

CHAPTER 11

Revs. Herwood Allen and John Pledger (1909 - 1916)

The minister who followed (Rev. Herwood Allen) served an even shorter time, his service being cut short by death from kidney disease amidst intense suffering on 21st February 1910. His period of ministry lasted only five months.

Mr. Allen was born in London in 1849, and was converted quite young, preaching his first sermon at the age of 15 years. He became a Primitive Methodist in 1867 and served various London chapels until becoming minister of Bethnal Green Church, East London, in 1901. This latter period proved a severe strain upon his health, for he lost much of his vivacity despite the commendable increase in membership of the church.

His breadth of learning was evident from his being a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical and Geological Societies, and lecturing in both subjects. It was written of him that 'his sympathies were broad, his disposition genial and brotherly, while he fought to the last for the great fundamental truths of the Gospel'.

Mr. Allen's wife had died before he moved to Great Chishill, but his daughter Maude who kept house for him left a lasting memorial, in that she began picking cowslips from the meadow and decorating the church with them. From her first display began the practice of always having flowers at Services.

Another missionary from Southern Africa (Rev. John Pledger) took the place vacated by Mr. Allen, the congregation having become rather unsettled by short ministries in quick succession. He was born quite locally, at Great Chesterford, in August 1870, and after training at Harley College, he served for four years under the China Inland Mission as a pioneer missionary

in Western China. He later worked with the Colonial Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society in Africa.

Mr. Pledger was ordained there on 18th February 1901, and the next day married a Miss F.M.Long. Unfortunately his wife suffered a prolonged illness which obliged them to return to England in 1907, to a pastorate at neighbouring Barkway. They had two daughters, by name Constance and Joan.

He moved to Great Chishill and Barley in 1910, where he was recognised as a hard worker, a very capable man interested in politics and village affairs.

One of the first questions which had to be settled related to affiliation to a County Union. Until now, Great Chishill had been part of the Saffron Walden District of the Essex Congregational Union, but the distance from this outer church to the centre of Essex Union activities made it difficult for the church to be adequately represented.

At a 'Church Business Meeting' held on 21st September 1910, the pastor and deacons were authorised to transfer affiliation to the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union. Prudently, this change was subject to continuation of the grant being secured.

In February 1914, the practice of individual Communion cups (rather than a common chalice) was adopted. It was still normal for the main Service to be distinct from the monthly Communion Service which might follow.

In June 1916, Mr. Pledger resigned in order to take a pastorate in Odiham, Hampshire. His wife's failing health and the greater facilities for education were the reasons he gave for transferring.

At a much later date (1934), he was elected to the chair of the Essex Congregational Union in honour of his 20-year service to the Union. In view of his earlier missionary service, he was for a period appointed interpreter to the Chinese Labour Corps.

In 1940, Mr. Pledger was caught in the blast of a high explosive bomb, and he never recovered from its disastrous effects. He died on 29th July 1943.



Interior of Great Chishill Congregational Church, pre-1935