

Two into One

A brief history of two Sudbury churches and their
relationship with the Gainsborough family

by Anthony Wheeler



All proceeds will go towards the upkeep of
Hive Community Hub, Sudbury

Price £1.00

ANTHONY WHEELER was a Christ Church Elder and Lay Preacher and was Church Secretary from 1992 to 2007. His family had close association with Trinity Congregational Church, and he used to live in the house his grandfather had built in Belle Vue Rd.

Born in Sudbury in 1927, he was a Freeman of the town and a leading figure in its life. He was educated at the local Grammar School and was Secretary of the Old Boys ' Association.

A graduate of Jesus College, Cambridge, where he read English, Archaeology and Anthropology, he also had a London degree in Geography.

Anthony was a knowledgeable railway enthusiast and was keen on walking and gardening (“when time permitted”, he said!).

He lectured to various groups on local and other historical topics and was responsible for the many blue plaques to be seen around the town, marking historic sites.

His philanthropic gifts to the town were considerable and far too numerous to list here. The Wheeler Room in the Hive Community Hub is named after him.

Editors Revd Colin Evans, Chris Proffitt and for this 2021 edition Gareth Cole

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Puritanism in Sudbury from the early years of the seventeenth century was closely associated with All Saints Church. There, in 1616, William Jenkyn was Preacher of the Parish, minister of a Puritan congregation forming a church within a church.

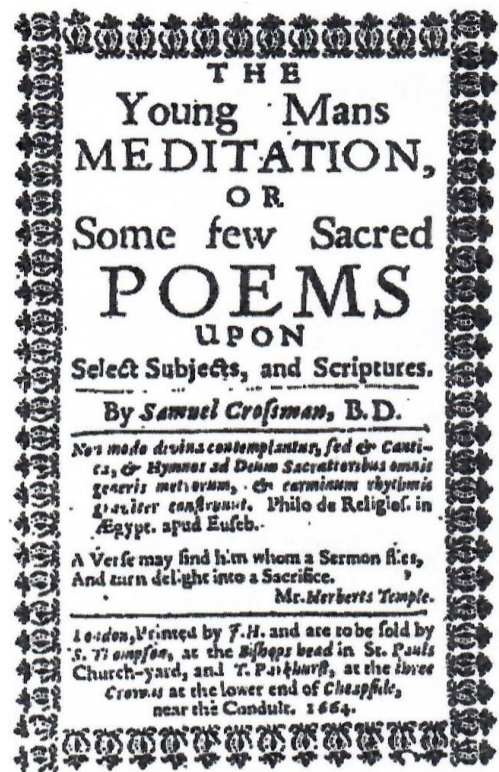
Jenkyn's successor as preacher, the Revd John Wilson, twice suspended for his views by the Bishop of Norwich and twice reinstated, emigrated to New England with John Winthrop and other Puritans in 1630. The two, with Deputy Governor Daley, signed the Covenant at Charleston on 30th January 1631.

From 1647 until his ejection in 1662 Samuel Crossman was Vicar of All Saints and at the same time Minister of the Separated Congregation of Sudbury. He held this pastorate after his ejection until 1665. A year earlier he had published *The Young Man's Meditation or Some few Sacred Poems upon Select Subjects and Scriptures*. The Poems included the still popular Passiontide hymn "My song is love unknown". Crossman later joined the ten per cent of ejected ministers who returned to the Church of England and, shortly before his death, became Dean of Bristol.

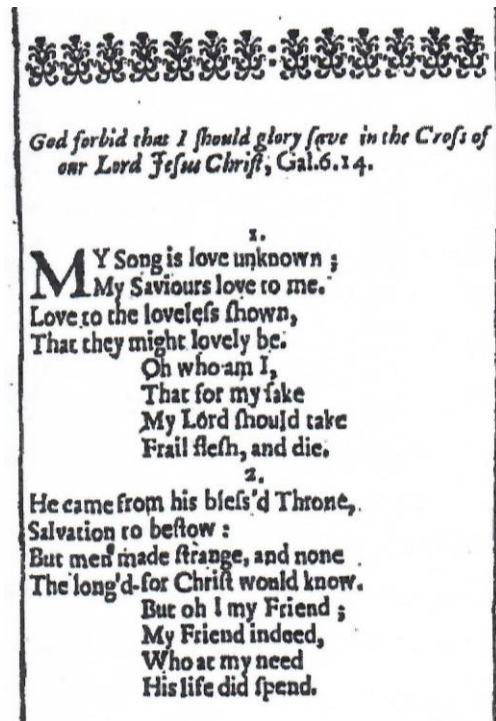
Edward Reynolds, a later Bishop of Norwich, who was also ejected for his Puritan sympathies but who also recanted, wrote in 1670 that the Puritans within the Church commenced their services by reading some parts of the Book of Common Prayer but then continued 'as they thought fit.

Meeting House

Early Dissenters met in private houses and, in particular, in the kitchen of John Burkitt's house at the corner of Burkitt's Lane and Sepulchre (now Gainsborough) Street. John Bunyan, a friend of Burkitt, is said to have preached there frequently. Christ Church possessed a silver chalice, hall-marked 1650, used at special Celebrations of Holy Communion. It may well have been used by Crossman himself. This chalice was passed to Long Melford United Reformed Church when the URC church in Sudbury closed its doors in December 2017. Since the demise of the Long Melford United Reformed Church this chalice has been passed back to the Eastern Synod.



Nonconformists continued to meet in private houses or in a barn until, in 1710, a Meeting House was built in Friars Street.



From about 1680 the Gainsborough family was closely associated with the Separated Congregation, or Independent Church as it had become, Robert Gainsborough was Chief Constable of Sudbury when, in the last decades of the seventeenth century, Dissenters were arraigned before the court for failure to attend their parish church. It may well have been Gainsborough's influence which saved them from serious penalty. There are twenty Gainsborough family entries in the baptismal registers of the Friars Street Independent Church. They include those of the baptisms of the artist Thomas Gainsborough on 14th May 1727 and of his brother Humphrey, minister, inventor and engineer.

Many principal tradesmen of the town were stalwart members of the Independent Church during the eighteenth century. Many were associated with the weaving industry. Nine of the Friars Street trustees were clothiers and two were saymakers. (Say is a type of serge.)

Secession and Reunion

A difference of view led, in 1765, to a secession of some members from the Friars Street Church known as the Great Meeting. They established a separate church, the Little Meeting, opposite the Angel Inn in the same street.

The Meetings were reunited in 1785 during the remarkable pastorate of John Mead Ray. He had been ordained on 21st September 1774 and was Minister of the Friars Street Church for 63 years. In 1795 he took part in the founding of the London Missionary Society and, in 1816, published a supplement to the hymns of Isaac Watts.

The congregation had grown to such an extent that a new chapel was built in 1823. From 1822 until Ray's death in 1837, William Wallis was co-pastor. Even the new chapel proved to be insufficiently large, and in 1859 an imposing church with 1,140 seats was built, the last on the Friars Street site.

Spite Chapel

Meanwhile, in 1837, there was a further secession of 15 members led by Emily Gainsborough, the artist's great niece. This was the result of Unitarian leanings at the Great Meeting, so a new church named Trinity, was built by the secessionists, in 1838, in School Street. Miss Emily provided most of the money for it and it was known as the 'Spite Chapel'.

Friars Street and Trinity Churches grew in parallel during the nineteenth century. Their congregations continued to include the families of many of the established tradesmen of the town. Both had very large Sunday Schools.

The expansion of Trinity Congregational Church was marked particularly during the pastorate of Charles Henry Vine, 1889 to 1896. Ever-increasing numbers necessitated an extension of the building. The present tower and west front were built and sittings were increased to 870.

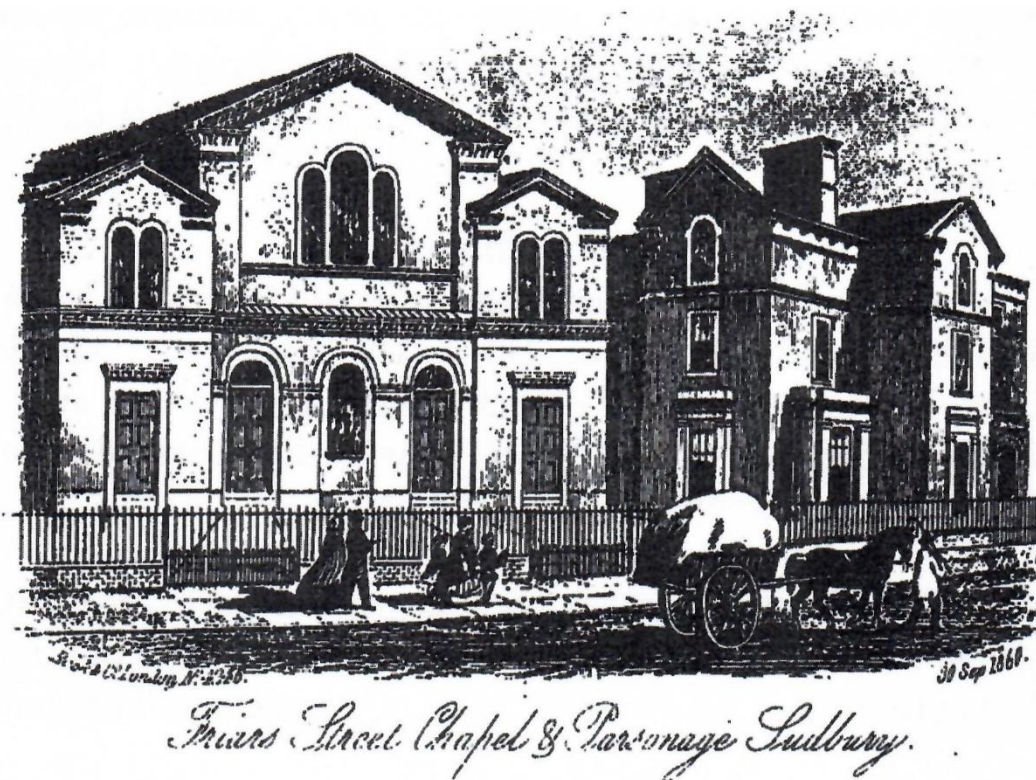
Even so, the church was often full for Sunday services. Vine was also responsible for four mission chapels, at Suffolk Square in Sudbury, and at Bulmer, Ballingdon and Great Cornard. The buildings of the last three still survive.

Throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, a correct formal relationship existed between the two congregational churches, but there was still rivalry behind the scenes.

Dwindling Congregations

Seating for over 2,000 Congregationalists in a town then of 7,000 people was, in the twentieth century, an over-provision. In addition to Sunday services, the activities characteristic of the churches in their heyday continued at both: Sunday Schools with declining rolls, mid-week services and Bible classes, guilds, social and tennis clubs, drama groups and concert parties. Some of the traditional business families remained as mainstays of the Churches, providing deacons and managers. This pattern had ended by the post-war years





The maintenance of two large buildings, their running costs, the payment of two stipends and the upkeep of manses became an increasing burden upon dwindling congregations. From 1948 to 1955 Friars Street Church was able to have only lay pastors in charge. The logic of amalgamation was becoming all the while the more apparent, despite the reluctance on the part of each church to lose its identity. In 1956 the two congregations formally amalgamated and adopted the name Christ Church Congregational Church. The former Trinity minister, the Revd G.W.J. Cameron Price, became minister of the united church. Services were held on alternate Sundays in each of the church buildings.

Two Into One

The problem of having two large buildings with a total congregation many times smaller than could be housed in one, had to be tackled. A Moderator's committee decided that Friars Street church should be retained because of its historical associations. This recommendation was overturned by Church Meeting, most of whose members had come from Trinity Church.

The Friars Street church and its site were sold. A number of former Friars Street members left the new Christ Church. The Friars Street buildings were demolished in

1966, although the substantial 14-room manse survives and is now in use by an accountancy firm. No attempt, reprehensible as it now seems, was made at the time to conserve graves and gravestones (including those of the Gainsborough family), monuments and furnishings, font or even the Great Pulpit Bible. The latter, however, was rescued from the ruins; and the font was in a Great Waldingfield garden where, until recently removed, it served as a bird-bath. The organ was rebuilt at Ipswich School. Remains from the Gainsborough family vault and church burial ground were interred, in 1966, in Sudbury Cemetery. A commemorative stone was placed in 1997.

The proceeds from the sale of the site were used in renovating and part-rebuilding of the church halls at School Street, and the resultant accommodation was renamed Friars Hall.

Christ Church, in 1975, became part of the United Reformed Church, a union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England, later joined by the Association of Churches of Christ and the Congregational Union of Scotland. The denomination is named the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom.

At the end of 2008 the URC had 1,587 local congregations with 70,508 adult members and 67,691 children. There are about 700 serving ministers. Many local churches are united with other denominations — Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Moravian. Nationally the Church has thirteen Provincial Synods. Christ Church was a congregation in the Eastern Synod, within which the churches at Bury St Edmunds (Whiting Street), Cavendish, Cheveley, Clare, Long Melford, Stetchworth, Sudbury and Wickhambrook formed the West Suffolk Group of URC Churches.

Due to diminishing numbers in the congregation, worship ceased at Christ Church in December 2017 and the buildings were offered for sale on the open market.

The site was purchased by Hive on the 1st October 2021 and re-named “Hive Community Hub” so beginning a new role for this much loved building .

Ministers of the Separated, Independent, Congregational and United Reformed Churches of Sudbury

The Separated Congregation

- 1616	Rev. William Jenkyn M.A.
1618 - 30	Rev. John Wilson M.A.
1647 - 65	Rev. Samuel Crossman
1662 - 72	Rev. William Folkes
1672 -	Rev. Samuel Blower
1676 - c,1710	Rev. Samuel Petto

Independent and Congregational Churches Friars St. Meeting House

1707 - 19	Rev. Josias Maultby
1720 - 29	Rev. Joshua Foster
1729	Rev. Samuel Harvey
1729 - 50	Rev. John Ford
1751 - 62	Rev. William Hextall
1765 - 68	Rev. Ottiwell leginbotham
1770 - 74	Rev. John Wood
1774 - 1837	Rev. John Mead Ray
1824 - 53	Rev. William Wallis

Friars St. Congregational Church

1837 - 53	Rev. William Wallis
1853 - 58	Rev. John Gill
1858 - 77	Rev. Josqh Steer
1877 - 81	Rev. J. M. Blackie B.A., LI B.
1883 - 91	Rev. William Shillito
1891 - 94	Rev. Ira Boseley
1896 - 1905	Rev. T.G.Boyne A.T.S
1906 - 13	Rev. Duncan C. Carson
1914 - 21	Rev. Hopkin Richards
1923 - 34	Rev. Ts Gilbat Piper
1936 - 38	Rev. Douglas J. Craig
1939 - 45	Rev. D.W. Cœnelius
1948 - 50	Mr. J. A. Lawson (Lay Pastor)
1951 - 55	Mr R. Royston B" (Lay Pastor)
1956	Rev. G.W.J. Cameron - Price

Trinity Congregational Church

founded, 1837 first services, April 1838	
1837 - 43	Rev. Thomas K. de Werdon
1843	Rev. Dr. Jackson
1844 - 46	John Elrick M.A.
1847 - 49	Rev. William McNab
1849 - 53	Rev. Jesse Hopwood
1854 - 61	Rev. Thomas Sowter
1861 - 77	Rev. George Hollier
1877 - 81	Rev. George Henry White
1882 - 83	Rev. Thomas Hawke
1884 - 88	Rev. Alfred Moon
1889 - 96	Rev. Charles Henry Vine
1897 - 1902	Rev. Sydney R, Laver
1903 - 07	Rev. Alfred Bönser
1908 - 14	Rev. David Clayton
1915 - 25	Rev. JarrB W. Thomas
1925 - 31	Rev. Kenneth H. Couldrey
1932 - 37	Rev. H. Carter Lloyd
1937 - 44	Rev. Michael Stacey
1945 - 50	Rev. Harry Welbourn
1950 - 54	Rev. H.W. Cater
1954 - 56	Rev. G.W.J. Cameron - Price

Christ Church Congregational Church

1956 - 69	Rev. G.W.J. Cameron - Price
1970 - 75	Rev. John T, Lyman

Christ Church United Reformed Church

1975 - 80	Rev. John T. Lyman
1981 - 87	Rev. W. Taylor Dip. Theol.
1988 - 94	Rev. Malcolm Hill B.A.
1995 - 2004	Rev. David R. Bunney B.A.
2006 - 12	Rev. Samantha M. White
2012 - 15	Rev. Cecil Ernest White
2015 - 18	Rev. Brian Philip Rickards

