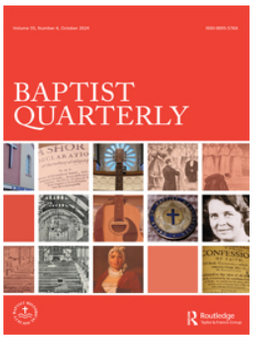

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'Toward a Wider Sphere of Usefulness': Women in British Baptist Life, 1873–1911

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ABSTRACT

In British society, historically it was assumed that a woman's place was principally in the domestic sphere. In the nineteenth century, in a changing social, political and economic context, British women found opportunities to take on roles outside the home. This paper explores the way nineteenth-century British Baptist women – slowly and over time – found ways to become more involved in denominational life, which culminated in their membership of the Baptist Union Council in 1911.

KEYWORDS

Baptist Women's league; Baptist Zenana mission; suffrage; temperance; Emily Medley; Isabel James

From the very beginning in the seventeenth century, women participated in the congregational life of British Baptist churches; their names (or in some cases simply their marks), are evident in church records.[1] Yet, while early confessions and covenants claimed that 'any person, fitted, and gifted by the Holy Spirit' might be appointed to leadership in the church, it seems that in practice, for the first three hundred years, leadership roles within the denomination were for the most part limited to men only.[2] These early Baptists, believed that in God's ordering of society, men, women and children all had a particular sphere and for women that place was in the home.[3]

The view that a woman's sphere was in the home remained the accepted teaching not only among British Baptists, but also in the wider society until the nineteenth century when increasingly women began to assume positions –

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[1]In 1610, when John Smyth and a small group of believers affirmed a *Short Confession of Faith*, at least sixteen women signed or left their mark. See, W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, revised ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1983), 113. For an overview of women in British Baptist life see, J. H. Y. Briggs, "She Preachers, Widows and Other Women: The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life since 1600", *Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 7 (July 1986): 337–52.

[2]The phrase comes from the Second London Confession, chapter XXVI "of the Church" article 8. See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 287.

[3]For a discussion of the Scriptural order of the home within Puritan/Separatist tradition, see K. E. Smith, "Nonconformists, the Home and Family Life" in *T& T Clark Companion to Nonconformity*, ed. Robert Pope (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 285–304.

often voluntary roles in religious or philanthropic societies for social reform – outside the domestic sphere. For Baptist women, this work included leadership in the temperance movement, women's meetings, Sunday Schools and weekday meetings for children and young people, and in the development of mission and evangelistic activity at home and abroad. Baptist women also contributed in the area of art and literature.[4] Many Baptist women were involved also politically through the Women's Liberal Association which was formed in 1887.[5]

Historians examining the lives of nineteenth-century British women within the context of a changing society, acknowledge that the 'separate spheres' ideology – often combined with patriarchal subordination – was a limiting factor in the lives of women. Yet, to simply argue that women were kept in their place at home by dominant male figures or to suggest that women preferred to stay at home is to offer an incomplete picture. While gender-based arguments have some validity in church life, an assessment of the development of the roles of women in the nineteenth century must consider the wider social, political and religious context.[6]

Awareness of the changing cultural context and a sensitivity to deeply held religious belief, seems especially important when evaluating the roles of Nonconformist women. For example, although no women in Britain were given the vote until 1918, there were significant political changes that allowed for greater participation of Nonconformist women and men, to serve on school boards and local councils.[7] Likewise, the improvement in opportunities for education, as well as economic prosperity, encouraged the growth of a middle class – of whom many began to employ servants to do the household chores. Free from the drudgery of many domestic duties, women – Baptists among them – were able to become involved in other social, political and philanthropic endeavours, though still emphasising a woman's contribution to home life. In fact, nineteenth-century Baptist women involved in social reform, political activism and religious evangelism ironically often argued that the good order of society depended on 'happy homes'. Be that as it may, through their work within the wider society, women became more visible and their leadership capability was increasingly evident.

As women assumed more public roles within the wider society, by the end of the nineteenth century, women began to apply for personal membership in the Baptist Union. While attendance at Assembly meetings was granted, women were not granted places on the Baptist Union Council. However, as with the

[4]Timothy Whelan has written extensively in the area of Baptist women and literature. See his website: *Nonconformists Women Writers, 1650-1850*, https://www.nonconformistwomenwriters1650-1850.com/home

[5]The background to the involvement of Baptist men with the Liberal party in the late nineteenth century has been discussed in David Bebbington, "The Baptist Conscience in the Nineteenth Century," *Baptist Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (1991): 13–24. However, further research is needed on Baptist women in the Liberal party.

[6]Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in The Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2001), 2–5.

[7]*Protestant Dissent and Philanthropy in Britain, 1660-1914*, eds, Clyde Binfield, G.M. Ditchfield, and David L. Wykes (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020), 20–1.

wider issue of suffrage for women, the approach of most women in the denomination was to quietly seek ways of working cooperatively with men within the Union.[8] Though excluded from formal leadership roles in the British Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society throughout the nineteenth century, women used their initiative to develop organisations which allowed them to support mission and evangelistic work locally and further afield as well.

Though change came about slowly, the contribution of women to the denomination was eventually recognised, and in 1911 the constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland was amended to allow women to serve on the Council.[9] Although this amendment ensured that there would be a male majority on the BUGBI governing body, the approval of this change signalled a new era in the life of British Baptists. The aim of this paper is to trace the slow progress toward participation of women in Baptist life and to highlight the contribution of some of the women who paved the way for the inclusion of women members on the Baptist Union Council in 1911.

Formation of the Union and Categories of Membership

The history of the development of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), as it is known today, began in 1813 when a General Union was formed. This Union lasted until 1831–2 when it underwent a 'reorganisation so substantial', according to Ernest Payne, 'as to be almost a new beginning'.[10] Between 1864 and 1876, there was a further period of reorganisation which, in 1873, included the decision to change the name of the Union to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.[11] Also, as part of the restructuring at this time – in an effort to bring together churches, ministers, colleges, and other institutions – it was agreed that 'the Baptist Assembly was made to consist of three distinct classes of persons – representative, personal and honorary.'

The category of personal membership was strongly contested in a special meeting held in July 1873. However, personal membership had been informally recognised for a number of years and, knowing that personal members had been allowed in the Congregational Union since 1864, it was decided that this category should be approved on the condition that it was 'carefully controlled by the committee [of men]'.[12] Describing the changes made to the

[8]See K.E. Smith, "Co-operation Not Separation: British Baptist Women and Suffrage" in *Re-membering the Body: The Witness of History, Theology and the Arts in Honour of Ruth M.B. Gouldbourne*, eds., Anthony Cross and Brian Haymes (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 67–94.

[9]Under Section 8 and Article VIII of the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. See Minutes of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 26 September, 1910, p.136.

[10]Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1959), 43.

[11]Ibid., 108.

[12]Ibid., 110. Requirements for personal membership included:1) being a member of a Baptist church, 2) nominated by several members of the Assembly, 3) accepted by the Council and 4) subscribe annually a nominated amount to the general funds of the union.

BUGBI structure, Payne suggested that Baptists were 'attempting to deal with a changing situation and move toward a more representative organization'.[13] No women were present at the meeting when these changes to membership were made, and it seems unlikely that the men who agreed to grant personal membership would have ever thought of a woman attending the Assembly meetings as members. Moreover, the men would not have envisaged that in 1895, eight women would apply for personal membership in the Union.[14] Nor could they have conceived that in the twentieth century the number of personal members would continue to grow as women took their place in the Assembly meetings.

The Involvement of Women in the Suffrage and Temperance Movements

In his account of the history of the Baptist Union, Ernest Payne further commented that changes within the BUGBI structures at this time reflected societal change. However, while claiming that 'women's suffrage and Socialism began to be talked of by a few daring spirits' he dismissed Baptist involvement in the suffrage movement by claiming: 'The Churches generally showed no inclination to welcome or even take seriously the claim for women's suffrage which John Stuart Mill had put forward as early as 1867.'[15] Recent research, however, challenges this assertion, and instead, suggests that while few Baptists were supportive of the militant suffrage movement, Baptist women and men were active in seeking not only the vote for all women, but greater equality of men and women in society as well.[16]

For example, John Clifford, pastor of Westbourne Park Baptist Church was praised by the suffragist, Millicent Fawcett, for his support for the movement.[17] Clifford served as President of the Free Church Suffrage Society and regularly invited women to lecture at the Westbourne Park Institute. Sarah [Beddow] Bonwick, a Baptist suffragist, was for many years a member at Westbourne Park Baptist Church, and often lectured at the Institute.[18] Other Baptist

[13]Ibid., 111.
[14]The names of the women were: Mrs R. Cartwright, London, Mrs W.R. Rickett, London, Mrs Thompson, Harrogate, Miss E. Fisk St Albans, Miss S. Fisk, St Albans, Mrs Thomas, Llannelly [Llanelli], Miss Stoker, St Austell, and Miss H. B. Warrington, London. *The Minutes of the Council of BUGBI*, April and July 1895.
[15]Payne, *The Baptist Union*, 107; 151.
[16]See K.E. Smith, "Co-operation Not Separation: British Baptist Women and Suffrage," in *Re-membering the Body: The Witness of History, Theology and the Arts in Honour of Ruth M.B. Gouldbourne*, eds., Anthony Cross and Brian Haymes (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 67–94. Colin Cartwright, "The Enfranchisement of Baptist Women? A Brief History of the Baptist Women"s League and the Woman"s Suffrage Movement in England and Scotland," *Baptist Quarterly* 49, no 4 (2018): 146–64. Colin Cartwright, "Sarah Bonwick (1849–1924), the Baptist Women"s League and the Women"s Suffrage Movement in England", *Baptist Quarterly,* 53 no. 2 (2021): 66–80.
[17]Millicent Fawcett, *What I Remember* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd, 1924), 241.
[18]K.E. Smith, "Building the New City of God: The Role of Women in John Clifford"s Vision for Christian Society", *Baptist Quarterly*, 55, no 1 (2024):16–30.

pastors were supportive of suffrage for women, though some, perhaps alarmed by the activities of militant suffragettes, were more reticent.[19]

Admittedly, for some Baptists, support for women's emerging role in society (and eventually, suffrage) was not about the rights of women, but was associated with their support for the temperance movement. Believing that the abuse of alcohol was the root cause for the destruction of home and family life, many Baptist churches took up the cause and not only supported women temperance speakers, but formed 'Band of Hope' groups for young people and adults in order to encourage total abstinence from alcoholic beverages.

The temperance movement provided many opportunities for women to begin to hone their skills at public speaking and leadership. Among the many Baptist temperance campaigners, Clara Lucas Balfour (1808-1878) and her daughter, Cecil (Balfour) Burns (1829-1897) were recognised as excellent public speakers.[20] Married to Dawson Burns, a Baptist minister, who also published books and lectured on temperance issues, Cecil not only worked locally in her own church, but was part of a group of women who tried to form a Women's Branch of the National Temperance Society (later League).[21] She successfully put forward a plan to join with The British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA) and she was invited to give an address to the BWTA. When the BWTA changed its policy and became an organisation for suffrage as well as temperance, however, Cecil along with others felt that women's suffrage, while important, was secondary to the temperance cause. Hence, to keep focussed on temperance, she joined the Women Total Abstinence Union (WTAU).[22] She continued to lecture in public meetings around the country and when she died in 1897, the WTAU gave thanks for a 'beloved and honoured pioneer worker'.[23]

The involvement of women in the suffrage and temperance movements signalled a changing attitude in society toward the involvement of women in social and political issues. While many Baptists supported the contribution of women to the suffrage or temperance campaigns, the activity of women outside the home, and their effectiveness as public speakers, inevitably began to raise questions about women in leadership roles within the church. Addressing this issue, J. Jenkyn Brown, an influential minister in Birmingham, gave a paper to the BUGBI Assembly in 1867 on 'Woman's Work in the Church'.

[19]A regional survey, gives the names of twenty-five Baptist ministers who supported suffrage for women. See, Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women"s Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[20]See K.E. Smith "The Balfours and the Burns: Baptists and Temperance", in *Baptist Quarterly,* 45, no 4, (2014): 444–55.
[21]Dawson Burns, "Biographical Sketch of (The late) Mrs. Dawson Burns", *Wings*, Issue 6, (June 1, 1897), 71.
[22]She wrote "*A Few Words to Temperance Women on the Women"s Suffrage Question*", 1876.
[23]*Wings,* London, Saturday May 1, 1897, p.65

In this address, Brown, tried to carefully balance the view that while the primary sphere of activity for all women was in the home, Scripture affirmed the place of women to serve outside the home as well. Stating that work outside the home need not interfere with 'other duties in life', he offered an exegesis of a number of passages of Scripture asserting, for example, a contextual interpretation of Paul's injunction to the Corinthians about women deferring to men in the church. Jenkyns also underscored the belief that Phoebe as described in Romans 16.1, was a deaconess and thus, this role should be for women in the church. He concluded with the suggestion that while women should not be removed from their 'natural sphere' [the home], they should be allowed to use their gifts outside the home when their ministry was to women and children.[24]

The Formation of the Zenana Movement

Jenkyn's encouragement for women to work among women set the stage for the denomination's acceptance of the Ladies Association for the Support of Zenana Work and Bible Women in India (the name was changed to the Baptist Zenana Mission in 1897) which was established in May of 1867. Initially, the Baptist Zenana Mission (BZM) was formed in order to send British Baptist women as missionaries to women in India who, according to tradition, were living in confinement and were not allowed contact with men outside their family circle. The practice of this custom meant that these women did not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel preached by male missionaries. Hence, it was suggested that women were needed to proclaim the Christian message to them.

Women (as wives of men who had been appointed as missionaries) had served in the work of BMS from the beginning: they were not themselves recognised as missionaries, but had been considered 'helpmeets' to the work their husbands.[25] Responding to the call for women to have a ministry to women in India, the BZM – formed with the approval of the BMS – became a strong Baptist women's missionary organisation run solely by women who trained and sent women to serve as missionaries. As the work expanded, they appointed missionaries to China, as well as to India.[26]

The work of the BZM proved to be an important training ground for Baptist women leaders, and it functioned solely as a women's organisation until it was formally amalgamated back into the BMS in 1914. Yet, the BZM should not be

[24]J. Jenkyn Brown, "Women"s Work in the Church, A Paper read before the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Cardiff, October 1867," in *Cardiff Memorial*, *Five Papers Read at the Autumnal Session of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland October 1867* (London: Pewtress Bros. and Gould, 1867), 11.

[25]See K.E. Smith, "The Role of Women in Early Baptist Missions", *Review and Expositor*, 89, no.1, (Winter, 1992): 35–48 and Ian Randall, "General Baptist Women in Orissa, India: Initiatives in Female Education, 1860s–1880s", *Religions* 15, no. 4: 450. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040450

[26]An account of the formation and development of the BZM may be found in Emily G. Kemp, *There Followed Him Women* (London: The Baptist Missionary Society, 1927).

viewed as a nascent 'feminist' movement – primarily because their focus was not on achieving the rights of women. Their purpose was to share the Christian gospel in places where male missionaries were not allowed to preach. Like those who occupied leadership roles in the temperance movement, Baptist women viewed their involvement with the BZM as part of their Christian discipleship. Ironically, as I have noted elsewhere, as British Baptist women engaged in mission to those whom they believed were in cultural captivity, they themselves began to discover new found freedom from the western cultural bonds which had previously placed restrictions on their Christian service.[27]

Many of the early leaders in the BZM were from prominent Baptist families. For example, Mrs Amelia Angus, the wife of Joseph Angus, served as the Honorary Foreign Secretary of the BZM from 1869 to 1893.[28] Her youngest daughter Isabel served as a missionary in India and when Amelia Angus died in 1893, her daughters Edith and Amelia served as Honorary Minute Secretary and Foreign Secretary, respectively.[29] They were members of the Heath Street Baptist Church in London, though Edith was also very involved with work in the Drummond Street Mission which had been started by a member of the Regent's Park Congregation, Elizabeth Lush (later Lady Lush). Elizabeth Lush was also very involved in the BZM, and a brief look at her life is illustrative of the way cultural change – which brought opportunity for education and economic prosperity – allowed women to move outside the domestic sphere and develop leadership roles in the community.

Elizabeth Ann (Woollacott) Lush (1818-1881) was the daughter of a Baptist pastor, Christopher Woollacott and his wife, Elizabeth (d.1866).[30] She met Robert Lush when he came to the area to work in a solicitor's office – initially just sweeping the floor – and began to attend the church where her father was pastor.[31] When they married, they were given a monetary gift that allowed Robert to study law and once qualified, he rose to prominence, eventually being made Lord Chief Justice.

As she grew up, Elizabeth saw her mother as a homemaker, but also, she observed her mother's involvement in the sabbath school, organising a prayer meeting for women and serving as a collector for the Bible Society.[32]

[27]K.E. Smith, "Women in Cultural Captivity: British Women and the Zenana Mission Baptist," *Baptist Quarterly* 42, no 2, (January 2007): 103–13 and continued in Vol. 42 No 3, (July 2007): 245–8.

[28]Amelia Angus was the daughter of W.B. Gurney who served for many years as treasurer of the BMS and treasurer of Stepney College. Gurney was also one of the founders in 1807 of the London Female Penitentiary and he conducted worship there. J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptist of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 320–21.

[29]Brian Stanley, *The History of The Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 232.

[30]He served as pastor of the Romney Street Baptist Church (later Westminster Baptist Church) and then at the Church in Little Wild Street until 1863. He wrote a memoir of his wife Elizabeth: *Memorial of Elizabeth Ann Woollacott by her bereaved husband, for the use of their children* (privately printed, 1868).

[31]For a biographical account of Robert Lush which includes a discussion of the work of Elizabeth Lush in the mission at Drummond Street, see William Landels, *Baptist Worthies: A Series of Sketches of Distinguished Men who have Advocated the Principles of the Baptist Denomination* (London: Baptist Tract and Book Society, 1884), 373–411.

[32]Christopher Woollacott, *Memorial of Elizabeth Ann Woollacott, 13.*

When Elizabeth and Robert married, they became active members of the Regent's Park Baptist Church in London where Elizabeth, like her mother before her, began to express her Christian discipleship. In about 1860, seeing the great poverty of people living in the streets around the church, Elizabeth Lush began to visit homes and to establish work among the poor. She established a mission which first met in rented rooms, and then met in a chapel which her husband had built for the work on Drummond Street.[33] Elizabeth also supported other causes, such as the Haverstock Hill orphanage, and she served as treasurer of the BZM from 1866 until her death in 1881.[34] Elizabeth and Robert had 11 children. Their youngest daughter Florence married Alfred Pearce Gould later Sir Alfred Pearce Gould (1852-1922) and as Lady A. Pearce Gould (1856-1935), Florence served as treasurer of the BZM after her mother's death.[35]

Women Invited to Speak at the BUGBI Assembly and a Ministry for Deaconesses

In 1889 two women, Emily Medley and Cecil Burns, were invited to speak to the Baptist Assembly meeting held at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London. Emily Medley spoke on young women's guilds and Cecil Burns addressed the issue of women's work in the church.

Emily Grey (Birrell) Medley (1845-1919) was the daughter of the Baptist pastor, Charles M. Birrell and Harriet Jane (Grey) Birrell.[36] Pembroke Chapel in Liverpool, where her father served as pastor was known for its support for social issues. Significantly, Josephine (Grey) Butler (1828-1906), an Evangelical Anglican activist and social reformer, was a cousin[37] who lived in Liverpool from 1866 to 1869.[38] During that time, Butler worked with impoverished

[33]At the mission, mothers" meetings were held twice a week and there was a weekly meeting for men. At the annual tea given by Lady Lush at the Drummond Street Mission in 1879 it was reported that 410 people attended and were "supplied with tea, bread and butter, and cake". Hymns were sung and several addresses were given which encouraged the people to have "happy homes" and spoke of a mother"s influence on children. *Marylebone Mercury*, Saturday, 1 March 1879, p.3.

[34]*Wrexham Advertiser*, Saturday 26 March 1881, p.3.

[35]Florence was the second wife of Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, KCVO, CBE, FRCS - Cr 1910 (1852-1922). He was the second son of the Baptist minister of Norwich, George Gould and his wife, Elizabeth (Pearce) Gould. His brother was George P. Gould who served as Principal at Regent"s Park College from 1896 to 1920.

[36]Charles M. Birrell (1811-1880) went to Stepney and then served as the minister of Pembroke Chapel from 1838-1878. For C.M. Birrell see, F.H. Robarts, "Some Personal Recollections of the Late C.M. Birrell", *The Baptist Magazine*, 1881 Vol. LXXIII, February, (London: Yates, Alexander and Shepheard, 1881), 49–53.

[37]Emily"s mother, Harriet Jane Grey was the sister of Josephine"s father John Grey. Their parents were Margaretta and Henry Grey (who were cousins who had married). For a memoir of his father-in-law and portions from the diary of his mother- in-law see, C.M. Birrell, *Thoughts in the Evening of Life: A Sketch of the Life of the Rev Henry Grey, D.D and Passages from the Diary of Mrs Grey* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1871). Josephine had a close relationship with the Birrell family. Emily"s brother, Augustine, rose to prominence as a barrister and MP and photos of "cousin Austin" (as he was called) may be found in the Butler archive. See, "The Grey Family of Millfield" http://milfieldgreys.co.uk/3_george_sandyhouse/sibs_edward.html.

[38]Helene Mathers described her as "evangelical" claiming that Butler"s personal and "active faith in Christ" motivated all her reforming efforts. Helene Mathers, "The Evangelical Spirituality of a Victorian Feminist: Josephine Butler, 1828–1906", The *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52, no. 2 (2001): 282–312.

women in the city, and in 1868 she wrote *The Education and Employment of Women* claiming:

> there is other work on every side waiting to be done by women, – the work of healers, preachers, physicians, artists, organizers of labour, captains of industry, &c., while on the other hand women are waiting to be prepared for service, and ready to bridge over, as they alone can, many a gulf between class and class which now presents a grave obstacle to social and political progress.[39]

Butler's reforming work gained prominence when she led a national campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864,1866, 1869). These were acts that were an attempt to control the spread of venereal disease – particularly in garrison and port towns – by empowering police to stop women on the streets whom they believed were prostitutes, and then to subject them to forced physical examinations and incarceration. Emily's father, Charles Birrell, supported Butler's campaign and he took a leading role when a group of Nonconformist ministers approached the government to protest against the Contagious Disease laws. He wrote to Josephine in 1870 saying:

> You and your companion women have struck a note for which the ages have been waiting, and which even the church itself in its organised forms has never yet intoned.[40]

The fight to have the contagious diseases acts removed from the statute book continued until they were finally repealed in 1886 and Emily was very involved involved in the campaign.

Emily left Liverpool in 1869 after she married Edward Medley (1840-1927)[41] at Pembroke Chapel, which they had both attended before Edward trained for ministry at Regent's Park.[42] They served a church in London from 1869 to 1876. They then moved to Nottingham to Derby Road Baptist Church where Edward served as pastor from 1876 to 1891. In Nottingham, Emily became involved in addressing social issues in the city and it was here that she became the President of Nottingham Women Against Contagious Diseases Acts.[43] In 1881, Emily presided over a mass meeting of women in the Albert Hall in Nottingham. Although the women supporting this meeting had different motivations for doing so, Emily's Christian commitment was apparent as she began the meeting with prayer and made reference to Jesus' care for 'the

[39]Josephine Butler, *The Education and Employment of Women* (Liverpool: T. Brakell, 1868), 22.
[40]Josephine E. Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of A Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall and Son, 1898), 4.
[41]Edward Medley (1840-1927) trained for ministry at Regent"s Park College and was a fellow student with F.B. Meyer. He succeeded Baptist Noel at John Street Church, Bedford Row in 1869, and served that church for nine years. He then served as minister of Derby Road Baptist Church, Nottingham from 1876 to 1891. He was tutor at Regent"s Park College, 1896-99. *The Baptist Handbook*, (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1928), 312–3. He was well -known in Nonconformist and Evangelical circles. He was a member of the Evangelical Alliance. See report of the Nottingham branch meeting in 1882 in *Evangelical Christendom (London: J.S. Phillips, 1882), 352*.
[42]They married on 14th July 1869 at Pembroke Chapel. At the same ceremony her sister Harriet was married to Edward"s brother, William, who was Professor of Moral Philosophy and Classics at Rawdon College, Yorkshire. *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Saturday 17 July 1869, p.8.
[43]Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2003), 256–9.

lost'. While acknowledging that it was a difficult subject, she claimed that no 'true woman' could look on the acts they were opposing without feeling 'heartfelt sorrow and indignation'. Josephine Butler spoke to the meeting claiming that the Acts were degrading and insulting to all women and they must continue to work for their repeal.

Reflecting on Emily's involvement in the campaign, Butler's influence on her is not easily judged. Biographers of Josephine Butler, suggest that her interest in campaigns was based on moral and religious views and an interest in the rights of humans regardless of their sex.[44] Hence, while Butler worked alongside many of the suffragists, and demanded complete legal and political equality between women and men, she did not 'integrate herself into the women's movement'.[45] Rather, she continued to emphasise the 'distinctive characteristics of women' and she insisted that the home is the 'nursery of all virtue' and women were 'home makers by instinct'.[46]

Similarly, Emily Medley was Liberal in her politics and as President of the Woman's Campaign against Contagious Diseases in Nottingham, she worked alongside leaders of the suffrage movement. Most importantly, like Butler, Emily Medley's involvement in social reform work was driven by her Christian faith. Hence, in addition to working for the reform of unjust laws, as the mother of five children, she took particular interest in young people who had come to the city seeking employment and became involved in establishing a guild for young women.[47]

The establishment of guilds had become a common practice in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some guilds, such as the Women's Cooperative Guild that had been established in 1883, had gained the reputation of engaging with political ideas and encouraging a radicalism which was identified with socialist and feminist perspectives.[48] The establishment of such guilds in chapels and churches was seen by many as a way of improving the lives of young people and encouraging involvement in the church and community. However, there were those who were afraid that they might also encourage more radical tendencies.

Emily Medley's paper to the Baptist Union in 1889 may have been, partly, an attempt to allay any fears that guilds might be part of a movement for women's rights.[49] She saw the work as an opportunity to reach out to young women who, given the trade in the town [lace making], lived 'monotonous and laborious lives' and so began her address on 'Young Women's Guilds' with references to Scripture to emphasise that human beings are not 'isolated beings', but

[44]Barbara Caine, "Josephine Butler", *Victorian Feminists*, Clarendon Paperbacks (Oxford, 1993; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198204336.003.0005, (accessed July 11, 2024).
[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Charles (b.1870), Harriet (b. 1871), Edward (b.1873), William (b.1875) and Olive (b.1879).
[48]Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 117–8.
[49]*Derby Daily Telegraph* - Thursday 2 May 1889, 3.

always in relationship with one another.[50] Reminding them of the words of Jesus that those who 'do the will of God' are his sister, mother and brother (Mark 3.35), she went on to describe the structure of the guild and the way they provided opportunities for girls of sixteen years and over to meet together for singing, sewing, and help with learning to read. Bible study and prayer was part of each meeting, but there was opportunity for recreation and conversation with others. Practical issues of health and hygiene were addressed and a savings bank had been created for the benefit of the young people. Membership in the guild was for girls who were sixteen years of age or older (other groups were provided for young girls). At the time she reported that they had 102 members with 60–80 attending each meeting.

Addressing criticism of the guild, Medley said that the meeting was held at what might be considered a late hour (8-9.30pm), because most of the young women did not finish work until 8pm. To those who suggested that the guild encouraged women to 'have ideas above their station', she replied that encouraging a woman to read and love books 'may lead her with their help, to God Himself, the spring and source of all noble thought, and true poetry'.[51] Significantly, in promoting the guild, she continued to stress the importance of home and family. Noting that some people had suggested that the guild should be open for the girls every night, she claimed:

> They have many duties at home, and we endeavour to impress earnestly upon them that these duties come first, and that our Guild only answer its purpose when it helps them be kinder daughters and more affectionate sisters and friends.[52]

Emily continued her work with the guild for young women, and in 1893, published an article, 'The Hidden Voice', in the *Baptist Magazine* and in 1894 a second article, 'Characters and Circumstances'.[53] Both articles were examples of the kind of short talk she gave to the young people's guild. By publishing them, it seems she intended to further encourage her listeners to listen to God and, undoubtedly, she thought they might inspire other Christian women to let their voices be heard.[54]

The paper by Cecil Burns[55], also given at the Baptist Assembly in 1889, was on 'Women's Work in the Church'. As already noted, in her work with the

[50] *Birmingham Daily Post*, Thursday 2 May 1889, 4. Mrs E Medley, Young Women"s Guilds" and D.F. Gotch Guilds for Young Men, Two Papers read at the Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union (Holborn: Alexander & Shepheard), 1.

[51] Ibid., 9.

[52] Ibid., 10.

[53] *Baptist Magazine* 1893, Vol. LXXXV, (London: Alexander and Shepherd), 22–7. *Baptist Magazine* 1894 Vol LXXXVI (London: Alexander and Shepheard, 1894), 177–84.

[54] In the table of contents, the article is said to have been written by Mrs Edward Medley, though the article itself gives her name, Emily Grey Medley. (Emily"s mother compiled a book of her husband"s work in 1861. See advertisement in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 1861 noting: C.M. Birrell, Sunday Queries, 1st, 2nd and 3rd series compiled by Mrs Birrell, intended to interest family circles, Bible classes, Sunday Schools, etc. in the study of the Scriptures.)

[55] Her husband confirmed that she was given the name "Cecil" at the request of her maternal grandmother. Dawson Burns, *Memorial Leaves: A Selection From the Papers of Cecil Burns (Mrs Dawson Burns) With a Biographical Sketch* (London: The Ideal Publishing Union, 1898), 7.

temperance campaign, Cecil had established her reputation as an excellent public speaker. In this paper, she demonstrated her ability to critically examine Scriptural arguments which had been used to deny women a place in the church. Published in a collection of her works under the title *Woman's Official Position in the Church*, in this address Cecil argued forcefully that women should have a recognised role within the church. Describing the way that 'women were regarded and approved as servants and deaconesses in the early church' she went on to insist that women should be allowed to use their gifts, to lead in prayer and to speak in meetings.[56] More directly she challenged her listeners:

> A young man on entering a Church, can hope to have his name ultimately identified with some office in that church; might it not be as well to hold out a like prospect to a young woman-member, so that she may feel her privileges were not restricted to mere membership, quiet listening, or passive voting on church affairs?[57]

Reports of the meeting suggest that an animated discussion followed the address, though commenting on the meeting in the *Women's Penny Paper*, Sarah Tooley, a Baptist journalist who at one time taught in the Sunday School at Westbourne Park Baptist Church, claimed that the discussion which followed:

> marks an epoch in woman's history within Nonconformity. Each delegate who spoke was in favour of a greater prominence being given to women in Church life; without a single dissentient voice it was accepted as a plank in the Baptist Forward Movement, now being inaugurated that women should be allowed, nay encouraged, to pray publicly in the prayer meetings, to conduct services, to form themselves into guilds as nursing sisters, and even to enter the pulpit itself, if they have the gift of tongues.[58]

Tooley claimed, 'It will take time before we realise how distinct an epoch in one branch of Nonconformity these resolutions form.' However, she also believed that 'a wider sphere of usefulness is now the privilege of women. If they have a message to tell, they may tell it out as a man does.'[59]

While it evidently did not meet with Cecil's plan of having a recognised place of service for women in every local church, under the leadership of F.B. Meyer and supported by the London Baptist Association, in 1890 the Baptist Deaconesses Home and Mission was opened at 59 Doughty Street with four sisters and a woman Superintendent. Although this was the first organised community of Baptists deaconesses, Faith Bowers has suggested that some churches had already begun to employ pastoral workers to minister to the needs of the

[56]"Women"s Work in the Church" in a report of "The Baptist Union" in *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Thursday, 10 October 1889, 7.
[57]Dawson Burns, *Memorial Leaves*, 56
[58]Sarah Tooley, "Women at the Baptist Union" *Women"s Penny Paper*, Issue 59, London Saturday, Dec 7, 1889, 75.
[59]Ibid.

poor.[60] However, with an established order of deaconesses, the work soon expanded around the country.[61]

Deaconesses in this order were not married, and were recognisable in the community by their uniforms which included a grey veil. Their work – often with the poor within a community – included nursing care and visiting in homes to teach and encourage good hygiene when preparing and cooking food. They organised mothers' meetings, worked with young people in clubs during the week and organised Sunday School meetings. They were also very involved in open-air services and, when called upon, proved to be very able preachers.

By 1908, deaconesses were engaged in work around the country, and their contribution was especially important to the success of the caravan mission work which was organised by Katherine Rose and her husband, Charles. Being adept at visiting, during the week before the open-air meetings were due to begin, a team of deaconesses would scour a town and go door-to-door inviting people to the meetings. They would also sometimes preach at local village churches. When first formed, the deaconess movement appears to have been an attempt to create a special sphere of service for women. Importantly, however, the work of deaconesses in the churches – teaching, preaching, witnessing, and serving – was a further step toward opening the door toward establishing the place of women more generally within the church as a whole.

Having heard papers by two very articulate women in 1889, two years later, in 1891, again two women, Edith Angus and Ellen Farrer, were invited to speak to the Assembly. Edith, as noted earlier had grown up in a home and church that encouraged women to use their gifts. Her mother, Amelia (Gurney) Angus and sisters were active in the work of the BZM. Her father, Joseph Angus, on biblical grounds had argued that in the early church all members were 'regarded as equals' and if gifted by the Holy Spirit, both women and men could pray and prophesy in public.[62] Hence, it is not surprising that Edith's address, 'Women's Work in Connection With The Social Conditions of The Poor' stressed that there was a great deal of 'latent power to be developed among women members of the churches.'[63] Her argument, however, was that the women needed training in order to do the work. Drawing on the writing of Mark Guy

[60]Faith Bowers, "For God and the People: Baptists Deaconesses, 1901-1905", *Baptist Quarterly* 43, no. 8 (2010): 473. For information on deaconesses serving at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London, see Faith Bower, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 1848–1999* (London: Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 1999). Also, Ian Randall, *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 2005), 44.

[61]See, Doris Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1954).

[62]Joseph Angus, *Christian Churches: The Noblest Form of Social Life; The Representatives of Christ on earth; the dwelling Place of the Holy Spirit* (London: Ward and Co, 1862), 55.

[63]Edith Angus, "Women"s Work in Connection With The Social Conditions of The Poor" in *The Training of Women For Christian Work, Papers read at the Autumn Assembly of the Baptist Union Held in Manchester, October 8, 1891* (London: Alexander and Shepheard, 1891), 13.

Pearse[64], who had been instrumental in building up the work of deaconesses among Methodists, she began her presentation by suggesting that volunteer work could often be 'disconnected, desultory, and untrained'.[65] Outlining the various ways that women might be trained, she urged Baptists to engage in supporting work among the poor by training and educating women who felt called to do this work.

Ellen Margaret Farrer (1865-1959) addressed the Baptist Assembly on the topic 'Women's Work Among the Sick Poor'. Ellen – the first woman doctor to be appointed by the BZM – went to India in 1891.[66] A devoted doctor, she worked in Bhiwani, at a mission station which had been established by Isabel Angus four years earlier. She served there for forty years until she retired to Rickmansworth in 1933; she lived there until her death in 1959.[67]

Given that women in Britain were still finding it difficult to be trained as doctors, and that many people felt that women should not serve in this way, Ellen took the opportunity to make a very direct and – as she put it 'matter-of-fact' – approach to her subject of 'Women's Work among the Sick Poor'. Giving an overview of the importance of training for women who served as nurses, she then made a very strong case for women serving at home and abroad as medical doctors. Acknowledging that a great deal of prejudice against women serving as doctors still existed, she argued forcefully that women who felt called to train as doctors should be supported in their desire to 'usefully and happily serve Him who sent out his followers to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.'[68]

Slow Denominational Change

The issue of women being allowed to use their gifts in the church was, of course, an issue among other denominations in Britain. In 1892, Congregationalists appointed their first female delegate, Harriet Spicer, to their assembly.[69] Her appointment was widely reported, since she had trouble convincing the police on duty that she had the right to sit among the delegates! Her brother,

[64]Mark Guy Pearse (1842-1930) worked in the West London Mission between 1887–1902 and was outspoken in his support for the work of deaconesses in Methodism. See *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* https://dmbi.online/index.php?do=app.entry&id=2160 (accessed 24 July, 2024). Edith Angus began her paper with a quote from his work, *Jesus Christ and the People,* which claimed that "the Church that will make the best use of its women will come to have the strongest hold on the world." See, Edith Angus, "Women"s Work", 13.

[65]Edith Angus, "Women"s Work", 13.

[66]She was appointed by the BZM along with Dr Edith Brown, who went to Ludhiana where she established a medical clinic.

[67]*Baptist Union Handbook*, 1961, 347. She was recognised for her work by the Indian Government with the Kaisar-i-Hind silver and gold medals. For information about her work in India, see I. S. Anderson, *A Mission for Medicine: Dr Ellen Farrer and India, 1891-1933*, University of Durham, PhD, 1997. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1630/1/1630.pdf

[68]Ellen Farrer, "Women"s Work Among the Sick Poor," *The Training of Women For Christian Work, Papers read at the Autumn Assembly of the Baptist Union Held in Manchester, October 8,1891* (London: Alexander and Shepheard, 1891), 12.

[69]*Daughters of Dissent*, eds, Elaine Kaye, Janet Lees and Kirsty Thorpe (London: The United Reformed Church, 2004), 15.

Albert Spicer, was a firm supporter of women in leadership and therefore, it is not surprising that he took the opportunity while speaking at the BMS centenary celebration in 1892, to urge Baptists to give women more opportunities. Noting that he was treading on 'delicate ground', yet he claimed:

> I am going to say this, that in the second century of missions we must make more use of women. We are all thankful for what the wives of missionaries have done, but we have come to learn that there is a place also for women in our mission-field, working side by side with the male missionaries. I look back, Mr Baynes, with great pleasure to the evening that I spent in your ladies' missionary house in Delhi. But I think we want to go a step further. I think that we need to endeavour to get the sympathetic help of some of our intelligent women in our committee-rooms and our board-rooms. I am convinced that we shall have as a result a deeper spiritual fervour; we shall have a keener interest, not only in the work itself in the committee-room, but we shall have a keener interest taken in the churches with which these different women are identified. I am sure that we have gained immensely in the London Missionary Society in our Forward Movement, because of the addition of women to our board. After all, we men, and especially those of us engaged in commercial affairs, are apt to go into committees without, possibly, enough reflection and forethought. We are apt to look upon it all too much as a business affair. The women, however, help us to remember that, after all, it is Christ's work, and must be done in Christ's name and in Christ's spirit and for Christ's sake.[70]

Spicer's support for women continued in his own denomination the following year when he served as Chairman of the Congregational Union. In his first address he issued a plea for churches to 'withdraw the limitations that preclude women from being chosen as Church officers where they have the necessary qualifications'.[71]

The response to Spicer's address to Baptists was not immediately apparent, though perhaps the knowledge that Congregationalists had allowed a woman to attend their assembly as a delegate may have encouraged Baptists to do the same two years later. Hence, in 1894, when Moss Side Church in Manchester appointed a Mrs Stockford – a temperance leader – to be their representative to the Assembly, the Council passed a resolution confirming that women were eligible to serve as such if appointed by their churches.[72]

Following Stockford's appointment as a delegate to the assembly, it is likely that the presence of other women at meetings challenged the idea that the Baptist Assembly and Association gatherings were for men only. For instance, in 1897, a newspaper reporting on a meeting at Shortwood, near Nailsworth of the Bristol Baptist Association listed the names of all the delegates which included 127 men and one female: 'Miss [Grace] Abbott'.[73] Grace Abbott had been responsible for the erection of a 'tin chapel' which was known as the

[70] *Centenary Celebration of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1892-3*, ed. John Brown Myers (Holborn: The Baptist Missionary Society,1893), 314–5.
[71] *Daughters of Dissent,15.*
[72] *Warrington Examiner*, Saturday March 24, 1894, 8.
[73] *Stroud news and Gloucestershire Advertiser*, Friday June 18, 1897, p.2

Baptist Mission Hall in Stonehouse in 1891.[74] As the leader of the church there, she apparently felt that she should attend the Association meeting, even if she was the only woman present.

As the call for the recognition of women in leadership roles within society and women's struggle for suffrage continued unabated, new opportunities were opening up for them. However, there was still great opposition in society and there were continued attempts to place limits on the participation of women. For instance, in 1899 the London Government Act replaced 'vestries' as an administrative section with metropolitan boroughs. In doing so, the law stated that women could continue to serve on vestries, but could not serve on the new metropolitan boroughs. Surprisingly, perhaps, the *Baptist Magazine* commented on this change claiming it was a 'step backward' and insisted that women were needed to help with local councils.[75] Ironically, of course, while some Baptists favoured women serving on local councils, no women were yet serving on the council of the BUGBI, though, as John Briggs has pointed out, in 1905 *The Baptist Handbook* listed more than thirty women who were serving as church secretaries.[76]

The acceptance of women as church secretaries was, perhaps, a sign of growing pressure for the inclusion of women on the Baptist Union Council and, indeed, their recognition as ministers. In 1910, the Council was directly challenged about the possibility of the acceptance of women as ministers when they received a letter from a Miss Clark of Glasgow asking about the recognition of women as ministers by the Baptist Union. She was a student at Glasgow University and claimed that after she completed her course, she would have the degrees Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity. She asked the committee that if she 'could go on with her studies as a recognised Baptist student with the assurance that, at the end of her course, she would be accepted by the Baptist Church'. Avoiding controversy, the committee responded: 'It was agreed to inform Miss Clark that it did not come within the scope of the Committee to consider the cases of those who were not actually engaged in pastoral work.'[77]

The Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Women's League

Realising the important contribution of women to the life of the church, J. H. Shakespeare, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union from 1898 to

[74]Abbott later married the Rev Henry Moore who served as minister at Philip"s Street, Bedminster, Bristol from 1886-1907. At his death in 1911 Grace returned to Stonehouse and again assumed the leadership of the Mission Hall. Her daughter took over in 1919 and served as a leader until 1961. See "His Work Still Goes On: The first 150 Years of Phillip Street Baptist Church, Bedminster, Bristol" https://www.philipstreet.org.uk/main/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PhilipStreet-His-Work-A4.pdf For a photo of the Mission Hall see, Stonehouse History Group website: https://stonehousehistorygroup.org.uk/baptistchapel

[75]"Notes and Comments", *Baptist Magazine* Vol XCI, (London: Alexander and Shepheard, 1899), 400.

[76]J.H.Y. Briggs, "She Preachers, Widows and Other Women: The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life since 1600", *Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 7 (July 1986): 345.

[77]"Ministerial Recognition Committee" 18th July 1910, *Baptist Union Minutes,* June 1909-December 1911, p.126.

1924, actively looked for ways to include women in the life of the denomination. When the first meeting of the Baptist World Alliance was held in London in 1905, he ensured that women were included as delegates, and offered an opportunity for an African-American woman, Nannie Helen Burroughs to preach.[78] The meeting also proved to be an opportunity for British men and women to learn of the home mission work other Baptist women were doing in their own countries. With Shakespeare's encouragement, in 1908 a group of women met to organise the Baptist Women's Home Work Auxiliary (the name was changed to the Baptist Women's League in 1910). The first meeting took place in the home of Isabel (Riley) James who – like her father – was a close friend of J.H. Shakespeare.[79] Madeleine Marnham[80] served as the first president and Katherine Marie Rose became the organising secretary.

The work of Katherine Rose was important not only to the success of the BWL, but to the furtherance of women. She visited Baptist churches all over the country in order to establish new BWL groups and to encourage giving to the sustentation fund. She also supported the work of deaconesses and for a time oversaw the work of the training College. Rose was known to be an able preacher and worship leader. She played the harmonium and preached during caravan mission meetings. One newspaper account claimed of Rose:

> She generally conducts the services in each village on the first Sunday that the van is in the vicinity. Last Sunday she occupied the pulpit at Marden, and gave a most interesting and instructive sermon.[81]

The purpose of the BWL, was stated in the first constitution as:

> The development of the home work fund of the Baptist Union through the agency of Baptist women by the raising of funds to render church aid and promote evangelisation and colportage and also to welcome church members passing from one district to another and by assisting Baptist girls seeking situations.[82]

Under the leadership of women such as Isabel James, and Katherine Rose, the work of the BWL became an important force for change in the denomination. Hundreds of BWL groups were started in the churches and the BWL raised thousands of pounds for denominational funds. Likewise, they provided for troops and refugees in war-time, and also supported the work of deaconesses.

In assessing the contribution of the BWL to Baptist life, it may appear that the BWL was very much an organisation that encouraged women to remain in a

[78]See K.E. Smith "British Women and the Baptist World Alliance: Honoured Partners and fellow Workers?", *Baptist Quarterly* 41, (January, 2005): 30–4.
[79]A Fitzgibbon Riley served as minister at the Gateshead church in Highgate. Significantly, Shakespeare dedicated his book *At the Cross Roads* to Albert Fitzgibbon Riley and Isabel Riley James.
[80]S. Madeleine (Hudson) Marnham was the daughter of a Baptist minister, Matthew Hudson. She married Herbert Marnham in 1888 and they were members of the Heath Street Baptist Church in Hampstead.
[81]*Devizes and Wilts Advertiser*, Thursday 16 June 1910, 5. For a photograph see, Ian M. Randall, *The English Baptist of the Twentieth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 2005), 106–7.
[82]*Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland Minute Book 1906-1909*, Angus Library, Regent"s Park College Oxford.

subservient role, and did not press home the suffrage issue. However, it is clear that James saw it as a way that they had advanced the cause of women. Later, describing the growth of the BWL, Isabel James claimed that it passed through three phases: indifference, hostility and victory. Those who were hostile to creating an organisation just for women within the Baptist churches suggested that women had always worked in the church and did not need to organise. To this argument James claimed that women needed to feel that they were 'being permitted to give of their best in the service of Christ and whether the sphere opened to them is adequate to the measure of their capacity and will'.[83]

Reporting to the second meeting of the Baptist World Alliance, James spoke forcefully of the way the league had indeed opened up a new sphere of labour and claimed that there had been a very great advance in the history of BUGBI that year when ten women had been co-opted to the council. Reflecting on this appointment she wrote:

> We feel that our churches and every organisation in connection with them will be better and greater for men and women working side by side, and we see the future opening up with wide and gracious possibilities.[84]

1911 – Constitutional Change

While James commented that the constitutional change would allow men and women to serve on the council, the amendment stipulated that 'not more than ten ladies who have also been duly nominated' could serve on the council of sixty members.[85] This meant, of course, that on a council of sixty only ten women would be present among fifty men. The women named were as follows[86]:

Mrs. Winsor Bond, Birmingham	[Louisa (Jones) Bond]
Mrs. Carey Bonner, London	[Amy (Griffiths) Bonner]
Mrs. Bonwick, London	[Sarah (Beddow) Bonwick]
Mrs. Russell James, London	[Isabel (Riley) James]
Mrs. Lace, Penarth	
Miss Perry, Bristol	[(Emily?) Perry]
Mrs. Ridley, Bury St Edmunds	
Mrs. Robertson, Burnley	
Mrs. C. S. Rose, Harrow	[Katherine Marie (Pearce)Rose]
Mrs. Smallwood, Stratford on Avon	[Elizabeth (Knight) Smallwood]

As far as it has been possible to identify them, an analysis of these committee members seems to indicate that several of the women were either married to a

[83]Mrs Russell [Isabel]James, "The British Baptist Women"s League" in *BWA Proceedings*, 1911, p.168.
[84]Ibid., 167.
[85]Under Section 8 and Article VIII of the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. See Minutes of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, September 26, 1910, 136.
[86]"Officers, Council and Committees 1911-1912", *The Baptist Handbook for 1911* (London, Baptist Union Publications, 1911), 17.

Baptist minister or had been brought up in a minister's family.[87] Others were part of families who had taken an active part in denominational life.[88]

Although, these women were named as members of the Baptist Union Council, it is notable that in 1911 the Baptist Union Minutes still included a report from the 'Ladies Housekeeping Committee' who inspected the Baptist Church House for cleanliness and recommended changes to the décor. Additionally, there was a notice that Lady Macalpine was giving an 'At Home' in the library of the Baptist Church House in connection with the BWL.[89] It seems that then, and for many years to come, women would still be identified with the domestic sphere.

Conclusion

The change in the constitution in 1911 which allowed women to take their place on the Baptist Union Council was, perhaps, a reflection of a changing culture. Though for many years, it may have been assumed that a woman's place should be defined by domesticity and motherhood, throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century that view was challenged in many different public arenas: social, educational, and political.

In the church, as a whole, and among Baptists in particular, arguably the change in attitudes toward women came very slowly. For some, the resistance originally may have been due to traditional social or cultural views or circumstances. For others, arguments against women in leadership in the church were backed up by certain interpretations of Scripture and linked to cherished religious customs and belief. In Baptist life, these arguments were countered

[87] *Amy [Griffiths] Bonner* was the daughter of Robert Griffiths who served as secretary of the Tonic Solfa College. She was active in the BWL from the beginning and travelled widely speaking in churches in order to promote the sustentation fund. She was also active in the Liberal party. Carey Bonner (1859 -1938), whom she married in 1884, was a Baptist minister and musician was the son of a Baptist minister, W.H. Bonner. J. Edward Roberts, "Rev Carey Bonner" in *Baptist Magazine*, January 1897. *Isabel [Riley] James*, the daughter of A. Fitzgibbon Riley, was herself named in a newspaper account as one of the leading orators among women in Britain. *Dartmouth & South Hams Chronicle*, Friday 28 November 1913, 3. *Mrs. Robertson* was married to John Donald Robertson who served as minister to churches in Alloa and Burnley and then as Superintendent in the North of England. *Katherine Rose (1874–1937)* was married to a minister, Charles Samuel Rose. *Sarah [Beddow] Bonwick (1849–1924)* was the granddaughter of Barnabas Beddow, a Baptist minister. Colin Cartwright, "Sarah Bonwick (1849–1924), the Baptist Women"s League and the Women"s Suffrage Movement in England", *Baptist Quarterly* 53 no. 2 (2021): 66–80.

[88] *Louisa [Jones] Bond* married Joseph Winsor Bond. They were both from Plymouth and married in 1867 at George Street Baptist Chapel in Plymouth. He established a successful business making horseshoes. They were members of King"s Heath Baptist Church, Birmingham and very active in the work of the Baptist association and in the Baptist Missionary Society. *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* - Friday 11 January 1867, 5. *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*, Friday 12 June 1914, 1. *Elizabeth (Knight) Smallwood* moved to Stratford-on-Avon from Reigate when she married John Smallwood, at a ceremony in the Baptist chapel in Reigate, Redhill, Surrey in 1902. John Smallwood was active in community life in Stratford – serving as an alderman for many years and a well-known figure in Baptist life in Worcestershire. They were members of the Baptist Church in Stratford on Avon. After her husband"s death, Elizabeth continued her work as a strong temperance campaigner. *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, Friday March 14, 1902, 8. *Mrs Lace* and her husband were both members of the council in 1911 and they were members of The Tabernacle Baptist Church on Plassey Road in Penarth. *Mrs. Ridley* presumably, was the wife of part of Thomas Ridley who was a prominent figure in the town, grocer and twice mayor of Bury St Edmunds 1878 and 1882 and active in the Baptist church.

[89] *Baptist Union Minutes* June 1909-December 1911, March 17, 1911, 183.

from time to time in published articles and addresses given at the Assembly by both men and women. However, the primary way that women themselves moved the discussion of leadership forward was through the example of their own dedicated and evidently effective service which they believed to be an expression of their Christian discipleship.

Often in inauspicious circumstances, Baptist women demonstrated their gifts of leadership. They proved themselves to be significant leaders in social action both locally in their own communities and nationally, too. They organised and supported opportunities for women to serve in mission work at home and abroad. When given the opportunity to serve in a church through leading worship, teaching or preaching, or raising funds (as they did through bazaars organised to pay off the loans owed on many Baptist church buildings) they took their place without fanfare. Evaluating their approach today, it seems that at times their efforts to challenge the status quo could have been construed as rather subversive, such as the applications to personal membership in the Baptist Union. Whether this was the intention or not, their approach to change was clearly to work from within, rather than from outside the institutional structures. As a result, the change occurred gradually, and without division within the life of the Baptist Union.

The slowness of change was frustrating for many women and for some men, too. In his book, *The Church at the Cross-roads*, published in 1919 (and dedicated to Isabel James and her father, A.F. Riley), J. H. Shakespeare, the great supporter of Baptist women, lamented the fact that unlike the social, educational or political sphere, in many instances in the church women were still excluded from service. Yet, perhaps as a prophetic word or even as an expression of his prayer and hope, he claimed:

> At any rate, in the new world, women will enter upon hitherto untried paths, they will assume added responsibilities and will advance in power, efficiency and self-confidence; prejudice will disappear and the Church will be compelled to accept the principle that sex in itself can be no bar to position and service.[90]

Disclosure Statement

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[90]J. H. Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Cross-roads: A Study in Church Unity* (London, 1918), 9–11.