinerary was "...at Basingstoke on the 26th, Mr W. addressed the British School, and on the three succeeding days lectured at Petersfield, Ramsdean, and addressed the British-school at Petersfield. May 2nd preached at Emsworth"³⁵.

It would seem that Petersfield Congregational Chapel was the continuing senior partner of Ramsdean which is always referred to in the HCU reports as "an outstation" of Petersfield . Interestingly both are referred to as "preaching stations" rather than "churches" (unlike most of the congregations in the HCU) and an earlier report (1852) marks them with an asterisk as "not affiliated" probably underlying their different origin from other Independent chapels in Hampshire. Petersfield always provided "superintendence" of the work at Ramsdean the superintendent being its ministers.³⁶

Whilst no evidence has so far been found for the nature of activity in the earliest years of the Primitive Methodists at Stroud extensive preaching plans and schedules from the last decade of the 19th century clearly indicate their continued conformity with the principles and practice of the Primitive Methodists from their inception. The Primitive Methodists were a major offshoot of the principal stream of Methodism - the Wesleyan Methodists - in 19th Century Britain.

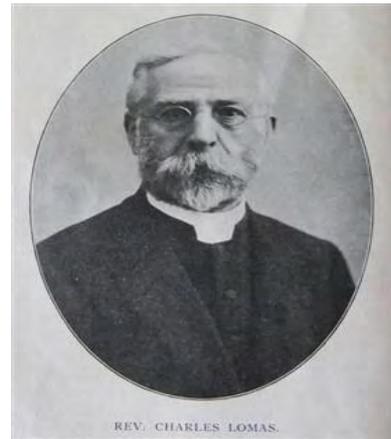
In the early decades of the 19th century there was a growing body of opinion among the Wesleyans that their Connexion was moving in directions which were a distortion of, not to say a betrayal of, what John Wesley had brought to birth in the 18th century. Tensions increasingly arose in the earlier 18th century where the increasing tendency of Wesleyan Methodism to "churchify" under respectable middle class aspirations was for many seen as a betrayal of Wesley's emphasis on taking the Gospel to the poor being committed the political implications of their brand of Christian discipleship.

³⁵ Connected History

³⁶ Hampshire Congregational Union Annual Report (HRO)

Eventually a Methodist preacher called Hugh Bourne became the catalyst for a breakaway, to form the Primitive Methodists. The "Primitives refocused on the role of lay people, stressed simplicity in their chapels and their worship, rejecting cultural enrichment from the Anglican tradition, and concentrated on evangelising the rural poor concentrated their mission on the rural poor.³⁷ The break point came over the Primitives emphasis on Open Air preaching and the use of "Camp Meetings" (all day open air event with multiple preachers and extempore prayer). Their preaching was zealous, emotional and revivalist in character. They dressed and spoke plainly with most of their preachers being from the agricultural labouring class of their own area.

The preaching plans (the one for 1901 is attached in Appendix 1) shows most of these characteristics. Open air preaching is regular and scheduled. The Circuit was centred on Buriton and on successive services the local preachers moved from chapel to chapel. The Superintendent (the only paid minister) usually only staid for one or two years and whilst living in Petersfield the congregations in all of the rural parishes were much larger. Camp Meetings were a regular feature at Buriton (held at the top of Kiln Lane).³⁸ Stroud had a mere 14 members (whilst Petersfield had 11 and East Meon had 48) and collections averaged 2s 9¾d per member for the quarter. The leader at Stroud, Fred Knight was a foreman brick-maker at the local brick works. His wife helped too. The occupations of the preachers included "stockman" (William Langrish), "general labourer on farm" (Henry Marriner), "farmer" (David Noble, Rookery Farm, Ramsdean), "farmer" (77 year old William Pink living at Stroud Cottages), and the superintendent minister himself, Charles Lomas (1854-1930), who hailed from Rochdale, Lancs, where he had been a cotton spinner before becoming a minister in 1879³⁹



This paper does not address the decline of the chapels in the 20th century, but for sake of completeness their demise is as follows. Stroud Primitive Methodist chapel was closed immediately after the Second World War in 1946 and between 1957 and 1975 it was in use as a farm building. It is now a private residence. Ramsdean Independent Chapel was sold in 1967 and its charity dissolved after a few years of complex legal discussions as to the title of the building and land and distribution of funds resulting from its sale. The funds were passed to the Congregational Union.

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³⁷ The Methodist Church in Britain @ <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/history/primitive-methodism>

³⁸ Buriton Heritage Bank. Information Sheet 10 @ <http://www.buriton.org.uk/bhb/infosheet10.htm>

³⁹ 1871 to 1901 England Census; http://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/page/charles_lomas

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