THE COMMUNITY OF PRESTWOOD, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: A NEW PARISH AND ITS PEOPLE 1850-1900

Postgraduate Certificate in Genealogical Studies

Centre for Lifelong Learning
University of Strathclyde

ANNE HOLMES

2009-10

Copyright statement
The copyright of this project belongs to the author under the terms of the United Kingdom Copyright Acts as qualified by University of Strathclyde Regulation 3.50. Due acknowledgement must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this written work.
THE COMMUNITY OF PRESTWOOD, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: A NEW PARISH AND ITS PEOPLE 1850-1900

Abstract: Prestwood, a new parish

....The District is about to be formed in to a separate Incumbency, and will embrace portions of the parishes of Hughenden, Missenden and Stoke Mandeville. Here the people have been hitherto almost wholly deprived of the means of grace, in consequence of the distance from their respective churches, as well as the badness of the roads..." 27th Oct 1849, Bucks Herald

The new parish church of Holy Trinity, Prestwood had been consecrated in 1849. The Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood was formed in 1852 out of portions of the three parishes mentioned. Map 1 (Appendix 1) shows a simplified version of the area of the new parish based on the original 1850 map. Map 2 shows a photograph of the original 1850 parish map. Map 3 shows the nucleus of the village in 1850, the boundaries of the old parishes and some of the plot numbers related to the census information.

The aim of this study is to discover how the identity of the parish of Prestwood evolved in the second half of the nineteenth century and how the nature of the parish, its people, their origins and the occupations they pursued changed during this period. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in this process.

Aims and strategy

An independent census of Prestwood had been commissioned by the Anglican church in February 1850 in light of the birth of this new parish. This census plus the associated map has been chosen as the starting point for this study; firstly because it gives the most accurate figure for the population of Prestwood as a collective community at that time and secondly for the additional genealogical information the 1850 census provides that cannot be found in the government census of 1851. The data from this independent census was transcribed as originally recorded (Appendix 2), however place of origin of individuals was not part of the census. Using the government census of the following year place of origin, where it could be found, was added to the 1850 census transcription in order to extract information about the percentage of people who were born locally. As a comparison at the end of the nineteenth century data from the 1891 census was also used to compare the origin and other pertinent data of Prestwood people. The 1901 census could also have been chosen but as the 1891 census was more accessible, it has been transcribed by the Bucks Genealogical Society, and the difference in population between 1891 and 1901 was only 10 persons, the use of the 1891 census was considered acceptable. The genealogical information for the family case study and associated pedigree chart (Appendix 3a/b) has
been extracted from original parish registers where possible. The General Record Office
Indexes of Births, Marriages and Deaths and the general census returns 1851 to 1901 via
Ancestry.com online were also used. Where the genealogical information is not certain it has
been omitted.

Description and Evaluation of Sources Used and Methodology

Despite the 1849 newspaper comment of the new incumbent of Holy Trinity, many
inhabitants of Prestwood had managed to attend the parish church relevant to the area of
Prestwood in which they lived for the rights of passage of baptism, marriage and burial.
However, for those that lived in Stoke Hamlet, the detached Stoke Mandeville portion of
Prestwood and the nucleus of the village in 1850, Stoke Mandeville was often too distant to
travel (six miles) and some would perhaps use the nearer Great or Little Hampden parish
churches or Great Missenden church to baptise their children, to marry or for burial. A
consequence of this fragmented community makes locating genealogical information for the
inhabitants of Prestwood in the nineteen century and earlier a challenge. A genealogical
search may require examining the registers of up to five local parish churches. Factor in to
the search also that Prestwood did have a church of its own in the early nineteenth century,
a Strict Baptist Chapel in the detached part of Stoke Mandeville parish. This chapel had
been first erected in 1823. No written records survive from the nineteenth century Baptist
Chapel. Membership of this chapel has to be gleaned from newspaper articles and the
monumental inscriptions on the headstones found in the adjoining Baptist cemetery. A
Methodist Chapel was also built in 1863. Members of Prestwood Methodist Church can be
found in the High Wycombe Circuit Register. Baptism and membership numbers of the this
chapel in the nineteenth century can be found in Appendix 4: Table 4 and Figure 1.

Although a new Ecclesiastical parish was formed in 1852, for the purpose of census return
information, at least from 1851 to 1881, to trace all inhabitants of Prestwood the relevant
portion of Prestwood entries has to be extracted from the returns for Great Missenden,
Hughenden and Stoke Mandeville as the links to these ancient parishes were maintained
when the civil parishes were established. The detached part of Stoke Mandeville was moved
to the Civil Parish of Great and Little Hampden in 1885 thus to locate of all Prestwood
inhabitants in the census returns of 1891 and 1901 the civil parishes of Great Missenden,
Hughenden and Great and Little Hampden had to be examined. The data for the population
of Prestwood has been extracted from the official census return figures 1861 to 1911.
However, as there was not an official Ecclesiastical District of Prestwood until 1852 the
figure for 1850 has been taken from the independent church census.
Prestwood people - population, origins and occupations: the findings

In an earlier study of Prestwood in the year 2000 (Appendix 4) the population of Prestwood in 1851 was estimated at around 750 individuals, however the discovery of the church census reveals this figure was inaccurate. This figure was 798 in 1850 and a new estimate of 813 in 1851. In addition, about one quarter of the individuals who were recorded in 1850 could not be located in Prestwood in 1851: the evidence thus indicating an element of transience within the Prestwood population. The population of Prestwood 1850 to 1911 can be seen in Figure 1 and the breakdown per parish in 1850 and 1891 in Figure 2.

![Prestwood-Population 1850-1911](image)

Figure 1: Population of Prestwood 1850-1911

![PRESTWOOD -Population by Ancient & Civil Parish](image)

Figure 2: Population of Prestwood by parish 1850 and 1891
The population figures of Prestwood for the second half of the nineteenth century show an approximate increase of 21% in those fifty years. A possible explanation for the peak in 1871 is that the 1870s was the high point in brick making in the village: Prestwood was providing raw materials for the new houses being built in the expanding suburbs of the surrounding market towns and drawing in workers to supply this need. Kiln Road, in Stoke Hamlet and Kiln Common, already existed in 1850, suggesting the brickwork industry had been present in Prestwood for some time. Although, the population of Prestwood had only increased to 968 by 1901 as can be seen from the data extracted from both the 1850 census and the 1891 census the occupations of the villagers showed greater variety in 1891 than in 1850 and whereas in 1850 much of Prestwood's population was born within five miles of the village by 1891 a greater proportion of those who lived here were from further afield.

The occupations of many of the inhabitants of Prestwood were those of a rural community and the artisan trades that supported such a community. Many families such as the BRYANTS, KNAPPS and the REDRUPS had continued in the same rural occupations for a century or more. Using the occupation data from the 1850 independent census of Prestwood Figure 3 shows the breakdown of male occupations in the village at that time.

Figure 3: Prestwood 1850: Occupations of male workers

As might be expected in a mid nineteenth century rural community 'Labourer' was the most recorded male occupation. This was followed by occupations that related to the timber trade: Prestwood was a hilltop settlement surrounded by the beech woods of the Chilterns. Timber from the surrounding woodland supplied the local furniture industry and the paper mills in the nearby market town of High Wycombe. Third in the occupation list are the tenant Farmers.
Other occupations included are those artisan trades such as Blacksmiths and Wheelwrights. In addition to those main occupations as recorded in Figure 3, there were 2 Clerics, 1 School Master, 1 School Mistress, 1 Shoemaker, 1 Beehive Maker and a Tailor. Where an occupation for females is given in 1850 three quarters were Lace Makers or Straw Plaiters (Figure 4): cottage industries the wages from which supplemented many a meagre family income.

![PRESTWOOD 1850-Females Workers](image)

Figure 4: Prestwood 1850: Occupations of female workers

Although there was a School Master and a School Mistress resident in the village and a new school room had been built alongside the church no scholars were recorded on the 1850 census. The census surveyor chose not to record this data. The 1851 Census suggests there were 53 children, just under one third of eligible children under 13, attending the new Prestwood school, and by 1891 this had increased to 166, nearly three quarters of eligible children.

By 1891, the most recorded occupation is still Labourer (Figure 5) and as in 1850 followed by those occupied in the timber trade. There are still the village Blacksmiths, the Wheelwrights and the Farmers, the Bakers, the Butchers and Beer Sellers albeit in slightly increased numbers but new to the list is the Railway Worker. The new railway from Great Missenden to London was opened in 1891. The railway was, in the course of time, to change the character of life in Prestwood. Occupations for female workers in 1891 (Figure 6) showed more variety than in 1850 though still all within the domestic sphere.
Figure 5: Prestwood 1891: Occupations of male workers

Figure 6: Prestwood 1891: Occupation of female workers

Comparing the census data for place of origin for the population of Prestwood in both 1850 and in 1891 the difference in origin of Prestwood's inhabitants were showing signs of change. In 1891 more were from further afield. In 1850, 90% of the villagers whose origin could be located were local, mostly from Prestwood or the immediate surrounding parishes, only one person stated they were actually from Prestwood. By 1891 the figure was 68% of the population who were from Prestwood or a neighbouring parish: nearly a third of these individuals (222) gave their origin as Prestwood. However, similar data taken by county of
origin alone in 1851 and 1891 revealed in both years around 90% of Prestwood residents were still Buckinghamshire born. Figures 7 and 8 indicates the age range of the population remained fairly consistent.

![PRESTWOOD 1850-Age Distribution](image)

Figure 7: Prestwood 1850: Age distribution

![PRESTWOOD 1891-Age Distribution](image)

Figure 8: Prestwood 1891: Age distribution

Much information regarding the population of Prestwood has been gleaned from the statistical data, but what of the individuals themselves. Away from work and school how did the Victorian villagers fill their leisure time? The village schoolroom had been opened shortly after the new parish was created. The school room room was also used as the village post
office, postal communication having been granted in 1858. It was the school and the three denominational churches that initiated the entertainment in the village.

From the 1860s onwards Penny Readings were popular. Volunteers would give renditions of poems and songs and these events were well recorded in the local newspapers. Cricket matches were organised in the summer months by the local churches, rival parish choirs often making up the teams. There were the regular harvest festivals, and treats were often provided for the children. The Baptist Church in Prestwood was particularly active, providing summer and Christmas tea parties for the village children (Appendix 4) and it is from reports of these events in the local press that members of the Prestwood Baptist Chapel can also be found.

....On the evening of Christmas Day a sacred concert was given at the Baptist Chapel, which was preceded by a public tea meeting. The company at tea was a numerous one: including the school children. The gentlemen who took part, Messrs A. and F. Free, E. Fountain, F. Anderson and G. Smith....Mr. H Groom presided at the harmonium...The various pieces were given in a very efficient and pleasing style, especially a solo by Miss Alice Bristow....Bucks Free Press, 16th January 1880

**The GROOM family: a case study**

Alice BRISTOW was to marry Alfred GROOM, brother of Henry, in 1884. The headstone of Alfred and Alice can be found in the Baptist Cemetery in Kiln Road, Prestwood. Nearby is the headstone of Henry GROOM. Henry's headstone informs us that he was the Organist for 53 years at the Zion Chapel.

In addition to the headstones of Alfred and Henry in the Baptist Cemetery, there are at least eight other GROOM headstones (photographs: Appendix 5) dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century indicating how much this family were connected to the Baptist life in the village. The family’s involvement with the Chapel probably started circa 1832/3. William and Sarah GROOM, Alfred and Henry’s grandparents, had their first four children baptised at Great Missenden parish church, the fourth being Rosetta in 1831. After this year there are no more infant baptisms for the children of William and Sarah. The couple’s fifth child Sarah Ann chose to join the Anglican Church as an adult. She was baptised, aged 17 years, at Holy Trinity, Prestwood 13th March 1850. In 1853 she married George WARD. Their children were also baptised in the Anglican Church. William and Sarah GROOM’S sixth child, Solomon chose the path of the Baptists. It was he and his children who became the most noted members of the Zion Chapel in Prestwood. As well as being a prominent member of the Baptist Chapel, William’s son, Solomon, owned one of the largest brickworks in the village in the late nineteenth century thus a major employer in the community.
William GROOM was the third son of Philip GROOM and Elizabeth (nee KNAPP). William had three siblings: two older brothers, Henry and Samuel, and a sister, Mary. Samuel died as an infant and Henry moved away from Prestwood to Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. In 1851 and 1861, Henry is listed there as a Baker. William GROOM became the village Shoemaker. By 1850, both Philip and Elizabeth are deceased therefore William GROOM was the only male child of Philip GROOM residing in Prestwood in 1850. William GROOM and his descendants have been chosen as the pedigree case study (Appendix 3a) of a nineteenth century Prestwood family: for their connections to the Strict Baptist Chapel, the genealogical challenges this family presents and for their high profile involvement in village life. An important genealogical discovery regarding the GROOMS was provided by the 1850 census. This was the marriage partner of Mary GROOM, sister of William. It was not known if Mary had married as a marriage could not be found in the local parish registers for her. The discovery of Ann KNAPP, Spinstor, living with the BRYANT family and noted as aunt to Mary BRYANT indicated a possible marriage of Mary GROOM to John BRYANT. Ann KNAPP had died by the date of the 1851 census however, tracing Ann KNAPP and her wider family back in time it was discovered she was the sister of Elizabeth KNAPP (wife of Philip GROOM). It was also discovered that Philip and Elizabeth's daughter Mary was
baptised in the parish church of Great Missenden 6th August 1797 thus correlating Mary's year of birth with the age of Mary BRYANT in 1850.

Like Solomon, most of William's children chose to live and work in Prestwood, however the census returns tell us Sarah moved with her husband, George, a Carpenter, to the nearby town of Amersham. Rosetta GROOM died as a teenager. It is not known what happened to Ann. She cannot be easily traced on the census returns or the GRO Indexes. Rachel married twice, firstly to Benjamin MASON and secondly to Charles REDRUP. Rachel and Charles also became members of the Baptist Chapel and part of the farming network that was so closely connected to the Chapel (Appendix 4). Rachel and Charles were either childless or had no surviving children. Arthur died widowed and childless and is buried in the churchyard at Holy Trinity suggesting perhaps he was not a follower of the Baptist tradition.

Solomon GROOM had eleven children. One child, Sarah Ann, died at one month old in 1879. This information was discovered from her headstone in the Baptist Cemetery. The other children mostly resided in Prestwood or the surrounding local area during their lives: only Herbert died in London. However the census returns indicate Herbert did spend most of his adult life in Prestwood. In 1891, he is listed as Baker in Great Hampden Civil Parish, in the old Stoke Hamlet. He is buried in the Baptist Cemetery alongside his GROOM siblings. By 1891, Solomon's son, Henry, appears to have taken over the running of the family brickworks. Of Solomon's other sons, Alfred is also listed as a Baker and Walter and Owen are listed as Farmer's sons. Solomon, himself is listed as Bread Manufacturer and Farmer: all are living in Prestwood. In 1891 four of Solomon GROOM'S daughter are still living at home. The youngest, Florence, aged 13 years is still at school. Her older sisters are noted as having occupations relating to needlework, namely dressmaking and bead wire work.
Conclusion

The evidence suggests it is only as the twentieth century progresses do the descendants of William and Sarah GROOM start moving further afield. In 1891, as in 1850, the core of the community of Prestwood is local to Buckinghamshire and at least two thirds in 1891 are still from the Prestwood locality. At the end of the nineteenth century, as the occupation and population data suggests, Prestwood appears to have been holding on to the old village way of life. However, the inevitable change to be wrought by the arrival of the railway, nearly two miles distant, was already starting to emerge indicated by the new influx of villagers who had come from further afield and the emergence of new occupations. The consequence of the arrival of the railway was that Prestwood would become a commuter dormitory for London but this did not really happen until well in to the twentieth century: the population increasing to only 1,297 by 1911.
INDEX of APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Maps of Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood
APPENDIX 2: Transcription of 1850 Census of Prestwood (Excel Spreadsheet)
APPENDIX 3a: Descendant Chart for William GROOM (PDF File)
APPENDIX 3b: Source Usage Report for Descendant Chart (PDF File)
APPENDIX 4: Open University Project on Prestwood (year 2000)
APPENDIX 5: Photographs of GROOM Headstones, Prestwood Baptist Cemetery

REFERENCES: SOURCES (Primary)


Parish Registers of St. Mary the Virgin, Stoke Mandeville 1783-1877. Ref: PR196/1/2-7. Held at the Centre for Bucks Studies, Aylesbury.

Parish Registers St. Mary Magdalene, Great Hampden 1557-1885. Ref: PR90/1/1-4. Held at the Centre for Bucks Studies, Aylesbury.


1871 Census Amersham Ref: RG10/1395/p10. Available online: www.ancestry.co.uk Last accessed 18th July 2010.


Historic Photographs of Buckinghamshire. Solomon Groom’s Brickyard 1876-1907 Available online: http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/museum/ea_buckinghamshire_photos.page Held at Bucks County Museum (Copyright permission granted by Bucks County Museum to reproduce these photographs for this study only)
Bucks Herald: October 1849 on microfilm. Held at the Centre for Bucks Studies, Aylesbury.

Bucks Free Press January 1880 on microfilm. Held at the Centre for Bucks Studies, Aylesbury

REFERENCES: SOURCES (Secondary)


Buckinghamshire 1851 Census Transcription with Index (CD-Rom) published by the Bucks FHS, P.O. Box 403, Aylesbury, Bucks

1861 Census of Buckinghamshire (CD-Rom) published by the Bucks Genealogical Society, Rudds Lane, Haddenham, Bucks

1891 Census of Buckinghamshire (CD-Rom) published by the Bucks Genealogical Society, Rudds Lane, Haddenham, Bucks

Population Data - Prestwood 1861-1911: HISTPOP Online Historical Population Reports: Available online: www.histpop.org Last accessed 18th July 2010


GRO Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes 1837-1930. Available online: www.ancestry.co.uk Last accessed 19th July 2010

BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1: Maps of Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood

The Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood

JANUARY 1850

Map 1: The Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood 1850 (simplified version)
Map 2: Prestwood 1850: Photograph of original parish map showing old parish borders
Map 3: Prestwood 1850: Photograph showing Stoke Hamlet, nucleus of the village, plus old parish borders
APPENDIX 4: Open University Project on Prestwood, Year 2000

What role did Religion play in the Rural Community of Prestwood, Buckinghamshire 1850 - 1890?

(Final Project Report for Open University Course DA301, 2000)

Anne Holmes

Abstract

A group of scattered settlements in 1850, a village community by 1890? This paper explores the role religion played in the community of Prestwood, Buckinghamshire 1850 - 1890. Evidence has been obtained from the Religious Census of 1851, Population Census Returns 1851 - 1891 and Parish Records where available. Also used were Prestwood’s National School Log Book, Local Trade Directories and Newspapers. My research is related to studies by GILBERT (1976), HARRIS (1993) and TILLER (Golby, 1994). Findings show a surge of religious activity in this community 1850 - 1890 suggesting religion was an all-pervasive presence in everyday life yet by 1890 religious observance was showing signs of decline.
Aims and Strategy

The aim of this project is to establish the role religion played in the rural community of Prestwood, Buckinghamshire 1850 - 1890. This is a complex issue to investigate therefore, in light of the key question stated a number of wider points need also to be explored. What religious bodies were present in the community during the said period? Where were they located in the village? What sections of the community were affiliated to each denomination? Did one particular denomination command more influence than the others? Was religion a prime factor in defining a sense of community in Prestwood, or did it, by 1890, lead to the existence of communities within a community?

The strategy used was the questioning of sources by qualitative techniques based on a particular locality exploring change over time. Because of the scattered nature of Prestwood’s population in the 19th century locality was defined by that area within the Ecclesiastical Parish boundary of Prestwood (Appendix A, Map). The forty-year period chosen because this was a time when there was a surge of religious activity within the community.

The Religious Census of 1851 was the initial source used, and the data extracted from this established the setting for the investigation. The evidence gained here was further supplemented by, and expanded upon, over the forty year period by other sources such as Parish Registers, Newspaper Articles, Parish Magazines, Local History Publications, Population Census Returns, the Village School Log Book and Local Trade Directories. A brief piece of oral evidence was also necessary.

In collating the evidence the key question was constantly referred to, as were comparisons to the work of other researchers. The final stage was to examine the results of my investigation and compare them with received views about the role religion played in the Victorian community.

Relation to the Work of Other Researchers

To relate my project to other researchers I initially looked to K. Tiller’s Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Golby 1994 pp 156-181). Tiller suggests that religion was a central influence, whether directly or indirectly, in people’s lives throughout the 19th century. For some it was a primary factor in defining a sense of community, encouraging individuals and families to participate in the lives around them. For others religion separated rather than attached, generating a more inward looking identity. Whilst some would embrace religious belief less positively but none the less would encounter its influence in their everyday lives (Golby, 1994 p 156). Tiller’s points about the different forms and functions taken by religion in Victorian Britain are particularly pertinent to the context of my research.
Tiller also comments on the effect of the evangelical revival both within the Church of England and the Nonconformist denominations. The building of the new Anglican Church and its adjoining National School were the centrepieces of the new Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood borne out of the drive of this evangelical revival. The community of Prestwood was not only to feel the force of revivalism from the Church of England but New Dissent also. The Strict Baptists already appeared to have a thriving church community by the middle of the 19th century and it was expanding by 1870. It was not long before Methodism had gained a foothold too.

Gilbert (1976, p 30) states that it was Methodism that grew most rapidly in the 19th century. Did Methodism in Prestwood follow national trends? Gilbert (1976, p 53, 147) also comments that Strict Baptists had a strong tradition of independence from other dissenting religions. He also argues that New Dissent appealed more to the artisan, the non-agrarian occupational classes within a community. In light of Gilbert’s research it will be seen from the evidence that indeed the Strict Baptists of Prestwood were fiercely independent, but that Nonconformity appealed more to non-agrarian workers was not the case. And Gilbert’s argument that Nonconformity in general stood still or declined in the years 1840-1880, and clearly declined thereafter was not clear cut in my examination of the relevant sources for Prestwood.

Harris (1993, p 153) takes a more positive view about the role religion played in Victorian everyday life. And that though the second half of the 19th century was a period of advancing secularisation the overall picture surrounding this trend is a complex one. I have found this to be the case in my research on Prestwood. Each locality examined is subject to a set of unique circumstances particular to itself as well as those it has in common with other villages, towns or cities.

Harris (1993, p 153-154) also raises many valid points, which I have considered whilst evaluating sources for this project. That for example, quantitative data relating to external religious observance may be an unreliable guide to internal religious conviction. And it may be that external forces can also confuse such data. Church membership could be affected by the charismatic personality (or lack of it) of the resident priest or pastor thus increasing or decreasing his congregation accordingly. This point is also relevant to the spectacular revival campaigns, those of Moody and Sankey an example, of the 1870’s thought to have but a transient effect, thus one explanation for the fall in church membership circa 1880. Harris also observes that family size was decreasing though the number of individual families was expanding, at a time (1860-1906) when membership of church clubs and societies was running into millions and Sunday School attendance was increasing. These points detail the complex circumstances that surround participation in late Victorian religion and that the evangelical revival did have some long term affect on society.
Description and Evaluation of Sources and Methods Used

In order to establish the religious denominations present in the settlement of Prestwood at the beginning of the relevant period, the first source to be consulted was the Buckinghamshire Returns of the Census of Religious Worship 1851 published by the Buckinghamshire Record Society. The three parishes - Great Missenden, Hughenden and Stoke Mandeville, to which Prestwood belonged at that time, were consulted. The statistics for the returns are shown in Table 1. Quantitative techniques were used to analyse the data. The figures show that when compared with total attendance 52.1% had attended the Baptist Chapel and 47.9% had attended the Anglican Church, Holy Trinity. These percentages were roughly in line with national statistics i.e 53% attending a Nonconformist chapel and 47% an Anglican church on 30th March 1851 (G. Best, 1979, p 199).

To establish church attendance as a percentage of the total community I looked to the Population Census of 1851 for the population of Prestwood in that year. Again three districts had to be consulted and the population number was estimated at 751. Therefore church attendance, as a percentage of total population was 80%, higher than the national average of between 47% and 54% (G.Best, 1979, p 197) but lower than the average of 87.3% for Buckinghamshire (Golby, 1994, p 165). However it must be remembered that with these figures it must be taken into account that some individuals may have attended twice on that Mothering Sunday in 1851 and that some may have remained loyal to, and attended one, of the parent parish churches.

Local Directories were the next sources studied, to ascertain the extent of church building and expansion that took place in the community 1850 - 1890. Kelly’s Directories of Buckinghamshire for 1869, 1877, 1883, 1889, and 1891 were used, as these were the only ones available at local libraries for the relevant period. They begin at 1869 because this was the first edition available that gave details of Prestwood as a village in its own right. Its appears from using other sources that information in these directories was not always up to date but they were able to provide detail of the religious denominations that were present in the community 1850 - 1890. The data is presented in Table 2.

The next task was to try and discover which sections of the community were affiliated to a particular denomination and compare the findings with received views that Nonconformity appealed more to the lower middle classes and Anglicanism the gentry and rural poor (Harris 1993, p155). Again the sources were guided by those available but had to correspond with as many as the denominations as possible. It was the Baptism Registers I consulted. These were readily available for the Anglican Church, Holy Trinity and the Methodist Chapel, the latter to be found in the Wesleyan Methodist Circuit Registers for High Wycombe. With Holy Trinity’s registers the name and date for each baptism was noted 1849 - 1890 with detail of parents and parental occupation. The same methodology was applied to
the Wesleyan Methodist Registers. Here parental occupation was not given therefore the
date of each baptism and father of each child was cross-referenced with the appropriate
Population Census. As the registers for Holy Trinity began in 1849, and for the Methodist
Chapel in 1864, the totals for baptisms were grouped in five year periods beginning 1849 -
1853, 1854 -1859 and so on, in order that that a true comparison can be made.
Each family bringing a child to baptism was counted only once, the number of any further
children baptised to known families were counted collectively and appear in brackets in the
table. This not only gives details of new families affiliating themselves to a church but also
total number of baptisms and the extent of continued loyalty The occupations of parents
(predominantly fathers) were classified according to Armstrong's socio-economic groups I -
However, in the Quarterly Circuit Schedule Books (Wycombe Circuit) were figures for
Prestwood members of the local Methodist Society. These are presented in the graph, figure
1. This was a useful exercise as two methods of examining religious affiliation were used.
The rise and fall in Methodist baptisms 1864-1890 did not correspond to the rise and very
slight fall in Methodist membership for the same period. As members of the Methodist
Society were adults, and those baptised were children one possible explanation for this may
be a fall in the birth rate. And it appears from detail in the registers the main cause for the fall
in Methodist Society membership was death of a member. These results therefore would be
in line with Harris (1993, p 154) observations of falling figures for church membership at a
time when church clubs and societies were expanding.
Strict Baptists do not believe in infant baptism. And after consultation with the pastor of the
present day chapel it appears no adult baptism registers either exist or have survived for the
said period. At the County Record Office there were some records for Buckinghamshire
Baptist Association but no entries for Prestwood. Also available were 20th century editions
(1960-1969) of the Bucks Baptist magazine. A map that appears in all editions reveals that
Prestwood's Baptist Chapel did not adhere itself to any local or national Baptist organisation.
However, it was suggested I speak to Miss Florence Beesley, aged 93, a present day
member of the chapel, and descendant from a prominent village Baptist family, the Grooms.
She knew as a child some of the younger members of the Groom family who would have
been active in the chapel in the late Victorian period, for example, Henry Groom, Chapel
Organist from 1869 to 1923. She informed me that many of these members were from
farming families, not only from the village but also as far as ten miles in distance. A visit to
the private Baptist Cemetery in the village part confirmed this information. Most of the
Monumental Inscriptions on the Victorian headstones were still legible. I took all the names
and dates that fell within the relevant period and cross-referenced them with the appropriate
Population Census. This revealed that indeed many of these 19th century Baptists were
farmers. And if some were migrant worshippers in 1851 this may cast doubt on the statistics presented for the Religious Census for this chapel.

Membership of the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Prestwood’s parish boundary at Bryants Bottom was more difficult. Trade Directories state this chapel seats 120. But the population of the hamlet at Bryants Bottom was around 50 (250 years of Chiltern Methodism, 1988, p 206) suggesting that some of its members were from outside the community. Articles in local newspapers reporting activities religious and cultural in this chapel often stated names and origin of participating members confirming some were local and some from nearby villages and towns.

To assess provision of cultural activities from each of the churches I looked to Parish magazines and local papers. Years where known important events took place were selected and others chosen randomly. The National School Log Book was also a useful source showing the type and progress of educational provision in the village and the logbook would also record the occurrence of a local event when the school would often close.

**Findings**

In 1851 the Religious Census reveals that the settlement of Prestwood had one Nonconformist chapel, built 1823, and its new Anglican Church had only been completed in 1849. The new Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood not yet officially decreed. This was to happen in April 1852. Neither church was filled to capacity on census day, but the Baptist Chapel had fared rather better. However, the evidence shows some of those attendants may have been migrant worshippers. In addition, the Baptist Chapel was near the centre of the main population, and it had been long established. The building of Holy Trinity, destined a new parish church was borne out of the Anglican Evangelical Revival,

> “Here the people have been hitherto, almost wholly deprived, of the means of grace, in consequence of their distance from their respective churches”  (Bucks Herald, 27 Oct 1849)

Once established this new parish church and its adjoining National School by 1890, were to have a profound effect on the community. But it was not without competition. By the mid 1860s, as well as offering education for the children of ‘the laboring poor’ the Anglican Church was also providing a range of cultural and sporting activities outside of the usual religious ceremonies. It is reported in the Bucks Free Press, 23 Sept 1863, that the Harvest Home Festival as established by Prestwood’s incumbent minister had set the style and tone for the event throughout the county. The Reverend Thomas Evetts

> “designated the parent of those celebrations in Bucks”

Other activities offered by the church, as reported by local newspapers, included Choir Concerts, Poetry Readings, Sunday and Day School outings and inter-church Cricket
matches. Evetts' grand eulogy in the local paper may have been by coincidence or by design. 1863 was his final year as Prestwood’s minister before promotion, but also in this year the foundation stone for a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel had been laid in the heart of the village. In contrast to the fine Tractarian style Anglican church, paid for by private benefactors (Evetts was one), the Methodist Chapel was a simple building, accommodation 130 seats, paid for, and built by its lay members. This chapel had a straw earth floor and no pews nor pulpit in its first two years of existence (250 years of Chiltern Methodism, 1988, p 112). By 1871, a Primitive Methodist Chapel had been built on the far western boundary of Prestwood Parish at Bryants Bottom and the Baptist Chapel rebuilt to accommodate 250 seats, almost on par with the Anglican Church which had 300 seats. By the mid 1870's all four denominations had thriving Sunday Schools and there followed in the next decade a proliferation of cultural events by all the churches. And they were not always exclusive to their own members as the National School Log Book reveals,

“A holiday given in the afternoon, there being a tea at the Baptist Chapel” (Prestwood School Log Book, 28 July 1890)

The continuation of such events throughout the period indicates that they were popular, the villagers responsive to them.

Prestwood in the mid 19th century was a community of tenant farmers, agricultural workers and those skilled craftsmen e.g. blacksmiths, wheelwrights, needed to support a rural community. By 1890 brick making, stone digging and chair making were more to the fore. It has already been noted that the Baptist Chapel’s adult members were fiercely independent confirming Gilbert’s (1976, p 53) findings, but that they were from families with farming connections contradicts his view. However, the evidence re socio-economic class from the Anglican and Wesleyan Methodist Baptist Registers (Tables 3 and 4) does confirm received views that Nonconformity did appeal more to the lower middle classes, or at least here the artisan class, and Anglicanism the gentry and rural poor. But in Prestwood the gentry, the landowners, were mostly absent and Anglicanism still retained the loyalty of a great many of the artisan class. Harris’ (1993, p153) comments that external religious observance may not be a good indicator of internal religious conviction is pertinent here but the figures shown do give some indication of religious affiliation. However, it was not unknown for individuals to switch allegiance. Benjamin Hildreth, noted village blacksmith and initial leading member of the Methodist chapel was one. His daughter, Ruth was the first baptism in Prestwood’s Methodist Chapel, 4 May 1864. Another child followed two years later. But in the period 1869-73 Benjamin’s subsequent children are to found in the Anglican Register, as was his first in 1853. His name re-appears on the Methodist Register in 1877. He was not the only prominent Methodist member to do this. Were personalities of individuals involved here? An example of the difficulty in measuring internal religious belief.
A high point for Anglican baptisms, not only for new families but those who had subsequent children baptised, was 1864 - 1868, a period when the Methodist Chapel was in its infancy. The high point for Wesleyan Methodist baptisms was 1874 - 1883, but by 1884 and thereafter the number of new families christening children for both denominations was declining. Falling birth rate was considered as a factor in line with Harris’ (1983, p 154) comments but population in Prestwood had shown a continual increase 1850-1890. 751 in 1851 and 958 by 1891 and figures for successive family baptisms had only shown a slight fall regarding Anglican baptisms and an increase for the Methodists. Membership of the local Methodist Society (Figure 1) did steadily increase during this period, but this could have been due to younger church members growing eligible to join. The overall picture is somewhat ambiguous but it is possible these figures are showing some indication that the number of new church members was decreasing and that advancing industrialisation and its associated secularisation were beginning to have an effect in Prestwood.

**Conclusion**

Although it may be that church membership was showing signs of decline by 1890, the role religion played in this community was profound. The new Ecclesiastical Parish with its centrepiece, a fine new parish church, established Prestwood as a village in its own right. The adjoining National School, the only day school in the village, provided the opportunity of education for the children of the community, though it was a difficult task for the church to keep the school full. But by 1890 they were winning this battle. The Anglican Church also provided cultural and sporting events and they were popular. New Dissent in the village responded to this and provided cultural activities of their own, not always exclusive to their own members. The Strict Baptists had a long established base of members expanded by groups of extended families from the farming community. The Methodists, smaller in comparison, drew its membership mostly from the artisan class. Though the Church of England was left to serve the village poor, it still held the loyalty of a cross-section of individuals across the socio-economic groups. And it maintained a dominant and steadfast position throughout the period. As in all localities some individuals did wish to exist in a community within a community, but all denominations contributed in their way to give this once group of scattered settlements a strong sense of identity.

I feel the results of this investigation fall most in line with Harris’ (1993 pp 150-179) observations that religion was a pervasive force in Victorian society, important to education, social welfare and cultural identity. Here religious bodies were mediators of social change not passive victims.
Postscript
By 1891, the Metropolitan Extension Railway was being constructed and Prestwood was to be within two miles of the railway station at Great Missenden, making London easily accessible. In 1908 The National School closed and the village school moved to a site in the village one and quarter miles north, thereby separating the school from the church: the new school building erected by the County Council. In the fifty years 1890-1940 the character of the village changed yet again, becoming a commuter hinterland for London workers. Many country occupations disappeared and the class structure of the village altered. But the four religious denominations survived, the churches still attracting worshippers. Sources are plentiful, therefore it would be interesting to extend my research into this following fifty year period and discover the role religion played in this community in the early 20th century.
### Table 1  Church and Chapel in Prestwood, Census of Religious Worship 1851

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Date building erected</th>
<th>No. of sittings</th>
<th>Attendance (General Congregation plus Sunday Scholars)</th>
<th>Return made by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Morn</td>
<td>Aft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict Baptist</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In 1851 Population of Prestwood was 751

### Table 2  Evidence of Directories: organised religion in Prestwood 1823 - 1890

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>1823</th>
<th>1849</th>
<th>1863</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1890</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strict Baptist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primitive Methodist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: X = entry found in directory
### Table 3  Baptisms for Holy Trinity Church, Prestwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1849-1853</th>
<th>1854-1858</th>
<th>1859-1863</th>
<th>1864-1868</th>
<th>1869-1873</th>
<th>1874-1878</th>
<th>1879-1883</th>
<th>1884-1888</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>2 (+2)</td>
<td>1 (+6)</td>
<td>2 (+4)</td>
<td>2 (+1)</td>
<td>1 (+3)</td>
<td>1 (+2)</td>
<td>1 (+1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>7 (+4)</td>
<td>4 (+13)</td>
<td>3 (+12)</td>
<td>1 (+13)</td>
<td>2 (+11)</td>
<td>4 (+7)</td>
<td>4 (+5)</td>
<td>(+11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>30 (+17)</td>
<td>18 (+23)</td>
<td>15 (+20)</td>
<td>19 (+32)</td>
<td>13 (+29)</td>
<td>17 (+37)</td>
<td>17 (+31)</td>
<td>13 (+35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>29 (+18)</td>
<td>30 (+49)</td>
<td>28 (+37)</td>
<td>38 (+61)</td>
<td>22 (+43)</td>
<td>29 (+39)</td>
<td>18 (+29)</td>
<td>8 (+20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (+1)</td>
<td>1 (+1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/K</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68 (+41)</td>
<td>53 (+91)</td>
<td>46 (+73)</td>
<td>68 (+107)</td>
<td>40 (+87)</td>
<td>56 (+86)</td>
<td>42 (+66)</td>
<td>26 (+66)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N/K = Baptism of illegitimate child

### Table 4  Baptisms for Methodist Chapel, Prestwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1849-1853</th>
<th>1854-1858</th>
<th>1859-1863</th>
<th>1864-1868</th>
<th>1869-1873</th>
<th>1874-1878</th>
<th>1879-1883</th>
<th>1884-1888</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>2 (+1)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 (+2)</td>
<td>7 (+9)</td>
<td>1 (+7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (+1)</td>
<td>6 (+2)</td>
<td>1 (+3)</td>
<td>1 (+1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (+2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 (+3)</td>
<td>5 (+1)</td>
<td>11 (+4)</td>
<td>8 (+12)</td>
<td>2 (+8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5 (+3)</td>
<td>5 (+1)</td>
<td>11 (+4)</td>
<td>8 (+12)</td>
<td>2 (+8)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N/K = Unable to identify occupation as individual not found Census Returns 1861-1891

Note: Tables 3 and 4, figures in brackets are baptisms of subsequent children to known families.

### Figure 1

**Prestwood Members of Methodist Society (High Wycombe Circuit)**

![Graph of Prestwood Members of Methodist Society](image-url)
Appendix A

The Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood 1850

Parish Map as shown in Desmond Keen's *Prestwood Historical Guide*
REFERENCES (APPENDIX 4 only)


Sources

*Bucks Baptist Association Minute Books 1866-1889*, County Record Office, Aylesbury, Ref: AR/12/73

*Bucks Baptist Magazine (Editions for years 1960-1969)*, Local Studies, Aylesbury Library

*Bucks Herald, 1849 on microfilm*. Local Studies, Aylesbury Library

*Bucks Free Press on microfilm, 1863, 1866, 1871, 1872, 1875, 1880, 1882, 1885, 1888, 1889*, Local Studies, High Wycombe Library

*C.E.B. 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 Prestwood on microfilm*, Local Studies, Aylesbury Library.
Holy Trinity, Prestwood, Baptism Registers 1849-1890 on microfilm, Local Studies, Aylesbury Library.

Kelly’s Directories for Buckinghamshire, 1869, 1877, 1883, 1889 and 1891, Local Studies, High Wycombe and Aylesbury Libraries.

Oral Evidence, Conversation with Miss. M. Beesley, July 2000


Prestwood National School Log Book 1873-1898, County Record Office, Aylesbury, Ref: E/LB/168a

Trinity Herald - Parish Magazine for Holy Trinity Church, Prestwood, November 1991 & Winter 1996. Local Studies, Aylesbury Library

Wesleyan Methodist Register of Baptisms, High Wycombe Circuit, 1864 -1890, County Record Office, Aylesbury, Ref: 200/10/1 -10

Wesleyan Methodist Quarterly Schedule Book, Years 1864-1885, High Wycombe Circuit, County Record Office, Aylesbury, Ref: NM/7/2 - 4

--------------------------------------------------------------------
APPENDIX 5: Photographs of GROOM Headstones, Baptist Cemetery, Kiln Road, Prestwood

- Solomon GROOM
- Ruth GROOM (wife of Solomon)

- Sarah Ann GROOM (infant daughter of Solomon & Ruth)
Rachel REDRUP (nee GROOM, sister of Solomon)

Henry GROOM (son of Solomon)

Charles REDRUP (husband of Rachel)

Herbert GROOM (son of Solomon)
Alfred GROOM (son of Solomon)

Edgar Alfred GROOM (son of Alfred and grandson of Solomon)
Frederick William GROOM (son of Herbert and grandson of Solomon)