

# The Engagement of Churches in Social Welfare and Related Provision in Edwardian Basingstoke - 1903

## Introduction

Prior to the emergence of the Welfare State, churches made a valuable and valued contribution to social welfare provision either alone or collaboratively. In prioritising the needs of others, churches were seeking to give practical expression to Christ's injunction to 'love your neighbour as yourself.' By the Edwardian era this had been formalised in the concept of 'the social gospel' with adherents claiming that good works were as legitimate a pursuit for the churches as the saving of souls through the promotion of the 'personal gospel' based on faith.<sup>1</sup> David Bebbington distinguishes between the two by defining the 'social gospel' as 'an attempt to change human beings by transforming their environment rather than touching their hearts'.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing upon examples from Edwardian Basingstoke during a single year, 1903, three main forms of social welfare can be identified. First, there was the sponsorship of slate clubs, which were essentially insurance/savings schemes to assist members in times of financial need, such as sickness. Second, there was fund raising for good causes. Last, there were various kinds of what may loosely be described as 'direct action' in pursuit of specific goals.

## Slate clubs

At the beginning of the twentieth century, possibly the largest, and certainly the fastest growing, slate club in Basingstoke was that linked to London Street Congregational Church's Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (P.S.A.) Society. Having been established in 1901, along with a coal club, in January 1903 it was reported that 265 applications for membership had been approved by the committee.<sup>3</sup>

At the annual meeting held in December, the following statistics were provided by the secretary:

366 members ... [had joined during the year] compared with 198 for the first year and 295 in the second year. Twenty-one had lapsed during the year including one death; thus leaving 345 to take out their share of the funds, viz., £1 2s 9d [each]. There had been two death levies and these had been promptly paid out and discharged. The small amount paid for sickness was noteworthy, considering the large number of members and the trying weather of the year. This amounted to £72 5s 10d - £30 less than the previous year. This said something for the healthy nature of the town and also the healthy constitutions of the members ... The medical branch was also reported upon, this being an additional requisite for members and others not already provided with a medical attendant. The membership was found to be of modest numbers, but

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the origins and subsequent usage of the phrase 'social gospel', see David Thompson, "The Emergence of the Nonconformist Social Gospel in England," in *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America, c.1750 – c.1950*, ed. Keith Robbins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 255-80.

<sup>2</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 211.

<sup>3</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 10 January 1903. By 1912 the slate club had 388 members and the coal club 63 members, a clear indication of their worth. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 November 1912.

the subscriptions of 1s 4d and 1s 8d per quarter proved sufficient to leave a balance in hand on the year's working.<sup>4</sup>

This report illustrates the range of services offered by the slate club. To symbolise its links with the Church, the president was the Revd Capes Tarbolton, London Street's minister.

### Fund raising

Although not associated with any particular denomination, a good example of fund raising for a philanthropic cause was a two day bazaar and entertainment held in the Drill Hall on 21 and 22 January and organised by the Young Helper's League of Dr Barnardo's Homes<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 1). At the beginning of its report, the *Hants and Berks Gazette* observed that 'few charitable objects have so paramount a claim for financial assistance from the whole community.' The Church's commitment to this good cause was denoted by the presence of the Revd Tarbolton in the platform party. The specific purpose of the event was to raise funds in 'support of a "Basingstoke Cot"' at the Stepney Causeway homes of Dr Barnardo. The entertainment consisted of 'waxworks, action songs and tableaux' and the total sum raised was £40.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1 *Dr Barnardo's Children*

A second example of fund raising for a good cause from 1903 took place on Tuesday 19 May. This was a concert in the Drill Hall given by the members of the Bethesda Male Voice Choir (see Figure 2), which 'drew a large attendance'. The Choir was paying a second visit to Basingstoke. The concert was a cross-denominational initiative, for amongst those who organised the visit were the Primitive Methodist minister and some leading lay Congregationalists, one of whom,

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<sup>4</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 December 1903.

<sup>5</sup> Also known as the National Waifs Association. There was both a Church of England and Nonconformist Section.

<sup>6</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 January 1903. This equates to over £4000 in today's values.

Thomas Edney, acted as Chairman. The aim of the concert was to raise funds to alleviate the suffering of the Penrhyn Quarrymen, who were on strike, and their families. In a statement the choir secretary explained ‘some of the grievances which had led to the strike, and appeal[ed] for subscriptions in support of the locked out men, and more especially their wives and children.’ As it was put, ‘his remarks were sympathetically received, and many cries of “Shame!” were raised in the hall at Lord Penrhyn’s tyrannical attitude.’ The chairman made the point that it was not a party issue, ‘but a question as regards the rights of humanity.’ Thus, in this sense, it had both religious and moral connotations. What was described as ‘an interesting programme was brought to an end with the singing of the Welsh National Anthem.’ The amount raised was £4 12s.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2 *Bethesda Male Voice Choir Logo*

#### Direct action

One particular action of note during 1903 was initiated at a meeting held on Thursday 26 March called by the mayor and attended by the Revds Tarbolton and Eustace Long, minister of Immanuel Church, in addition to a large number of leading lay Nonconformists. It had been prompted by what was described as the duty to provide ‘some form of attractive and healthy recreation, combined with a modicum of useful instruction, for the lads who ... [spent] their spare time in the streets for want of a better place.’ Having given the matter some consideration the mayor favoured ‘the establishment of some form of Boy’s Brigade, having headquarters with provision for reading and games rooms, a gymnasium, etc, which would be open all through the week.’ This suggestion received a mixed response with the vicar, who could not attend, expressing some reservations. However, the outcome was the establishment of a committee consisting of both Free Churchmen and Anglicans.<sup>8</sup>

Just over six months later a Lads Institute was formally opened in Flaxfield, with the now redundant Primitive Methodist chapel being converted for this purpose (see Figure 3).

On the opening night the new Institute looked decidedly attractive. The Mechanics’ Institute Band occupied the platform ... which was surrounded by choice palms ... in a room to the left was a neat refreshment buffet; the chairs around the side of the room provided for accommodation for visitors. The centre of the room was reserved as an arena for the gymnasts; and here a substantial horizontal bar had been erected, with padded mattresses beneath to

<sup>7</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 23 May 1903.

<sup>8</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 28 March 1903.

prevent serious accident. Parallel bars and a vaulting horse with a springboard were also to be seen. Adjoining this main room ... [was] a small room in which boys of quieter tastes ... [could] indulge in reading and in games of skill, such as draughts and chess.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3 *Extract from Newspaper Report of the Opening of the Lad's Institute*

Both the Congregational minister and the vicar were present and such was the popularity of the new facility, and the many adults in attendance, that there was only sufficient room for a 'limited number of lads', who wished to do so, to be admitted.

In his remarks, the Revd Tarbolton expressed the hope that the lads of the town would:

... all enrol themselves and do what they could to make this Institute the success which those who started it earnestly hoped it would prove ... It rested with the members to give tone to it, to build up its renown, and retain its credit, and they confidently looked to the lads of Basingstoke to do this ... The streets were certainly not the most appropriate places for working off the superfluous animal spirits of those who liked a little exercise.

Likewise, the vicar argued that it fell to the members to make the Institute a success and went further by indicating that they should also contribute to its financing with their pennies. In his view, 'the best way to prove that the Institute was rendering real benefit was by their behaviour inside and outside the Institute – by the absence of that roguish conduct in the streets which had sometimes caused a great deal of regret.'<sup>10</sup>

As a second example of 'direct action', the support of the churches for the cause of temperance can be seen as a means whereby they sought to improve the well-being of the wider community. For many church members alcohol was seen as an evil in that it could result in considerable social distress (see Figure 4). Throughout 1903 there were a number of reminders of the importance attached by the Free Churches, and by many Anglicans, to this issue, with there being a considerable degree of unanimity across the Free Church-Established Church divide.

<sup>9</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 31 October 1903.

<sup>10</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 31 October 1903.

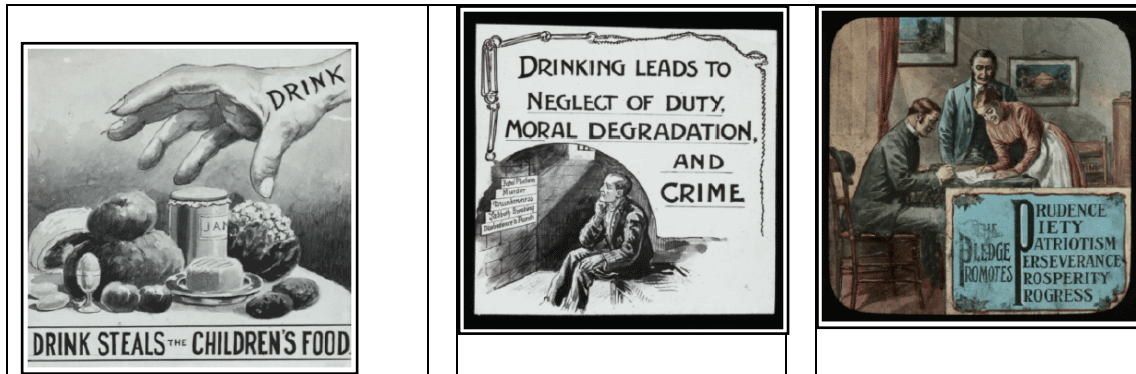


Figure 4 *Temperance Campaign Posters*

One reminder was the campaign to ban the opening of public houses on Sundays. Thus, in early January advance notice was given of a meeting to be held under the auspices of the “Central Association for Stopping the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors on Sunday”. Supporters of “Sunday Closing” were encouraged to attend with it being claimed that, ‘Experience proves, only too sadly and surely, that “Sunday Opening” is largely responsible for the large amount of misery and crime in this country.’<sup>11</sup> The meeting duly took place on the afternoon of Wednesday 21 January with about 50 Christian and temperance workers gathering in the Town Hall. It was chaired by the vicar. Also in attendance was the Revd Tarbolton who moved the following resolution, which was ‘carried unanimously’:

That as the Sunday Closing of Public Houses has been unquestioningly fraught with much good to the people of Scotland, of Ireland, of Wales and of the Colonies, this meeting deplores the prolonged delay in extending similar beneficent legislation to England. It believes that the present time is particularly opportune for pressing the claims of Sunday Closing upon legislators, and therefore earnestly calls for combined and vigorous action on the part of Church of England, Nonconformist, Temperance and other philanthropic organisations, and appeals to reformers and politicians of all political parties to unite in a great effort to obtain from Parliament this great boon for the people.<sup>12</sup>

It was also agreed to establish a local committee, comprising Anglican and Nonconformist clergy and others, to campaign for a change in the law.<sup>13</sup> The afternoon conference was followed by a public meeting in the evening. This was chaired by the mayor, Cllr Henry Jackson, a leading member of London Street Congregational Church. As reported:

... the Town Hall was packed with a representative and influential gathering, which was by no means confined to teetotallers, and the meeting was perfectly unanimous in support of the movement. We cannot call to mind any meeting

<sup>11</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 10 January 1903

<sup>12</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 January 1903.

<sup>13</sup> The Anglicans were the vicar of Basingstoke, one of his curates, the rector of Oakley and the vicar of Sherborne St John and The Nonconformists the Revd Capes Tarbolton and the Revd Ernest Long.

held for a political object which more thoroughly represented the opinion of the thoughtful, sober-minded inhabitants of Basingstoke ...

Those attending approved the following resolution unanimously:

That as the sale of intoxicating liquor on Sunday is productive of a large amount of drunkenness and consequent degradation, misery, poverty and crime; and other trades may not legally be pursued on that day this meeting is of [the] opinion that it is most unfair and wrong that such sale should continue to be sanctioned by the law of the realm.<sup>14</sup>

The display of unity on this occasion was quite impressive given that amongst those attending there were Free Churchmen and Anglicans; teetotallers and non-teetotallers; and sabbatarians and those who adopted a more relaxed view towards Sunday observance. Yet they were all agreed that closing public houses on Sundays was a desirable goal.

On a related issue, clergy of various denominations also felt that there were too many licensed premises in the town. Thus, when Revd Tarbolton argued the case for fewer public houses at the adjourned Licensing (Brewster) Sessions, in February, but making it clear that 'he was an abstainer not a prohibitionist,' his stance was very similar to that of other clergy, including the Primitive Methodist minister, the Revd Joseph Beal, the vicar and one of his curates.<sup>15</sup>

Further reminders of the importance attached to the cause of temperance can be seen in other events arranged by various organisations active in the field. On Thursday and Friday 12 and 13 March, a two day mission was held under the auspices of the Women of the White Ribbon. As reported, although there was a 'better attendance' at the Friday meeting than the Thursday one, when there had been about 100 people present, 'there was room for many more at the back.'<sup>16</sup> The chairman, Cllr Henry Jackson, reviewed the progress that was being made with respect to total abstinence and the challenges that remained. He concluded by arguing that:

This nation had been exalted above others in Christian privileges, and in the blessings God had bestowed on the land, and surely they ought to set an example of temperance, instead of which in some cases they had cursed with strong drink the very races their missionaries had won from idolatry. He hoped the time would come when England could be no more accused of so doing.

The missionary, Mrs Jennie Walker, who on Thursday had given an address on 'the growth of temperance', spoke for over an hour and gave 'an interesting account of her travels in Canada and the United States, and concluding with a description of the operation of the law of prohibition in the state of Maine.' She also spoke at a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meeting and one organised by the Railway Mission.<sup>17</sup>

Another, better known, organisation was the Band of Hope (see Figure 5). During February there were reports of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Band of

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<sup>14</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 January 1903.

<sup>15</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 28 February 1903.

<sup>16</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 March 1903.

<sup>17</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 & 21 March 1903.

Hope meetings, with about 80 attending the former.<sup>18</sup> While in September, there was a social evening for Band of Hope workers:

About forty persons attended, and spent about two hours and a half together, the greater part of the time being spent in listening to valuable suggestions upon the organisation and management of Bands of Hope by Mr Charles Wakeley, the genial and experienced Secretary of the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union, the rest of the evening being devoted to music, social intercourse and refreshments ... In the course of a practical address Mr Wakeley laid down as the first requisite for Band of Hope workers enthusiasm – faith in their work; and in the next place, they wanted a spirit of cheerfulness in carrying out their work ... The co-operation of parents was desirable, so that children would not be sent to public-houses for drink even in sealed bottles. Members should first be put on probation for a month, and their admission should be made the occasion of some special ceremony in order that they and their fellow members should realise the privilege and importance of their connection with the Band of Hope.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 5 *Band of Hope Outing in Eastleigh<sup>20</sup> and Certificate*

It was recognised, however, that as pointed out by Henry Jackson during the White Ribbon mission: ‘Many who were staunch little abstainers when they were in the Band of Hope were led astray when they got into their teens.’<sup>21</sup>

Thus, there was a continuing need for constant reiteration and reinforcement of the temperance message. This was evident in other events held during February namely a temperance reform meeting held under the auspices of the Total Abstinence Union at the Town Hall;<sup>22</sup> and the annual meeting of the British Women’s Temperance Association held at the Primitive Methodist Church schoolroom.<sup>23</sup> During March temperance was again to the fore with the subject being discussed at a Wesley Guild meeting on Monday 9 March. At this meeting, the minister, the Revd Joseph Caley spoke of the commitment of his denomination to the cause of temperance. He referred to the £10,000 being allocated to what he described as

<sup>18</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 and 14 February 1903.

<sup>19</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 September 1903.

<sup>20</sup> No images of similar events in Basingstoke have been found.

<sup>21</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 March 1903

<sup>22</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 February 1903.

<sup>23</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 28 February 1903.

‘aggressive temperance work of the Home Mission Department’ and wished that ‘other sections of the Christian Church would consecrate similar sums of money to’ the cause. While Richard Sterry Wallis, a Quaker, who chaired the meeting, expressed the belief that it had arisen ‘out of a desire to show their collective responsibility with regard to the promotion of temperance.’ The principal speaker was Mr G.L. Ward of the United Kingdom Alliance who had ‘preached two able sermons in the church on Sunday, and had also addressed the Band of Hope before the meeting.’<sup>24</sup> The commitment of the Wesleyans was also demonstrated by designating the last Sunday in December, “Temperance Sunday”.<sup>25</sup>

A final example of direct action from 1903 and again indicative of the Church’s concern for those in need, but on a much smaller scale, was the holding of a flower service by the Congregational Church in July. After the service, the children’s offerings of flowers were ‘sent to the Cottage Hospital, the almshouses, and to the Flower Mission.’<sup>26</sup> Similarly at Harvest time the Cottage Hospital received gifts of flowers, fruit, vegetables and cash from a wide variety of churches in the neighbourhood.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

As these examples illustrate, without the involvement of churches life in Edwardian Basingstoke, for many in the community, would have been all the poorer. By giving attention to ‘good works’, they sought to make a difference and although on issues, such as temperance, there would have been strongly held differences of view within the community, at the very least churches were motivated by a desire to ensure that spending on alcohol was not at the expense of the wellbeing of family members, particularly women and children.

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<sup>24</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 March 1903.

<sup>25</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 December 1903.

<sup>26</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 July 1903.

<sup>27</sup> These included Eastrop Parish Church, Cliddesden Parish Church, Mapledurwell Congregational Chapel, Farleigh Wallop Parish Church and Steventon Parish Church. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 September 1903, 3 October 1903 and 10 October 1903.