

**The Churches and the Working Class in the Dings,
Bristol, c.1880-1910**

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Abstract

This study addresses the question of how far the working-class residents of the Dings area of Bristol were 'outside the churches' at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. It takes issue with some of the views held by historians on the pessimistic side of the secularisation debate.

Much of the study focuses on the work of the Shaftesbury Crusade, a mission hall sponsored and organised by middle class volunteers from the congregation of the Redland Park Congregational Church. It also looks at marriage and baptism records of churches in the Dings (in particular the Church of England Emmanuel and the Congregationalist Kingsland Road Chapel). Census records are also used to assess the extent of church connection through solemnising rites of passage.

The evidence is used to argue that religiosity and connections with religious institutions remained strong in the Dings up to 1910. The residents of the area used the churches to solemnise rites of passage but also maintained links through accessing sporting, leisure and social opportunities provided by the Shaftesbury in particular, and through enrolling children at Sunday school. There was a moral and religious motivation to these choices. Instead of seeing the Shaftesbury and the efforts of the Redland Park volunteers as attempts for social control by the middle class, the extent of involvement with it shows it was an accepted and important part of the community and the fabric of the lives of the local residents. The working class population of the Dings did not align themselves with the churches in a denominational sense but expressed religiosity through the undenominational means available to them such as the Shaftesbury and the Sunday schools in the area.

Personal Statement and Acknowledgements

Parts of this dissertation build on material from the End of Module Assessment for A825 and are referenced as such. No part of this dissertation has been submitted for any other qualification or publication.

I confirm that this dissertation is entirely my own work.

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Introduction

On 6th November 1909 the workers of the Shaftesbury Crusade organised a midnight service. There was a special guest: "Hopper" Chinnick, who has been one of the worst and most notorious characters in the City of Bristol and was converted, promised to come down and speak'.¹ Because he was so well known, the hall at the Shaftesbury was 'crowded with men and women of all descriptions' and although 'drink had obtained a tenacious hold on many of them', 'there were a few who definitely gave their hearts to God'.² Late in the first decade of the twentieth century, a religious institution in a poor, working-class area was regularly holding services. Clearly the presence of a local celebrity was a key factor on this occasion, but locals were attending services and some were changing their lives as a result. How representative of the area in this period is this episode, and what was the relationship of the people of the Dings with the churches?

The Dings area of St. Philip's in Bristol in the late nineteenth century was a densely populated working-class area with many slums. In the 1885 *Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes*, St. Philip's was described as the 'very worst and lowest district in Bristol'.³ Such conditions were 'productive of a great resort to the public house, and the public house led naturally to the police court'.⁴ These conditions, coupled with fears about the moral state of the working classes, led in Bristol to what Meller has termed 'the civilising mission to the poor'. She identifies 'a religious and cultural impetus towards encouraging people to undertake socio-religious work'.⁵

¹ BA (BA), 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*. Vol. IX no. 12

² BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*. Vol. IX no. 12

³ Cmd. 4402 PP. 1884-1885, *Royal Commission for Inquiring into Housing of Working Classes (England and Wales)*, (London: 19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1885), p. 223.

⁴ 'Shaftesbury Crusade', *Bristol Mercury*, (20th June 1900).

⁵ Helen Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914: Bristol*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 137.

The Dings, as part of the wider St Philips area, was served by the Ancient Parish church of St Philip and St Jacob. The Dings itself, however, was within the parish of Emmanuel, established in 1863. The purpose of this church was to serve the working class, and it took on the national issue of pew rents from the outset. A letter to the trustees of the new church from the Bristol Branch of the National Association for Promoting Freedom of Public Worship in the Church of England requested no rents: '[Emmanuel Church] offers a most favourable opportunity for making the experiment of free and unappropriated sittings... the class of people who would form the great body of the congregation are, in the first place, many of them migratory in their habits and so not likely to take pews at annual or quarterly rentals... and are precisely of that class who would most resent the offer of a "free seat" in an inferior place'.⁶ The Bishop and Trustees agreed.

In addition, the area included Kingsland Road and Anvil Street (just outside the Dings itself) Congregationalist Chapels and, from 1883 the Shaftesbury Crusade (initially a coffee house run by Rev. J. H. Bell and from 1893 a mission of Redland Park Congregationalist Church in the affluent Redland area of Bristol).⁷ In 1900 on Union Street a new mission church, connected to Emanuel, was built 'to serve the needs of the large and poor district'.⁸ To the south of the Feeder, which split St Philips and the Dings from St Philips Marsh, was the parish church of St Silas (see figure 1). There were further chapels and churches in the surrounding areas of Barton Hill, Bedminster, St Jude and St Pauls.

⁶ *The Western Daily Press*, 25th October 1862, p.2

⁷ *A History of the Shaftesbury Crusade*, (Bristol: Shaftesbury Crusade, 1943), p. 3.

⁸ *Bristol Mercury*, July 29 1899, p.1

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Figure 1: churches in the Dings. The Parish Church of St Silas in St Philips Marsh is to the South, on the other side of the Feeder canal (Source: *Bristol Historical Maps* (layer: 1880s Epoch 1), maps.bristol.gov.uk)

The pessimistic view of the secularisation debate holds declining church attendance and membership, and that of the working class in particular, as integral to the argument that industrialisation and the growth of towns saw the beginning of the process of secularisation. Wickham was certain that the working-class were 'outside the churches'⁹ and for Inglis 'the Church was an institution belonging to... some social groups, but not others'.¹⁰ There is debate over the timing of this process; McCleod uses the *Daily News* censuses to locate the beginning of the process in the late nineteenth century and to suggest that 'the poorest districts tended to have the lowest rates of attendance',¹¹ and Cox, using Lambeth as his focus, argued that the process began in the 1880s and that by 1902 'churchgoing... was declining'¹². However, a number of recent studies have taken issue with the pessimistic view, such as those by Williams,¹³ Sykes¹⁴ and Green.¹⁵ Sarah Williams notes 'both the variety and vibrancy of church life at the close of the Victorian era'¹⁶ and Callum Brown has stated that 'the working classes made up the majority of churchgoers... in every period from 1800 to the 1960s'.¹⁷ Williams and Brown have also raised alternative approaches to measuring religiosity than church attendance alone; Williams shows it is important to 'include popular culture as a setting for religious expression alongside the church'.¹⁸ Brown identified regional differences, so this

⁹ E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1957), p. 14.

¹⁰ K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, (London: Routledge, 1964), p. 60.

¹¹ Hugh McCleod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, (London SW11: Croom Helm, 1974).

¹² Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society : Lambeth, 1870-1930*, (New York ; Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 47.

¹³ S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, C.1880-1939*, (Oxford: Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1999)., S. C. Williams, 'The Language of Belief: An Alternative Agenda for the Study of Victorian Working-Class Religion', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 1 (1996).

¹⁴ Richard Sykes, 'Popular Religion in Decline: A Study from the Black Country', *J. Eccles. Hist.*, 56 (2005).

¹⁵ S. Green, 'Secularisation by Default? Urbanisation, Suburbanisation and the Strains of Voluntary Religious Organization in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Hispania Sacra*, 42 (1990).

¹⁶ Williams, p. 3.

¹⁷ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain : Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 156.

¹⁸ Williams, p. 7.

dissertation will provide an additional local context to those already extant. Bernard Deacon has identified the need for further research: 'historians have an important part to play... in testing this new revisionist narrative' at local level¹⁹ and local studies are challenging the established narrative and providing a more nuanced view.

In the Dings at the turn of the century there was a concern that its people were indeed outside the churches; 'not because of the character of the people, but because of their complete isolation from the parish church'.²⁰ This study will use the evidence of the Dings to assess how far this was the case and will argue that religiosity remained a tangible part of life in the Dings. Through maintaining links with the churches for rites of passage, engaging in a range of activities through religious institutions and ensuring their children received religious and moral education, the working-class inhabitants of this part of Bristol may not have been regular churchgoers but continued to keep religion as integral to their lives. In particular, much of this study will focus on the Shaftesbury Crusade and will show that, contrary to Meller's view that the Mission movement split apart between 1890 and 1910,²¹ the Shaftesbury was still very strong and influential by 1910. Meller also holds that by this time the 'civilising mission to the poor' had dropped its focus on religious conversion and moved towards a concern for leisure to improve life for the working-class; this study will show through the Shaftesbury, the middle-classes of Redland Park did both, providing leisure and social facilities whilst keeping the Christian message central. This study shows that the residents of the Dings who used the facilities on offer did so on their own terms, and accepted them as part of the community.

The key primary source that forms the basis of this study is the *Redland Park Recorder*, held at Bristol Archives. A monthly publication covering all the many aspects of the work overseen by the middle-class volunteers at Redland Park Congregational Church, it

¹⁹ Bernard Deacon, 'Religion and Community: Frameworks and Issues', *Family & Community History*, 5 (2002), 41.

²⁰ *Bristol Mercury*, July 29 1899, p.1

²¹ Meller, p. 194.

contains a mixture of annual reports and articles. The accounts are honest and detailed, noting failures as well as successes.²² In giving memberships, club lists and schedules and accounts it is an invaluable source on the Shaftesbury and Kingsland Road Chapel. In addition, Emmanuel Church magazine, Sunday School Teachers' Minute Books for New Street Mission and Russell Town Congregational Church and the Log Book of St Philip's Board School and accounts of St Philips and Dings residents from the Bristol People's Oral History Project are utilised.

Marriage and Baptism Registers for Emmanuel Church and Kingsland Road Chapel were used to assess rites of passage. Additionally, returns for the 1911 census enabled a partial reconstitution of streets in the Dings to add quantitative data as well as giving an insight into real families.

²² Such as in January 1907 where it was noted that 'there is much to discourage the worker' in relation to numbers at Bible Class (which did recover in later months), BA, 40817/P/24, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. VII no. 1, January 1907

2: Church attendance, rites of passage and worship

This chapter will show that the people of the Dings maintained connections with the churches. It will show that, as suggested by Brown¹ and Williams,² the adult working-class population of the Dings maintained church connections between 1880 and 1910 both through the solemnisation of the rites of passage and through attendance at special services and extra-liturgical but still overtly religious activities, particularly connected to the Shaftesbury Crusade. As late as 1916 Emmanuel Church was opening for churchings before all services.³ The building of the new mission hall on Union Road was an acknowledgement of the achievements of the Congregationalists in the Dings and a wish on the part of the parish church to join in this success: 'they knew, of course, the excellent work carried on at the Shaftesbury, but they felt that as the Church of England, the National Church, they ought to have some share of the work'.⁴

The Religious Census

According to the *Bristol Mercury* the population of the Dings was about 4000 in 1899.⁵ The census of 1901 recorded the population of the ecclesiastical parish of Emmanuel as 4,635.⁶ The population of the enumeration district of St Philip and St Jacob was 49404 in 1901,⁷ a 1.4% drop from 50108 in 1881.⁸ If we assume the same difference for the Dings, the population in 1881 would have been around 4681. On 30th October 1881 the

¹ Brown, p. 92.

² See for example S. C. Williams, 'Urban Popular Religion and the Rites of Passage', in *European Religion in the Age of the Great Cities, 1830-1930*, ed. by Hugh McLeod (London ; New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 215-234. and Williams, pp. 86-104.

³ Bristol Archives, P.EmStp/PM/1/3, Emmanuel Parish Magazine, 1916

⁴ *Bristol Mercury*, July 29 1899, p. 1

⁵ *Bristol Mercury*, July 29 1899, p. 1

⁶ Cmd. 616 PP. 1901-1902 (63 Vict. c. 4.) *Census of England and Wales. 1901. Preliminary report and tables of the population and houses enumerated in England and Wales, and in the islands in the British seas, on 1st April 1901*, p.102

⁷ Cmd. 6422 PP. 1890-1891, *Census of England and Wales. 1891. Preliminary report, and tables of the population and houses enumerated in England and Wales, and in the islands in the British Seas, on 6th April 1891*, p.96

⁸ Cmd. 6422 PP. 1890-1891, *Census of England and Wales. 1891. Preliminary report, and tables of the population and houses enumerated in England and Wales, and in the islands in the British Seas, on 6th April 1891*, p.96

Western Daily Press conducted a religious census. Emmanuel was shown as having a total congregation of 500 (250 at each service) and Kingsland Road Chapel had a total congregation of 403 (157 in the morning and 246 in the evening).⁹ The total number of people attending the Dings churches was therefore 903. If the adjustment for 'twicers' as per Cox is applied¹⁰, the total number of individuals would be 790 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Attendance at Dings Churches and percentage of Dings population

Church	Attendance 30/10/1881 ¹¹			% of Dings population
	Morning attendance	Evening attendance	Total (adjusted)	
Emmanuel (CE)	250	250	500- (250x0.24)= 440	9.39%
Kingsland Road (Cong)	157	246	403- (157x0.34)= 350	7.47%
Total:	407	496	790	16.87%

The overall percentage is very similar to Cox's findings for Lambeth in 1902-3 (16.7%). Whereas he found non-conformist attendance higher than Church of England, however, in the Dings Emmanuel was attracting more people. The census in *The Western Daily Press* notes that there were 'counter attractions in the neighbourhood, and the congregations were not so large as usual'. It also acknowledges that there was a workmen's Bible class in the afternoon¹² for which no figures were taken. Nonetheless, attendance figures as a percentage of the Dings population indicate that not many working-class individuals were attending services. McCleod shows that in 1902-3, Greater London church attendance was lower for districts lower on the Social Index; as a

⁹ *The Western Daily Press*, 2nd November 1881, p.1

¹⁰ Cox, p. 281. Cox, based on the *Daily News* count of twicers in 69 churches, produced an average percentage for each denomination that should be subtracted from the morning figure to give an overall total taking twicers into account; 24 % for Church of England and 34 % for the Congregationalists

¹¹ Figures from *The Western Daily Press*, 2nd November 1881, p.1

¹² *The Western Daily Press*, 2nd November 1881, p.1

point of comparison, for Church of England attendance, the Dings figure is similar to Wood Green and Walthamstow (at thirty-five and forty-two out of fifty-one on the Social Index respectively).¹³ Whilst this data may appear confirm pessimistic views of working-class church affiliation, however, the picture changes when wider connections through marriage and baptism are taken into account.

*Marriage and baptism: households around Emmanuel and Kingsland Road
Congregationalist Chapel*

The data in this section comes from a partial reconstitution (from the 1911 census and parish records) of the area of the Dings around Emmanuel and Kingsland Road Chapel. The area covered comprises: Princess Street, Sussex Street, Kingsland Road (from the north east end of Emmanuel to Princess Street and Princess Street to Sussex Street), Chapel Street and Henry Street (see figure 2). Sydney Alley and Collins Court has also been included as the site of the original Dings Boys' Club.¹⁴ In total, returns for 112 households were collated. Of these, ninety-seven were used for the dataset (only households with couples and families were used; fifteen households comprised single individuals¹⁵ or combinations of brothers or sisters¹⁶). It is clear from this data that, as Williams noted in her work on Southwark, 'participation in the religious rites of passage... was a prominent feature of life'.¹⁷

¹³ McLeod, p. 301.

¹⁴ *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911*, RG14;15034;15-19 (Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1911) from www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed 12/06/2019

¹⁵ For example, Esther Tidman of 15 Kingsland Road who was listed as 57 and single, *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911*, RG14;15033;76 (Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1911) from www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed 12/06/2019

¹⁶ Such as the Farrow brothers of 3 Collins Court, *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911*, RG14;15034;16 (Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1911) from www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed 12/06/2019

¹⁷ Williams, p. 87.

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Figure 2: census sample area. The highlighted streets are those include in the sample (Sydey Alley and Collins court is also included)

The sample highlights the working-class nature of the Dings. Of the heads of household, 76% were engaged in unskilled labour and the remainder semi-skilled or skilled labour.¹⁸ According to the census returns, 100% of the head couples in each of the ninety-seven households were married. Of these, sixty-five couples (67%) had evidence of church marriages in the Parish Records.¹⁹ However, when households with at least one child baptised in a church are added, the number of households with a church connection goes up to 85 (87%). It is likely that more couples were married in a religious setting; William and Annie Ousely have no record in the Parish Records because they were married at the Kingsland Road Chapel on Christmas Day 1910.²⁰ Clearly not all of the couples would have had a religious wedding (a woman born in St Philips in 1896 and interviewed as part of the Bristol People's Oral History Project in 1979 recalled 'putting in the banns, [and] paying people to 'stand for us' at the registry office'²¹) but many did, suggesting

¹⁸ Job classifications for this chapter were made using *Standard Occupational Classification 2000* (Office for National Statistics, London: The Stationary Office, 2000), where unskilled is Level 1 and skilled/ semi-skilled is Level 2

¹⁹ *Bristol, England, Select Church of England Parish Registers 1720-1933*, www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed 14/06/2019

²⁰ BA, 41236/2/1, Kingsland Chapel Marriage Register, 25/12/1910

²¹ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, transcript of interview R001, 1979

that church still played an important role and that low attendance at Sunday services does not portray the full of extent of working-class church connection.

Table 2

*Percentage of those in the census sample married with evidence from Parish Records or Marriage Registers showing a religious wedding**

Classification**	Sample from census and parish records	
	Number with church record	% with church record
Unskilled (66 married)	38	58%
Semi-skilled/skilled (18 married)	15	83%

* all included were listed as married but only those where parish or chapel records could be located are included as having a church connection. It is likely that a number of those without records were married in a nonconformist institution; for example, William and Annie Ousely of 51 Kingsland Road had no record online but were located in the Kingsland Road Chapel marriage Register

** I have used the ONS's *Standard Occupational Classification 2000* (Office for National Statistics, London: The Stationary Office, 2000) for this classification, where unskilled is Level 1 and skilled/ semi-skilled is Level 2

Table 3

*Percentage of households with a church connection through either marriage and/ or baptism**

Classification	Sample from census and parish records	
	Households with church connection	% with church connection
Unskilled	55	83%
Semi-skilled/skilled	17	94%

Marriage locations, as expected, show strong local links. The majority of ceremonies took place in the most local churches. St Philip and Jacob, although outside the Dings, was the Ancient Parish church and perhaps seen as the most prestigious; it was also the most popular for baptisms from the sample. The weddings that took place outside of Bristol were of families that had moved into the area from outside. For example, George Scantlebury of Sydney Alley was born and married in Cornwall, at St Germans. More couples were married and children baptised at Kingsland Chapel than the sample shows; only records from 1899 survive. The *Redland Park Recorder* reports on the baptism there

of Marian Malinda Bennett, daughter of Charles and Rosina of Henry Street in February 1904 and there would no doubt have been more throughout the period.²²

Table 4

Location of marriage and distance from the centre of sample area

Marriages at each church/chapel from sample			
Location of marriage	Distance from sample area	Number of marriages	% of sample
St Philip and St Jacob	<1 mile	15	23%
Emmanuel	<1 mile	11	17%
Kingsland Rd. Cong.*	<1 mile	1	2%
St Silas	<1 mile	2	3%
St Luke (Barton Hill)	<1 mile	2	3%
St Luke (Bedminster)	<1 mile	2	3%
St Jude	<1 mile	3	5%
St Matthias	<2 miles	6	9%
St Clement	<2 miles	3	5%
St John	<2 miles	3	5%
St James	<2 miles	2	3%
Christ Church	<2 miles	2	3%
St Agnes	<2 miles	1	2%
St Michael and All Angels	<2 miles	1	2%
Holy Trinity	<3 miles	4	6%
St Matthew Moorfields	<3 miles	1	2%
St Michael the Archangel	>5 miles	1	2%
Outside Bristol	>10 miles	5	8%

* There will likely be more marriages from this sample at Kingsland Road Chapel, but only records from 1899 survive

Of the local sample, seventy-seven households had at least one child registered at the address in the census. Of these, sixty-six households (85.7%) had evidence of at least one church baptism. It is clear that a church baptism was seen as important. Sarah Williams notes that, in Southwark, there is clear evidence of a link between the church used for a ceremony and belief in luck; that certain churches conveyed good fortune and, for this reason and others, including identification with the 'representative religious figure' of specific institutions created a sense of belonging to a particular church or chapel.²³ The evidence from the sample, however, suggests that in the Dings such connections to a particular establishment were less fixed.

²² BA, 40817/P/24, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. V no. 2

²³ Williams, pp. 96-98.

Only 7.5% (five families) of those with at least one baptised child and evidence of a church marriage used the same church for all ceremonies. The Jouxsons on 13 Kingsland Road were married in St Philip and St Jacob²⁴ and had their children baptised there. This was the case for the Henley, Berry and Older families, all of Kingsland Road. Thomas Garton, a dock labourer, married Emily at Emmanuel on 21st December 1902²⁵ and had his four children baptised there. Of all families with more than one baptised child, 63.6% used the same church in each case. This could extend to 'double' baptisms (as will be further seen from the Emmanuel registers): William and Sydney Roper (sons of George Roper, a retired railwayman) were baptised together at Emmanuel on 13th December 1904.²⁶ St Philip and St Jacob was the most popular with Emmanuel the next most frequently used church.

Some families seemed to favour a particular church but were not exclusively tied to it. For example, William Plumley, a bricklayer of 24 Henry Street, had seven children baptised; six at Emmanuel and one (Albert, baptised in March 1894²⁷) at Holy Trinity. John Green, a furniture salesman had eight children. The eldest two were baptised at St Philip and St Jacob, but from 1901 the Green children were baptised at St Nicholas of Tolentino, a Roman Catholic Church.²⁸ A conversion of this sort suggests a genuine religious consciousness.

²⁴ Wedding of William Jouxson and Sarah Ann Duffet, *Bristol, England, Select Church of England Parish Registers, 1720-1933*, https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=9842&h=1348731&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2352, accessed 23/7/2019

²⁵ Wedding of Thomas Garton and Emily Ada Clements, *Bristol, England, Select Church of England Parish Registers, 1720-1933*, https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=9842&h=2150055&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2352, accessed 23/07/2019

²⁶ Baptism of William Cecil Roper, *Bristol, England, Select Church of England Parish Registers, 1720-1933* https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=9842&h=1117478&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2352, accessed 18/07/2019

²⁷ Baptism of Albert Plumley, *Bristol, England, Select Church of England Parish Registers, 1720-1933*, https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=9842&h=267806&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2352, accessed 21/07/2019

²⁸ For example, Baptism of Sarah Green, *England, select Births and Christenings 1538-1975*, <https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi->

For some families, the importance of getting their child baptised was not linked to any sense of 'belonging' to a particular church. The Palmer children of 22 Princess Street were all baptised in a different church- St Philip and Jacob, St Silas, Emmanuel and St Matthias. Several families made use of St Philip and St Jacob and Emmanuel, such as The Hussey family of 34 Kingsland Road, the Taylors of 16 Princess Street and the Coles of Princess Street. St Silas was another popular church that was used with St Philip and St Jacob or Emmanuel, such as by the children of William Price, a labourer living in Princess Street and the Goodyers of Henry Street. It is clear that there was no compulsion to use a specific church amongst these families, and in this the Dings evidence differs from Williams' findings for Southwark. As with marriages, St Philip and St Jacob was the most popular location (see Table 5). In total, 37% of families with more than one baptised child used more than one church, which suggests a lack of any real sense of 'belonging' to a church in the sense of being a member of that church community. Solemnising the birth of a child through baptism seems to have been held as an important rite of passage but there were a significant number of families for whom the church used was not the important factor.

bin/sse.dll?dbid=9841&h=91501090&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2352, accessed 12/07/2019

Table 5

Location of baptism and distance from the centre of sample area

Baptisms at each church from sample			
Location of baptism	Distance from sample area	Number of baptisms	% of sample
St Philip and St Jacob	<1	83	55%
Emmanuel	<1	30	20%
St Silas	<1	18	12%
St Luke (Barton Hill)	<1	4	3%
St Matthias	<2	3	2%
St Nicholas of Tolentino (RC)	<2	3	2%
Holy Trinity	<3	2	1%
St Simon	<2	2	1%
St Peter (Clifton)	<5	1	1%
St Thomas	<2	1	1%
St Mary (Fishponds)	<4	1	1%
St Clement	<2	1	1%
St Stephen	<2	1	1%
Holy Nativity (Knowle)	<2	1	1%

Marriage and baptism: Church and chapel registers

(a) Emmanuel Baptisms

Several studies have shown that baptism was a well-observed ritual into the early nineteenth century. Bartlett notes a rise in baptisms against a fall in reported births to a peak in 1899²⁹ and Callum Brown shows an increase in Church of England Baptisms to live births up to the 1920s.³⁰ The baptismal records for Emmanuel between 1880 and 1910 follow a broadly increasing pattern, albeit with a drop in the 1890s (see figure 3), with 109 baptisms in 1910 compared to thirty-six in 1880.³¹

²⁹ A. B. Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey 1880-1939', (Birmingham University Ph. D Thesis, 1987), p. 183.

³⁰ Brown, p. 168.

³¹ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/b-d, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1875-1920

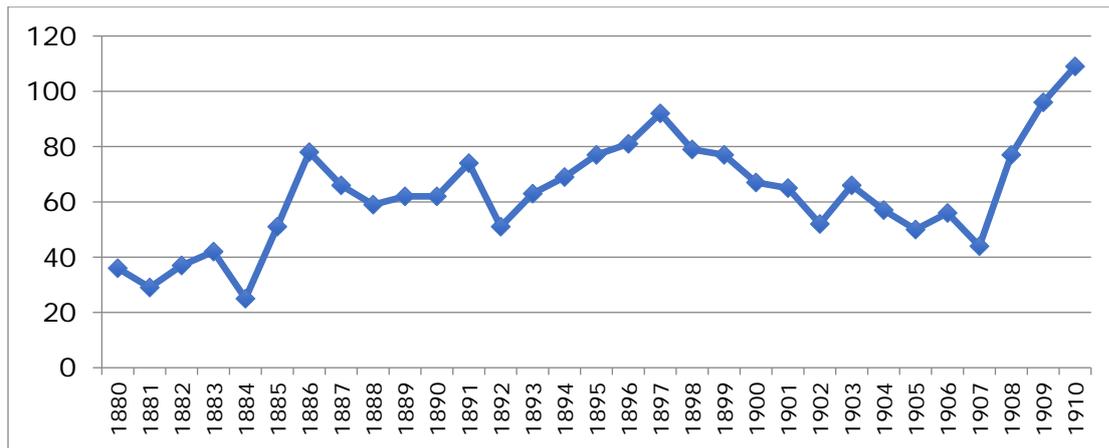


Figure 3: Baptisms by year, Emmanuel Church

Bartlett notes that, by the early 1900s, the average age of children being baptised had dropped significantly: 'the pattern of a month, perhaps two, between birth and baptism was overwhelming'.³² Although the majority of children baptised there were between a few months and two years old, the Emmanuel records show a more mixed pattern. As late as 1910 there were several instances of multiple family baptisms, where several children in a family were baptised together. Some were for twins, such as Lilian and William Ferris who were indeed a few months old, but the children of Henry Lloyd, a labourer (Elsie, Henry and Florence) were between three and less than a year at the time of baptism, and Clifford and Jessie Webb were three years apart in age,³³ so some parents clearly waited to baptise children together. Occasionally families would baptise children at the same time as their neighbours, such as the Bull (three children), Headford (two children) and Hillier (one child) families from 5, 4 and 2 Sydney Alley respectively, who baptised their children in June 1896. This suggests a degree of community, of the celebration of a key rite of passage, with importance attached to the ceremony; a shared baptism could be followed with a shared celebration. On the same day, six Lock children were baptised together³⁴. In November 1882 Elizabeth Davis and

³² Bartlett, p. 184.

³³ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/d, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1909-1920

³⁴ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/b, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1875-1897

Mary Taylor, next-door neighbours, were baptised on the same day.³⁵ In 1891, Rosina, Charlotte and Sarah Lavington were baptised together and ranged between eight years and four months.³⁶ Most of the baptised children by 1910 were between less than two years, but the multiple baptisms show this was not always the pattern. In 1894, Florence Hoskin was baptised at the age of fifteen.³⁷

Table 6 compares the occupational breakdown of fathers for three sample years, 1880, 1891 and 1910. It is clear that, unlike St Philip and St Jacob and, to a lesser extent, Kingsland Chapel, Emmanuel served an overwhelmingly working-class congregation. In the years sampled, only two fathers had non-manual jobs; an insurance agent and a clerk, both from the 1891 sample.³⁸ The marriage records for Emmanuel follow the same pattern, and show that it served and was used by the Dings community; people did not travel from outside the immediate area.

Table 6

Occupation of father from Emmanuel Baptism registers

Year	Total baptisms	% occupation of father			
		Unskilled	Skilled/semi skilled	Clerical	Not given
1880	36	54%	37%		9%
1891	51	66%	26%	3%	5%
1910	109	82%	21%		6%

³⁵ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/b, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1875-1897

³⁶ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/b, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1875-1897

³⁷ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/b, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1875-1897

³⁸ BA, P.EmSt P/R/1/c, Emmanuel Baptism Registers 1897-1907

(b) Emmanuel and Kingsland Chapel marriages

Emmanuel marriage records further underline the working-class and local nature of those using it to solemnise rites of passage. Of the eighty-eight total marriages (from the years 1880, 1890, 1900 and 1910), eighty-seven of the brides and eighty-four of the grooms were from the Dings or St Philips. In 1880 one of the grooms was a gardener from Salisbury and another was a commercial traveller from Feltham;³⁹ in 1890 John Henry Jones a 'clerk in holy orders' from Teignmouth married a local girl.⁴⁰ The only non-local bride was from Kent, marrying a local railway guard in January 1890.

The occupations of the grooms and fathers of the brides and grooms are broken down in Table 7. This table shows similar results to the data from the Emmanuel baptism registers, with an overwhelmingly working-class, and predominately unskilled, congregation. As will be seen, St Philip and Jacob attracted a wider social base and was clearly seen as the more prestigious or 'respectable' church. However, Emmanuel was clearly successful in serving the Dings community, at least in terms of the rituals of baptism and marriage.

³⁹ BA, P.EmSt P/R/2/a, Emmanuel Marriage Register 1865-1884

⁴⁰ BA, P.EmSt P/R/2/b, Emmanuel Marriage Register 1884-1910

Table 7

Occupation of groom and fathers of groom and bride from Emmanuel Baptism registers

Year	Total marriages		Occupation from marriage register				% manual
			Unskilled	Skilled/semi-skilled	Clerical	Not given	
1880	24	Groom	12	10		2	91.7%
		Groom's father	12	12			100%
		Bride's father	13	9	1	1	91.7%
1890	30	Groom	21	7	2		93.3%
		Groom's father	22	7	1		96.7%
		Bride's father	22	5	2	1	90%
1900	23	Groom	15	6	2		91.3%
		Groom's father	17	6			100%
		Bride's father	16	7			100%
1910	15	Groom	7	8			100%
		Groom's father	11	4			100%
		Bride's father	7	8			100%

Kingsland Chapel marriage records from 1899 show a more varied social base for those marrying in the Congregationalist Church.⁴¹ It also hosted far fewer marriages than the local parish churches; forty-two in total between 1899 and 1913, with an average of four (and none at all in 1903). It is clear that the majority still saw the Church of England as the appropriate establishment for sanctifying marriage.

⁴¹ BA, 41236/2/1, Kingsland Chapel Marriage Register 1899-1913

Table 8

Distance of Groom and Bride addresses in marriage register from Kingsland Chapel

	Address on register	
	Groom (%)	Bride (%)
The Dings	31%	35.7%
<1 mile	28.6%	38.1%
<2 miles	23.8%	21.4%
<3 miles	-	4.8%
>3 miles	2.4%	-
Outside Bristol	9.5%	-

Table 8 shows the area from which the brides and grooms lived prior to the marriage.

Although the majority lived within a mile, as a percentage less were from the Dings area.

Four grooms were from outside Bristol: a butler from Monmouth, a farmer from

Dunstable, and two men from Cardiff, a signwriter and a hairdresser. The latter married

a girl from Kingsland Road, possibly a relationship that grew from the annual

Shaftesbury trip to Penarth. There was also a more varied social mix among the families

using Kingsland Chapel, as shown in Table 9. There is a similarity here with the findings

of McLeod, who showed that a greater percentage of manual workers married in Church of England churches than in Nonconformist chapels.⁴²

Table 9

Occupation of groom and fathers of groom and bride from Emmanuel Baptism registers

	Occupation from marriage register (%)			
	Unskilled	Skilled/ semi skilled	Clerical/ upper*	% manual
Groom	33.3	57.1	9.6	90.4%
Groom's father	48.6	40.5	10.9	89.1%
Bride's father	40	40	20	80%

* the occupation of the bride's father on 17/03/1906 was given as 'gentleman'. The bride's address was Cotham and she was marrying a farmer from Dunstable

⁴² McLeod, p. 293.

The percentage of unskilled grooms and fathers of the bride and groom was significantly higher for those married at Emmanuel than those at Kingsland Chapel. On average, 58% of grooms had unskilled occupations and 67.5% of groom's fathers and 60.7% of bride's father worked in unskilled labour. Kingsland Chapel attracted more of the 'respectable' working-class and middle classes than Emmanuel.

Services and bible classes at the Shaftesbury Crusade

If the working-class population of the Dings preferred to marry and get their children baptised in the Church of England churches, this did not preclude them from engaging in religious activity at the Shaftesbury Crusade. The midnight lantern services, aimed at attracting the drinking population in an effort to turn them to temperance, could be very well attended: 'rather more than persons... were assembled in the hall, at the unwonted hour of 11.30 pm, for a religious service' which ended at 01.00 am.⁴³ Not all the attendants at this regular event were fully involved in the worship ('silly drunk some of them, far gone in drink others'⁴⁴) but there was clearly a degree of engagement, with participants joining in with the singing of 'popular hymns'; over 200 attended the service in December 1904.⁴⁵ There were other services at the Crusade. In 1901 the report in February noted good attendance at the 8 o'clock Sunday Service for the first four Sundays of the year.⁴⁶ Winifred Etle, born in 1899, remembered Sundays at the Shaftesbury Crusade in her childhood.⁴⁷ In 1908, at a visit by 'Rambler' of the *Bristol Evening News*, the following numbers were recorded at the various services:⁴⁸ 150 under six in the gym; 400 older children in the large hall; sixty young men; 100 Boys' Brigade; fifty older girls. Crusade workers were busy canvassing the neighbourhood for the

⁴³ BA, 40817/P/25, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. V no. 1

⁴⁴ BA, 40817/P/26, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. VIII no. 1

⁴⁵ BA, 40817/P/25, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. IV no. 12

⁴⁶ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*. Vol. I no. 2

⁴⁷ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, transcript of interview R002, 1979

⁴⁸ BA, 40817/P/24, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. VIII no. 12

peoples' evening service. A census in 1910 recorded 1175 at the Sunday evening services (including the Peoples' Service), with 550 present in the afternoon.⁴⁹

Williams has identified undenominationalism as central to popular religion in Southwark. This was undoubtedly a key part of the appeal of the Shaftesbury. Worship tended to be of a 'bright and brief character'.⁵⁰ An aim of the Shaftesbury was to 'teach religious truth upon Evangelical and Protestant lines' and, though run by the Congregationalists, was not denominational in approach.⁵¹ People could thus engage with the worship without being bound to a particular church and in a way that suited them. The churches were important for rites of passage but the Shaftesbury, as will be further seen in chapter 2, allowed religion to be expressed 'outside of the confines of official denominations'.⁵²

Bible classes were another way that residents of the Dings engaged with religion. In 1901 there was a membership of 224 for the Men's Bible Class. This increased to 281 for 1903. Actual attendance was less than the membership but for the first ten weeks of 1905 ('a record year...for spiritual awakening'⁵³), weekly attendance figures were 154,155,165,167,176,175,176,185,175 and 201.⁵⁴ On the day of the visit of 'Rambler', there were 150 men, 100 women and 40 young men at Bible class.⁵⁵ In February 1908 there had been 340 at the annual bible class meeting, an increase from 300 in 1904. That Crusade workers had to canvas the residents of the Dings to attend services might suggest reluctance. However, attachment to the churches through rites of passage, attendance at certain services and membership of overtly religious activities such as Bible class (as opposed to some of the clubs that were predicated more on sport and leisure) is evidence that Christian belief was more of a feature of life in the Dings as late

⁴⁹ BA, 40817/P/27, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. X no. 1

⁵⁰ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*. Vol. II no. 4

⁵¹ *Western Daily Press*, (12th March 1910)

⁵² David Hempton, 'Religious Life in Industrial Britain, 1830-1914', in *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, ed. by Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 306-321 (p. 310).

⁵³ BA, 40817/P/26, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. VII no. 1

⁵⁴ BA, 40817/P/26, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. V no. 4

⁵⁵ BA, 40817/P/26, Redland Park Recorder. Vol. VIII no. 12

as 1910 than pessimistic views might suggest, and that attendance at services alone is not the only measure of this attachment.

3: 'By combined social and spiritual agencies': working-class religious connection through sport, clubs and leisure

If the use of the churches for solemnising rites of passage and attendance at services and Bible Classes at the Shaftesbury indicate a healthy working-class connection with the churches in the Dings, the range of clubs, activities, social events and the engagement with these further strengthen this impression. The Dings was well served by its churches for such opportunities. The PSA (Pleasant Sunday Afternoon society) at Kingsland Road Chapel was popular, attracting 250 in 1901¹ and by 1916 Emmanuel was still offering a full weekly programme including Band of Hope, clubs for girls, boys and men, mother's meetings, band and men's and women's bible classes² but this chapter will focus on the Shaftesbury Crusade which was particularly successful at attracting working-class participants in a wide range of activities. Even those that initially appear secular in nature were always underpinned by the Christian message. Whilst the inspiration for these clubs and activities may have been part of the 'civilising mission' of the middle class, strategies for social control, the population of the Dings willingly embraced them as part of the fabric of their lives. There was a genuine sense of community around these institutions and, rather than seeing themselves as being controlled by outsiders the population experienced a sense of belonging. This chapter will explore the range of activities on offer, the depth of association with them, the impetus behind them and the extent to which the residents of the Dings saw them as theirs, as opposed to something imposed on them by wealthy outsiders.

The Origins of the Shaftesbury Crusade

The Shaftesbury Crusade, a mission of the Redland Park Congregational Church, played a central role in the religious life of the Dings. It initially opened 1883 as the St. Philip's Coffee House Company started by J.H. Bell (from the nearby Cumberland Street Mission) 'to provide a counter-attraction to the public houses'³ and initially comprised a café, hall

¹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol I. no. 2

² BA, P.EmStp/PM/1/3, *Emmanuel Parish Magazine*, 1916

³ A History of the Shaftesbury Crusade, p. 3.

and two rooms. In 1892 it was taken on by the Reverend Urijah Thomas as mission of his Redland Park Congregationalist Church, and became the Shaftesbury Mission in 1893. Temperance remained a central theme of the new mission and it continued to maintain Bell's original aim of 'furthering... God's kingdom in the Dings'.⁴ With investment from wealthy Bristolians including the Wills family, and clearly as part of the wider 'civilising mission to the poor' that had taken on great momentum in Bristol amongst the middle class,⁵ the building was extended to become an imposing and well-equipped focal point of the Dings landscape. By 1900, it had been developed to incorporate a gymnasium, 'two large club rooms (for youths)... and an improved skittle alley'.⁶ The original building was intended to be used 'not only for Sunday services, but for any good purpose for which it was required'⁷ and these improvements further widened the scope for additional activities.

The Shaftesbury enjoyed a period of growth and success, particularly between 1890 and 1910. In this way it is similar to the situation in Bermondsey in the same period, where A.B. Bartlett notes '[if] the mainstream denominations were in some difficulties by 1880, in comparison the missions... were climbing a pinnacle of success'.⁸ In the Bristol context, the work of the Shaftesbury is an example of 'the complexity and variety of methods used to get the working-class to partake in some form of religious worship'.⁹ However, in its efforts to bring the people of the Dings to God it also took on a wider role than merely providing services. The memorandum of association of the Shaftesbury Crusade states its aims:

To hold, conduct and promote services, public meetings, clubs, classes, education, social gatherings, recreation and entertainments... and the visitation of the sick and poor, and to teach religious truth upon

⁴ R.W. Thompson, *The History of the Shaftesbury Crusade 1885-1935*, (Bristol: Shaftesbury Crusade, 1935), p. 4.

⁵ Meller, p. 137.

⁶ *Bristol Mercury*, (20th June 1900)

⁷ *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, (15th September 1881)

⁸ Bartlett, p. 92.

⁹ Meller, pp. 197-198.

Evangelical and Protestant lines, and generally to promote the welfare of the people and the relief of distress, by combined social and spiritual agencies.¹⁰

Meller states that the 'civilising mission' failed to achieve the 'conversion of the urban masses' and as a result 'leisure facilities and concern for the environment as 'caring for the whole man' had become the moral basis of 'social citizenship'',¹¹ implying an end to making religiosity the central aspect of such work. Whilst the Shaftesbury certainly did focus on endowing 'every member with a "healthy mind in a healthy body"',¹² the Christian message underpinned all its work and activities and the teaching of 'religious truth' remained central.

Clubs, recreation and entertainments at the Shaftesbury

The clubs at the Shaftesbury took on a variety of forms. Sport, and a commitment to muscular Christianity was a significant part of this and has a lasting legacy; Dings Crusaders RFC's new ground is named Shaftesbury Park in recognition of the club's heritage and it remained a temperance club until the 1970s. Additionally, there were clubs for boys (under six), girls, older children (over six), older girls and young men. There was Band of Hope, Boys Brigade, women's meetings, Bible Classes for all ages, including men and women, singing groups, bands and a full range of social activities in direct competition with the local public houses. In 1910, there were 37 different departments operating within the overall structure of the Shaftesbury Crusade.¹³

(i) Sport clubs and physical activity

From the very beginning sport was central to the ethos of the Shaftesbury.¹⁴

¹⁰ As noted in the *Western Daily Press*, (12th March 1910)

¹¹ Meller, pp. 194-195.

¹² BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol I. no. 4

¹³ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 1

¹⁴ Christian Denley, 'The moral, spiritual and physical uplifting of the people': The Dings Club and Muscular Christianity at the Shaftesbury Crusade, c.1890-1910', A825 EMA Part 2 Submission, January 2019

There is a direct link to the nineteenth century muscular Christianity movement. H. D. Rawnsley (who later founded the National Trust) had led a mission of Clifton College to the St Barnabas area of Bristol¹⁵ which inspired H. H. Gore, an old Cliftonian, to start the Dings Club for Boys. Initially in a building on Sydney Alley in the Dings, the club moved to the Shaftesbury in 1896 and became a core part of the work of the Shaftesbury mission.¹⁶ Differing from the more usual approach of muscular Christianity in using association football as the accepted code,¹⁷ the Dings Club used Rugby Football. In contrast to Callum Brown's assertion that muscular Christianity tended to focus more on the 'muscular' than the Christian¹⁸ there was always a clear emphasis on the Christian message at the club, from temperance (as evidenced by a match report following a narrow victory, reflecting that 'if ever a match was won thanks to temperance principles, surely this one was')¹⁹ and moral behaviour ('the only [team] we have played... from which I have not heard a single oath')²⁰ to overt religiosity through club prayer meetings and services. As H.M. Harris, a club official, told parents at a meeting in 1903, 'the main object of the club was... to seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom'.²¹ The club was successful both in terms of recruitment and on the field of play. By 1902 there were two fifteens, the firsts winning the Division II Bristol Combination Cup and the seconds winning the Division III trophy.²² By 1908 there were three sides playing²³. Recruitment came from the working-class of the Dings; in 1910 James Payne of Barton Hill Road was

¹⁵ Graham Murphy, 'Rawnsley, Hardwicke Drummond (1851–1920), Church of England Clergyman and Conservationist', in *Oxford Dictionary of Biography*, (Oxford University Press).

¹⁶ BA, 40817/P/26 *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol VII. no. 11

¹⁷ For example, Catherine Budd has shown that in Middlesbrough 'rugby's 'roughness'... disadvantaged rugby when attempting to find favour with muscular Christians' (Catherine Budd, 'The Growth of an Urban Sporting Culture – Middlesbrough, C.1870-1914', (Unpublished Thesis, De Montfort, 2012), p. 27.) and in Wales the '[non-conformist church] church remained sceptical about the moralising influence of rugby football' (Gareth Morgan, 'Rugby and Revivalism: Sport and Religion in Edwardian Wales', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22 (2005), p. 435.)

¹⁸ Brown, p. 97.

¹⁹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 5

²⁰ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 5

²¹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. III. no. 4

²² BA, 40817/P/24. *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. II. no. 5

²³ *Western Daily Press*, (8th February, 1908), p.11

selected from the first XV to play for Bristol.²⁴ The club attracted a large local following, underlining its acceptance as part of the community of the Dings. Over 400 watched the first XV at the cup final in 1901, many demonstrating 'their confidence that we should win'.²⁵ The 'we' demonstrates how far they considered the team as belonging to them. As Thompson identified in response to the view that sport was used as a controlling measure, 'middle class reformist influence was a thin veneer, and the working-classes rapidly appropriated [the sport]'.²⁶

Following the success of rugby, Association Football teams were also established at the Shaftesbury, initially through the Boys Brigade but also as part of the Dings Club with the formation of Dings United in 1901.²⁷ Cricket also followed and despite some evident scepticism about the ability of Dings residents to play a gentleman's game ('Shaftesbury folk can't play cricket'), in 1910 the Dings Club won seven games and lost only one.²⁸ In providing the facilities and opportunities to play these sports the Shaftesbury was reacting to the fact that 'emerging popular sports... were formidable competitors for the weekly attention of male urban labourers'.²⁹ The Dings Club to which all these teams belonged continued to keep Christianity integral to its ethos: 'the Dings Club... looks upon the religion of Christ as the finest thing on earth for everybody'.³⁰ It was genuinely popular with the boys and young men of the Dings. A census taken in 1909 recorded almost 200 members,³¹ up from 40 in 1897,³² clearly showing it sustained and indeed increased in strength into the new century.

²⁴ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 2

²⁵ BA, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 5

²⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *The Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), p.201.

²⁷ BA, 40817/P/27 *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 10

²⁸ BA, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 8

²⁹ Hempton, p. 310.

³⁰ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 11

³¹ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 11

³² BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 11

In addition to team sports a full programme of physical activity was provided. The gymnasium was popular and had time slots for all the various age categories throughout the week. In April 1910 the junior boys' sessions (boys under twelve) averaged between sixty and seventy each evening.³³ The gymnasium also held weekly services, and on the night of a census taken for the *Bristol evening News* in November 1908 there were 150 children under six at the Sunday gymnasium service.³⁴ The Senior Girls Club used the gymnasium each Wednesday. Following a display of 'Figure marching, Indian club swinging and vaulting horse work' a reporter for the *Redland Park Recorder* observed that 'it is an excellent thing that our girls should thus be able to indulge in a little healthy recreation during the long winter nights, penned up as they mostly are in the various factories all day long'.³⁵ There were 175 members recorded for April 1910. From May of 1904 swimming sessions at the public baths in Barton Hill were booked on a weekly basis exclusively for Shaftesbury members³⁶ and the average attendance remained high with seventy attending on average throughout 1910.³⁷ The Shaftesbury Crusade Cycling Club was founded in 1901, Reverend Bell ensuring the Christian message remained integral through his role as a vice president of the club.³⁸

(ii) Leisure and social activities

McLeod notes that in Bethnal Green the churches were more successful in attracting numbers through leisure than to services.³⁹ There is certainly a parallel with the Shaftesbury in the provision of leisure but the overt religiosity of its work ensured that those attending the Shaftesbury Crusade maintained direct contact with the Christian message. This can be seen in the trips and camps that made up a large part of the summer timetable.

³³ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 5

³⁴ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII. no. 12

³⁵ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 5

³⁶ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 6

³⁷ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 9

³⁸ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 6

³⁹ McLeod, p. 113.

Every July the children of the Dings (if their attendance and behaviour on Sundays was good enough) had the opportunity to attend a trip to Penarth. In 1904 over 500 children set off after prayers, and hymns were sung following tea and games.⁴⁰ The annual Dings Club camp to Woolacombe was similarly structured on a firmly Christian basis. The camp programme for 1906 started and ended with prayer⁴¹ and in the 1908 the 'Christian influence of the camp' led to ten boys '[committing] themselves to the keeping of the saviour'.⁴² Numbers attending the Dings Camp rose from fifty-five in 1901 to eighty in 1910.⁴³ There were also day trips for the men and women of the Dings on Bank Holidays that ended up back at the Shaftesbury (220 went to Portishead at Whitsuntide in 1904).⁴⁴

Missions did attract criticism from those who felt that at least some of the activities did not have religious content.⁴⁵ A worker at the Shaftesbury was keen to allay such fears about the trips and camps:

'Perhaps you say, "what a fuss they make at the Shaftesbury about treats and outings"... [but] walk with the writer [through the Dings] and look at those two or three lads, somewhere between fourteen and sixteen, only just come half-drunk from the public house and think again of our bright and happy party of pleasure, all breathing in that indefinable atmosphere of which Christian love alone creates'.⁴⁶

The Reverend W.B. Selbie, a visiting speaker to the workers of the Shaftesbury, was also in no doubt about the essence of the mission, thanking them for their work and noting it had 'the Christian idea at the bottom if it... people were keen on their amusements, and

⁴⁰ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 8

⁴¹ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VI. no. 8

⁴² BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII. no. 8

⁴³ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 8

⁴⁴ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 7

⁴⁵ Such as in Lambeth noted by Cox. Cox, p. 86.

⁴⁶ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 8

wanted something of it in their religion'.⁴⁷ There were a number of, on the face of it, secular activities and events aimed at getting people through the doors rather than into the local pubs, and they were popular. The 'refreshment bar' and associated billiards room and skittle alley opened at 5 a.m. and closed at 11 p.m. and attracted working men after night shifts ('we are quite busy at the skittle alley at 6 o'clock in the morning'⁴⁸). Skittles, billiards and dominoes drew working-class regulars from the immediate vicinity and slightly farther afield; among the recipients of trophies at a dinner for working men in October 1908 were William Sowden, a metal turner, and Alfred Withey, a chimney sweep, both from Barton Hill⁴⁹ (just over a mile to the east of the Shaftesbury).

Those without work could use the billiard hall free of charge. A regular programme of 'Happy Evenings' with 'penny nights' attracted large attendances to compete with the 'music hall, with its many evil associations'⁵⁰ and by 1910 to Shaftesbury was applying for a license to present 'cinematograph exhibitions'.⁵¹ Even those Dings locals who attended for purely social reasons, however, were left in no doubt as to the central message of the Hall. Instead of a bell, patrons were notified of closing each day with a prayer and a hymn. As the *Western Daily Press* commented in March 1910, 'the [Shaftesbury] officers... have discovered how to harness the social with the spiritual'.⁵²

The 'civilising mission to the poor': The Shaftesbury and social control

There is a view that the churches in the late nineteenth century attempted to carry out a programme of social control through their work amongst the labouring classes. Cox notes that in Lambeth clergymen, if unable to create 'regular churchgoers' would instead

⁴⁷ *Western Daily Press*, (28th September, 1910)

⁴⁸ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII. no. 8

⁴⁹ *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901*, RG14;2382;16 and RG14;14960;1, (Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1901) from www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed 12/11/2019

⁵⁰ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 12

⁵¹ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 11

⁵² *Western Daily Press*, (12th March, 1910)

aim to 'produce good citizens' as part of a civilising mission.⁵³ Meller has identified this civilising impulse among the middle classes in Bristol and places the work of missions, including the Shaftesbury, within this context.⁵⁴ Gunn argues that the mission organisations in Manchester were demonstrations of 'bourgeois power and responsibility' and that the civilising mission of which they were part strengthened distinctions between the religious middle class and an irreligious 'mass'.⁵⁵ It is clear that, in the drive for temperance that underpinned the mission from its origins under Bell (the Shaftesbury Total Abstinence Association comprised fourteen officers making visits throughout thirteen districts⁵⁶, and the regular 'midnight meetings' saw officers rounding locals up at closing time and encouraging them to sign the pledge after the service⁵⁷) the officers of Shaftesbury Crusade were engaged in attempts to influence the behaviour of the people of the Dings. However, as Entwistle has found in her work on Sunday school reward books, the officers at the Shaftesbury 'contributed to the process of socialisation [in an attempt to] influence the attitudes and moral standards' of the people rather than attempting social control through the imposition of middle class values.⁵⁸

There was certainly the potential for a feeling of 'us and them'. The majority of the officers were members of the Redland Park Young People's Guild and the leadership of the Shaftesbury Mission were prominent members of Redland Park Congregationalist Church. Winifred Ertle, who lived in the Dings, identified Clifton and Redland as where the wealthy lived.⁵⁹ The treasurer (and a frequent donor) was S.D. Wills, a J.P., and several of the various departments were organised by members of the Harris and Tribe

⁵³ Cox, p. 83.

⁵⁴ E.g. Meller, p. 170.

⁵⁵ Simon Gunn, 'The Ministry, the Middle Class and the 'Civilizing Mission' in Manchester, 1850-80', *Social History*, 21 (1996), p.36.

⁵⁶ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 3

⁵⁷ Such as in January 1905, where more than 200 people, 'many of whom had spent some portion of the evening in less desirable places than the Shaftesbury were amassed... for a religious service', BA, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. V. no. 1

⁵⁸ Dorothy M. Entwistle, 'Children's Reward Books in Nonconformist Sunday Schools, 1870-1914: Occurrence, Nature and Purpose', (University of Lancaster Ph. D Thesis, 1990).

⁵⁹ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, interview R002, 1979

families.⁶⁰ A.E. Harris showed 'Rambler' of the *Bristol Evening News* around the Shaftesbury in 1908 and the moral, civilising purpose was made clear ('the avowed object... is for the moral, spiritual and physical uplifting of the people', 'whose environments could scarcely be elevating').⁶¹ As in Lambeth, much effort was focused on the young to produce 'a new, sober generation'⁶²: 'children are taken an interest of from the earliest age, and all subsequent stages of life are provided for'.⁶³

Yet there was a genuinely paternalistic undercurrent to this middle-class moral mission; in 1909 A.E. Harris, H.M. Harris and A.L. Jenkins made a plea to employers regarding boys 'for whom the officers are most anxious to secure situations'.⁶⁴ There was not a sense of 'us and them' between officers and those attending the Shaftesbury, and the officers did not simply engage with the Dings residents at the hall itself. A.E. Harris and his wife annually invited the Dings Club boys for support at their house, with over 100 in attendance. They were keen to create a genuine connection: 'there is a feeling of sociability... which helps to strengthen the bonds of friendship existing between the members one with another, and the officers'.⁶⁵ When Jack Cork, who had lived in Jubilee Street and was a member of the Dings Club died at eighteen (of appendicitis), his funeral was held at the Shaftesbury, officers and members mourning together: 'it seemed fitting that the last gathering together should be at his spiritual birthplace and home'.⁶⁶ There is not the aloofness suggested in the satirical letter of the plumber quoted by Inglis, 'you don't belong to 'our set'... you should be grateful to us in our condescension by asking us to come at all'⁶⁷ and if the 'civilising mission' did strengthen the distinction between 'a cultivated, Christian... middle class and an ignorant, heathen

⁶⁰ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. II. no. 2

⁶¹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII. no. 12

⁶² Cox, p. 81.

⁶³ *Western Daily Press* (12th March 1910)

⁶⁴ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 8

⁶⁵ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. III. no. 3

⁶⁶ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. V. no. 6

⁶⁷ *The Methodist Times* (3rd February 1897), p.86, quoted in Inglis, p. 117.

and morally irresponsible mass'⁶⁸ elsewhere, officers at the Shaftesbury were less condescending in their approach.

Paternalism is also evident in the annual Penarth trip, paid for each year by an anonymous donor. Referred to as 'our very kind and unknown friend'⁶⁹ a verse was written in his honour for the 1909 trip:

How can we thank the donor
For all that he has done
To lift the clouds from children's lives
And let them see the sun?⁷⁰

It is possible that this donor is Sir W.H. Wills who donated £2000 to the building fund for the Shaftesbury⁷¹. Donations also helped the Dings Club attend the Woolacombe camp, the boys paying half. Annual reports testify to the amounts donated by wealthy individuals and families (see figure 1), not least those members of the Redland Park community who worked at the Shaftesbury daily.⁷²

⁶⁸ Gunn, p. p.33.

⁶⁹ *Western Daily Press*, (2nd October 1906)

⁷⁰ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 9

⁷¹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 2

⁷² In January 1907 an appeal was made to Redland Park due to a 'crippling lack of funds', BA, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 1

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 4: Shaftesbury subscription list 1902 (from *Redland Park Recorder* Vol II. No.2)

Regardless of the success or otherwise of the temperance and moralising endeavours, it is clear that the Dings residents themselves did not see the Shaftesbury as an '[instrument] of middle-class and upper-class hegemony'.⁷³ The working-class locals used the Shaftesbury on their own terms. A Dings resident, born in 1896, recalls going to Band of Hope and events and taking the pledge, but then drinking beer.⁷⁴ Attendees

⁷³ Thomas William Heyck, 'The Decline of Christianity in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 28 (1996), 440.

⁷⁴ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, interview R001, 1979

of evening services, rather than being forced into temperance as the result of social control, were often 'far gone in drink'.⁷⁵ yet still took part. The Shaftesbury was a part of daily life, from the night-shift workers playing billiards or skittles after work to the children eating breakfast there 'if their fathers were out of work' or the families 'splitting... pea soup brought from the Shaftesbury at lunch'.⁷⁶ There were opportunities for socialising and forming relationships; in 1904 Sholto Pook, listed as resident at the Shaftesbury, married Matilda Palmer of 5 Kingsland Road.⁷⁷ There was a sense of kinship between officers and locals, travelling on day trips and returning together to 'their second home- the Shaftesbury'⁷⁸. Boys and officers ate together at the summer camp.⁷⁹ There was respect too for the ministers. As early as 1881 J.H. Bell was known for being 'very popular with the extremely poor residents [of the Dings]'⁸⁰ and when Urijah Thomas, Minister of Redland Park and instrumental in the success of the Shaftesbury, died in 1901 a memorial service at the Shaftesbury was so crowded with people wishing to provide 'the testimony of St Philips' extra seats had to be brought in.⁸¹

The numbers actively using the Shaftesbury are further testament to the fact Dings residents saw it as belonging to them. The officers regularly reported numbers and full censuses were taken in 1908 and 1910. The clubs, particularly those aimed at younger members, remained healthy throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. The Dings Club grew to 150 members by 1908⁸² and the Senior Girls' Club had 210 members in 1910 (although the average attendance was 169).⁸³ The children's service on a Sunday enjoyed an average attendance of 200.⁸⁴ Over 200 adults attended the midnight

⁷⁵ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. I

⁷⁶ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, interview R002, 1979

⁷⁷ BA, 41236/2/1, Kingsland Chapel Marriage Register 1899-1913

⁷⁸ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 4

⁷⁹ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 9

⁸⁰ *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (15th September 1881)

⁸¹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 4

⁸² BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 1

⁸³ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 1

⁸⁴ *Western Daily Press*, (12th March, 1910)

service in January 1905⁸⁵ and the numbers for the adult bible classes further suggest active engagement with the Shaftesbury: in 1908 on the night the 'Rambler' from the *Bristol Evening News* took numbers there were 150 present at the Men's class, 100 at the Women's and a further 40 at the Young Men's class.⁸⁶ The 'Happy Evenings' remained a popular mix of secular entertainment and religious talks.⁸⁷ There were also less religious talks (such as a lantern presentation on the 'Ancient Britons and their Mode of Living') and debates on both religious and topical issues ('the methods of the Wickliff Preachers are justifiable' and 'the introduction of machinery has benefitted the working man' were two motions put forward in consecutive meetings⁸⁸). The later census, taken over one week in January 1910, recorded an average weeknight attendance (numbers were taken at 8.30 each evening) of 411. Sundays were clearly seen as a distinctive day in religious terms (just as Williams found in Southwark).⁸⁹ The total at the services on Sunday evening, including the people's service, was 1175 (with 550 in the afternoon).⁹⁰ Undoubtedly these figures include those who attended at least twice in a week, but the daily averages nonetheless speak to a popular and busy institution. Bartlett noted in Bermondsey that high numbers at the evening service was 'proof of their social status'⁹¹ and there was undoubtedly a social element to Sunday attendance at the Shaftesbury given the other social functions it performed.

⁸⁵ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. V. no. 1

⁸⁶ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII. no. 8

⁸⁷ *Western Daily Press*, (22nd April, 1901)

⁸⁸ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. II.

⁸⁹ Williams, pp.147-49

⁹⁰ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 1

⁹¹ Bartlett, p.92

Table 10: 1908 Shaftesbury census

Numbers recorded by 'Rambler', December 1908*	
(i) Sunday evening attendance	
Under 6 (in gym)	150
Older boys (in main hall)	400
Young men	60
Boys Brigade	100
Older girls	50
(ii) Bible Classes	
Men	150
Women	100
Young men	40
(iii) Clubs	
Friday gym (boys under 12)	60
Junior girls	100
Senior girls	130
Dings Club	150
Women's meeting	200

Figures from *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII no 12.

* There were also 35 'lady workers' and 26 'gentlemen'

Table 11: 1910 Shaftesbury census

Numbers recorded at Shaftesbury census, January 1910**	
Sunday afternoon services	550
Sunday evening services	1175
Monday evening	550
Tuesday evening	351
Wednesday evening	514
Thursday evening	329
Friday evening	310
Saturday evening	405

**the census comprised a count at each religious meeting on Sunday and Tuesday and a count of all those in the Shaftesbury at 8.30 each evening. Source: *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X no. 2

Meller holds that the Mission movement had 'split apart' by 1910,⁹² but the Shaftesbury Crusade in the early twentieth century was a vibrant institution that attracted Dings

⁹² Meller, p. 194.

residents and ensured that the Christian message remained part of their lives. People accessed it in different ways and on their own terms, some for overtly religious activities (such as services and bible class), others for sporting or social activities and some, such as Jack Cork, for both. Its success led to further extension work in 1909 due to 'demand upon the occupation'.⁹³ The *Western Daily Press* in 1910 recorded that 'one of the most potent factors in the transformation [of the Dings] has been the Shaftesbury'⁹⁴ and the Anglicans in Bristol, perhaps as an example of the struggle for denominational control Snell identified in the Sunday School movement,⁹⁵ built a mission of St Silas on Union Street in the heart of the Dings 'to have some share of the work'.⁹⁶ Not only were the Congregationalists through the Shaftesbury doing their best to keep religion part of daily life for the working-class residents of the Dings, they were motivating others to try and emulate their success. In providing social, leisure and sporting connections the Shaftesbury used religion to '[help] express a particular culture rather than wage war against it'⁹⁷ and in doing so, 'reached beyond the confines of the churches'⁹⁸ and became an institution central to the life of the Dings.

⁹³ *Western Daily Press* (23rd September 1909)

⁹⁴ *Western Daily Press* (12th March 1910)

⁹⁵ K. D. Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales: Child Labour, Denominational Control and Working-Class Culture', *Past & present*, 164 (1999), 138.

⁹⁶ *Bristol Mercury* (29th July 1899)

⁹⁷ Hempton, p. 311.

⁹⁸ Bartlett, p. 96.

4: Sunday School

The working-class population of the Dings further maintained links with religion through the association of their children with the Sunday Schools of the area. Williams found that in Southwark this association contributed to a process of 'religion by deputy' and that the practice of sending children to Sunday school 'was a conscious effort of parents to identify with the teachings of the church through the medium of their offspring',¹ the religious content and purpose of the classes overt. Similarly Brown notes that enrolling children at Sunday school stemmed from a 'need to associate with a church without necessarily worshipping in it'² (a need that could also be assuaged through the various activities provided by the Shaftesbury). This chapter will show that in the Dings parents likewise sent their children to Sunday schools for the moral and religious education they provided. Value was placed on the religious and moral education provided by the Sunday schools and bible classes. It will also show that, in contrast to the pessimistic views of Wickham (who noted that whilst Sunday schools brought children 'under a civilising influence' they failed to keep them in the churches in adulthood³) and Inglis (who similarly stated that Sunday schools 'enrolled [many] who belonged later in life to no church'⁴), in the Dings scholars were often drawn into subsequent religious association. Focusing primarily on Kingsland Chapel and the Shaftesbury and the schools at New Street Mission and Russell Town Church (few records exist for the other Dings institutions) this chapter will show that Sunday schools were another expression of working-class religiosity and that, as with the other activities centred on the Shaftesbury, the Sunday schools were not seen as controlling endeavours but were rather accepted as an integral part of life.

In the immediate vicinity of the Dings there were Sunday schools attached to Emmanuel Church, Kingsland Chapel and Anvil Street Chapel (both Congregationalist) and the

¹ Williams, pp. 126-127.

² Brown, p. 166.

³ Wickham, p. 155.

⁴ Inglis, p. 330.

Shaftesbury provided bible classes. St Silas Church (in the Marsh) and St Philip and St Jacob provided schools in the wider St Philips area. Half a mile from the Shaftesbury up Midland Road (the end of Kingsland Road crossing the Midland Railway and containing the station for it) was New Street Friends' Mission. There were further institutions in the adjacent working-class neighbourhoods of Barton Hill and Lawrence Hill, including Russell Town Congregational Church less than a mile to the north west of the Shaftesbury.

Sunday School membership and attendance

Nationally, Sunday schools continued to enjoy good attendance between 1880 and 1910. McLeod has shown there was an attendance peak of about fifty percent of the population under fifteen years of age at Sunday schools from around 1880 to the start of the First World War.⁵ Williams found a similar situation in Southwark and noted that attendance remained 'significant' in the inter-war years.⁶ In County Durham in 1910, forty-seven percent of all children aged between five and fifteen in the county borough attended the Good Friday celebrations as scholars.⁷ Cliff shows a 15.8 percent rise in membership from 1880-1890, 3.5 percent between 1890 and 1900 and five percent in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁸ Sunday schools in the Dings area of Bristol likewise grew in the years between 1880 and 1910, the evidence standing in contrast to more pessimistic views such as that of Inglis who held that Sunday schools had 'lost much of their attractive power by the end of the century'.⁹

Membership numbers increased at Kingsland throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1899 there were 450 members¹⁰ and this increased to 516 as recorded on

⁵ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 79.

⁶ Williams, p. 127.

⁷ John Richard Hind, 'Churches, Chapels and Communities: Comparative Studies in County Durham 1870-1914', (University of Durham Ph. D Thesis, 1997), p. 215.

⁸ Philip B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), p. 201.

⁹ Inglis, p. 331.

¹⁰ *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, (17th June 1899)

the registrar's report in April 1906.¹¹ In May 1903 there were twenty-eight classes with 35 teachers and officers.¹² In September 1908 Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School sought and received permission to make use of extra rooms to divide large classes.¹³ Attendances at Sunday evening services for scholars also grew in number. At New Street Mission, the average attendance for Sunday evening service was ninety in 1900 and increased to 150 by 1905.¹⁴ At the Shaftesbury, 200 infants and 400 older children attended the Sunday evening service in March 1902¹⁵ and 610 in total on the night of a census in December 1908.¹⁶ Kingsland Chapel inaugurated Sunday evening children's services in October 1908 and in January 1909 reported that 'already we have over 100 members'.¹⁷

Treat trips, as 'reward for those who have behaved and attended well' on a Sunday¹⁸ also attest to growing membership. In July 1881 300 'scholars and friends' embarked on the annual treat for Kingsland Chapel Sunday scholars to Weston Super-Mare.¹⁹ The 1904 trip was attended by 220 scholars (including seventy infants) and 100 'friends'. Numbers would have been greater but for the fact that 'so many of our senior scholars are unable to get away [from work] to accompany us on these occasions' (the trips went on a Saturday).²⁰ There was a similar picture at New Street Mission, with 107 children going to Weston in 1900, 114 in 1901 (with 125 adults for a total attendance of 239) and a total attendance of 240 in 1906.²¹ Shaftesbury Crusade's annual Penarth trip (funded by the mysterious benefactor) similarly attracted large numbers. In July 1901,

¹¹ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VI. no. 4

¹² BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. III. no. 5

¹³ BA 39622/RT/SS/1(a), Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, September 1908

¹⁴ BA SF/A/9/16, New Street Friends' Mission Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, October 1905

¹⁵ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. II. no. 3

¹⁶ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 1

¹⁷ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 1

¹⁸ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 8

¹⁹ *Western Daily Press*, (16th July 1891)

²⁰ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 9

²¹ BA SF/A/9/16, New Street Friends' Mission Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, October 1906

320 children attended²² and in 1906 the number remained over 300.²³ There were disappointed scholars whose attendance 'had been too irregular' to qualify, preventing numbers being even higher.²⁴ Clearly, Sunday schools and connected activities in the Dings remained well attended and numbers were growing, mirroring the national pattern.

Motivations for enrolment

McLeod sees 'considerations of respectability' as key to parental motivations for enrolling their children in Sunday school. He also identified the material benefits (trips, meals) and childminding as important factors, alongside providing 'a source of religious and moral education'.²⁵ Hind has shown that Sunday schools were 'actively looking to establish attitudes of respectability'.²⁶ Respectability was certainly a motivation for some parents; a resident of Montpelier, just over a mile from the Shaftesbury, remembers his father being 'against religion' but his mother still asked the children to go to Sunday school. His parents were proud of their rented house and made sure it was decorated even though they didn't have much money.²⁷ The chance to send children on trips and the resultant child-free house were also clearly considerations. Arthur Jenkins, an officer at the Shaftesbury, had a difficult night 'pacifying importunate mothers' whose children did not qualify for tickets to the annual Penarth trip.²⁸ However, it is also the case that parents sent children for the religious and moral content of the classes.

Williams takes issue with Laquer's view that Sunday school attendance was purely a result of working-class notions of respectability and argues that that function transferred to elementary schools.²⁹ For Williams, it was the overt emphasis on religious instruction

²² BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 8

²³ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VI. no. 8

²⁴ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 8

²⁵ McLeod, p. 79.

²⁶ Hind, p. 190.

²⁷ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, interview R007, 1979

²⁸ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 8

²⁹ Williams, p. 128.

that was key. Parents may not have attended church themselves but clearly felt religious teaching was essential for their children and, in sending children to Sunday school, were ensuring religiosity remained an integral part of life. A meeting of Sunday school teachers at St Silas in 1895 noted that 'people who would not come to a place of worship themselves gave [teachers] their children... their children to a great extent were relying on them for Christian influence and teaching'.³⁰ As compulsory education provided the teaching that parents may have initially hoped to get from Sunday schools, Sunday schools became 'more directly associated with religious instruction'.³¹ Cox notes, however, that religious instruction remained integral to primary education,³² and the local day schools continued to provide it. St Philip's Board School was holding Scripture exams in 1903 and 1904³³ and George Prince (born in Montpelier in 1903) remembered receiving religious instruction every day at school.³⁴

Despite this, as Williams found for Southwark, parents clearly saw a distinction between the two types of school in terms of what was taught and continued to send children to both, valuing the Sunday schools for religious and moral education. Winifred Etle remembered attending Sussex Street school during the week (and occasionally truanting) and receiving religious instruction at the Shaftesbury on Sundays, putting a penny in the box to buy a text and getting a card stamped.³⁵ Williams has noted that this was a common act, recalled in many oral testimonies of Sunday schools in Southwark, with the card shown to parents as evidence of attendance.³⁶ Home visits further made clear to parents the religious essence of the teaching. Kingsland Chapel officers 'made [effort] to reach the parents of some of our Sunday-school scholars who

³⁰ *Western Daily Press*, (9th October 1895)

³¹ Williams, p. 129.

³² Cox, p. 268. McLeod similarly notes that the 'overwhelming' majority of day schools provided some form of religious education (McLeod, p. 82.)

³³ BA, 21131/SC/St.P.Bd/L/1/2, St. Philips Board School Log Book, 27/11/1903 and 01/07/1904

³⁴ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, interview R007, 1979

³⁵ Bristol Library Local Studies Collection, *Bristol People's Oral History Project: R001-R162*, interview R003, 1979

³⁶ Williams, pp. 131-133.

attend no place of worship'.³⁷ The Shaftesbury also engaged in outreach, recording 2132 absentee visits for all bible classes in the annual report for 1901³⁸ and engaging volunteers from 'those living in the immediate neighbourhood of the Shaftesbury' to make house visits (at the time being low on volunteers from Redland Park).³⁹ The minutes of the Teachers' Meeting of Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School for September 1906 record visits to scholars made by older members of the Bible Class.⁴⁰ The content of the classes themselves was, as per Williams, overtly religious. All the Sunday schools in the area followed the practice of rewarding attendance and behaviour with religious books, and hymn singing (which, as Warton has shown, became a staple part of Sunday school activity from the late nineteenth century and used for the hymns' religious and moral value)⁴¹ became increasingly central. The school at New Street Mission made it compulsory for each scholar to own a hymn book in 1893, using the prize fund to buy them⁴² and Russell Town Sunday School bought a hundred copies of Sankey's Hymn Book and sold them to scholars at half price in 1908.⁴³ The author of an article about Sunday schools in the *Redland Park Recorder* (Redland Park providing teachers and officers for Kingsland Chapel and the Shaftesbury) wrote that:

We want teachers and officers who look upon the work as God-given, and who, believing in its high purpose, seek to attain their object by personal dependence on the Holy Spirit⁴⁴

Services further underlined the religious nature of the schools. After a service at New Street Mission in 1902 teachers were gratified to note that 'definite results in spiritual

³⁷ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 2

³⁸ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. II. no. 2

³⁹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 3

⁴⁰ BA 39622/RT/SS/1(a), Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, September 1906

⁴¹ Gillian Ruth Warson, 'From Psalmody to Hymnody: The Establishment of Printed Hymnbooks within Hymn Singing Communities', (University of Sheffield Ph. D Thesis, 2001), pp. 176-222.

⁴² BA SF/A/9/16, New Street Friends' Mission Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, November 1903

⁴³ BA 39622/RT/SS/1(a), Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, September 1908

⁴⁴ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. V. no. 9

blessing was made known amongst our own scholars'.⁴⁵ The Kingsland anniversary service on July 1904 had an 'atmosphere of devotion and expectant faith'.⁴⁶ There was an overt religiosity to the Sunday schools in and around the Dings.

As McLeod identified, another motivating factor for parents was the role of Sunday schools as also a source of moral education.⁴⁷ Entwhistle has shown that Sunday schools influenced the attitudes and moral standards of their pupils.⁴⁸ Meller saw the schools as another part of the 'civilising mission to the poor' in Bristol⁴⁹ and establishing good behaviour and morality was an integral part of their approach. The teachers at New Street Mission Sunday School commented on a 'marked improvement' in 'the behaviour and general condition of the children' at the 1904 Christmas gathering.⁵⁰ Kingsland Chapel changed the destination for its summer treat in 1906 after the children 'saw too much of the questionable... performances upon the beach' at Weston. As a result, 'their minds were too full of stupid jokes and inane songs for the effect to be satisfactory to the officers of a Sunday school'.⁵¹

Chapter 2 has shown that the people of the Dings were willing to integrate use of the Shaftesbury into their lives and did not view it as part of a strategy of social control by middle class outsiders. In the same way, families utilised Sunday schools for the religious and moral teaching they provided and did not see this education as being imposed. Entwhistle has shown that Sunday schools engaged in socialisation rather than social control.⁵² There was certainly an affinity between scholars and teachers, something Williams identified as a strength of the schools in Southwark.⁵³ Scholars

⁴⁵ BA SF/A/9/16, New Street Friends' Mission Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, June 1902

⁴⁶ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 8

⁴⁷ McLeod, p. 79.

⁴⁸ Entwhistle, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Meller, p. 124.

⁵⁰ BA SF/A/9/16, New Street Friends' Mission Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, January 1904

⁵¹ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. V. no. 9

⁵² Entwhistle, pp. 37-42.

⁵³ Williams, p. 135.

would frequently band together to buy gifts for their teachers at Christmas and would also show their regard for them in other ways. In October 1904 'a large company assembled' at Kingsland Chapel to celebrate the wedding of Sidney Hazel and Sophia Bullock, Sunday school teachers 'greatly loved by all'.⁵⁴ In 1907 several ex-scholars returned to the senior class when Miss Walters, who had left due to ill health, began teaching again.⁵⁵ When Rowland Turner, the Kingsland Chapel Sunday school librarian who lived in Louisa Street in the heart of the Dings, died in January 1907 he was such a popular and well-known figure that his death 'caused a great sensation in the district'.⁵⁶

This closeness went both ways. In April 1906 the Kingsland teachers arranged a concert to raise funds for a scholar who had lost a limb, raising 'sufficient to purchase an artificial limb'.⁵⁷ Teachers and officers of the Shaftesbury classes were clear as to how they saw relationships with their scholars. In an article entitled 'Is the Sunday School Inefficient?' reflecting concerns the movement felt due the success of day schools, the author wrote that teachers and officers 'are giving their lives... to be real comrades and brothers' of the children under their care.⁵⁸ Relationships between teachers and scholars were respectful and close.

Parents made a conscious decision, rather than feeling compelled, to send their children to Sunday school. In doing so they were ensuring a connection with religiosity, the decision (as Williams has shown) having 'both a social and a religious element' and exemplifying 'religion by deputy'.⁵⁹ How far did this result in children maintaining longer contact with the churches? Was there a failure of the churches 'to integrate their scholars into the adult congregations'?⁶⁰

⁵⁴ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 10

⁵⁵ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 12

⁵⁶ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VII. no. 1

⁵⁷ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VI. no. 4

⁵⁸ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. V. no. 1

⁵⁹ Williams, p. 128.

⁶⁰ Wickham, p. 155.

Did children stay with the churches after Sunday school?

At the Shaftesbury it was a clear aim to encourage children to pass through all the stages of the youth classes, into the various organisations and then on to the clubs for men and women and the people's services. In November 1902 it was noted that it was 'encouraging' that so many who started as children had passed through to the 'senior club and the Dings'.⁶¹ Throughout the decade to 1910 both the men's and women's bible classes grew in membership. In January 1902 the men's class averaged 140⁶² and 150 in December 1908.⁶³ In 1910, 'at the request of some of the men attending the Bible Class' an additional Wednesday night meeting was organised and became known as the 'Men's Bible School', forty attending the initial meeting.⁶⁴ In April 1910 there were 225 at the women's meeting (with '250 reliable members on the books'),⁶⁵ up from 200 in 1908.⁶⁶ Not all would have joined through the children's classes (some coming, for example, through the sporting clubs), but clearly the Shaftesbury was successful in keeping members within the organisation.

Kingsland Chapel also saw scholars remain in a variety of ways. Some stayed on to join the regular Sunday congregation or associated organisations. In February 1904 it was noted at the annual meeting that eleven scholars had joined the church fellowship.⁶⁷ Clearly, given a Sunday school membership of over 400 but a congregation of 220 in February 1902, the majority were not joining the regular congregation, but many boys went on to the PSA as men and thus maintained links with the church outside of denominational worship. The PSA always joined the children at the Sunday school anniversary service, occupying the central part of the chapel and filling it in 1901.⁶⁸ The

⁶¹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VI. no. 11

⁶² BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. II. no. 2

⁶³ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IX. no. 1

⁶⁴ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 9

⁶⁵ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 4

⁶⁶ BA, 40817/P/26, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. VIII. no. 12

⁶⁷ BA, 40817/P/25, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. IV. no. 2

⁶⁸ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 7

PSA membership was 250 in 1900.⁶⁹ Similarly, girls would often stay involved into adulthood. 'It is the fashion', noted the *Redland Park Recorder* in May 1901, 'to attend Sunday School until one is married, and in many cases even after the happy event'. Senior scholars attended tea with their children.⁷⁰ At Kingsland and the Shaftesbury children were remaining involved in ways that support Hind's view that 'Sunday school was not an activity entirely confined to childhood'.⁷¹

Success at keeping scholars beyond childhood depended on the approach of the Sunday school itself. Whereas the Shaftesbury and Kingsland Chapel took proactive and positive approaches to recruiting and retaining members, with clearly delineated routes of progression (particularly at the Shaftesbury) to the senior and adult divisions, Russell Town Congregational Sunday School did not have such a smooth transition and the various classes had greater separation. In March 1907 the men's Bible Class offered to assist the Sunday School at the anniversary. However, 'the feeling of the meeting was somewhat against it... the classes did not cultivate such a spirit of cooperation as they might'.⁷² A debate regarding when scholars should join the Bible Class concluded, 'eighteen was quite soon enough... if we supplied the Bible Class with young life, they should give no teachers'.⁷³ This may account for the falling numbers among the older boys at that Sunday school and stands in contrast to the approaches employed at Kingsland and the Shaftesbury who shared an ethos through their link with Redland Park and where young people often stayed involved beyond childhood.

Clearly then, the Sunday schools were another means by which the working-classes expressed religiosity. Parents sent children for a variety of reasons but the need for a religious and moral education was certainly a key motivator. Children enjoyed Sunday

⁶⁹ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 2

⁷⁰ BA, 40817/P/24, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. I. no. 5

⁷¹ Hind, p. 163.

⁷² BA 39622/RT/SS/1(a), Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, March 1907

⁷³ BA 39622/RT/SS/1(a), Russell Town Congregational Church Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minutes, April 1907

school, involving themselves in the religious aspects as well as the treats. Sunday school could be the way into an association with religious organisations that lasted beyond childhood. Wickham says Sunday schools were 'inadequate' as a means of converting working-class children to Christianity⁷⁴ but the evidence here suggests a greater similarity with Hind's findings (for Methodism) that Sunday school was more effective than 'personal conversion' in getting people into church or chapel.⁷⁵ Sunday school became a part of family life for many, from the Kingsland mothers taking their children to the teas to older ex-scholars attending events with the Shaftesbury like those on the Easter Monday trip to Cleeve Gardens in 1910.⁷⁶ For those parents not already going to Bible Class or associating with the Shaftesbury for sport or leisure, enrolling their children at Sunday school was a way of expressing religiosity as 'religion by deputy'. Undenominationalism was again key in this practice (Williams identifies this as underpinning parents' decision to enrol their children), another example of eschewing formal denominational worship whilst maintaining, and engaging in practices that demonstrated, religious belief.

⁷⁴ Wickham, p. 155.

⁷⁵ Hind, p. 155.

⁷⁶ BA, 40817/P/27, *Redland Park Recorder*, Vol. X. no. 4

5. Conclusion

The people of the Dings had not succumbed to secularisation by 1910. Churches were used to solemnise marriage and baptism and churching was part of the culture. For these rites of passage the local Anglican churches were the chosen locations, suggesting they held a higher status, at least for these purposes. However, connection to a specific church was less pronounced than Williams found for Southwark, with many families making use of several churches. It is likely that more of these rites of passage would have happened at Kingsland Road Chapel, and this would have account for some of the gaps in the census sample from chapter 1, but the clear majority took place in the Anglican churches. It was important to the people of the Dings to solemnise these rites of passage; the religious element was more important than the attachment to a particular building.

Regular churchgoing on a Sunday was not a feature of the Dings. At Kingsland on a Sunday numbers were far greater for Sunday school and PSA than for the actual worship. Despite this, however, people demonstrated religiosity through their membership of and attendance at the variety of organisations, clubs and events connected to the religious institutions in the area. The censuses taken at the Shaftesbury Crusade at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century reveal a strong connection with this institution in particular. This could also include worship, with large attendances at the Sunday services which were less formal and doctrinal in character than that in the established churches. Undenominationalism, 'a key feature of popular religion in Southwark'¹ was key in this part of Bristol also. PSA membership at Kingsland Road and Sunday attendance figures at the Shaftesbury indicate the continuing status of Sunday as a special day.

¹ S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, C.1880-1939*, (Oxford: Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 139.

The drive and dedication, both in terms of financial support and day to day volunteering on the ground, of the middle class Redland Park congregation was undoubtedly part of the 'civilising mission to the poor', seeking to improve moral standards of the Dings residents and promote the temperance message. Contrary to Meller, through the Shaftesbury this mission maintained momentum into the twentieth century and, moreover, kept the religious message at the core of its work. The Shaftesbury became an important part of the community. It was used in a variety of ways and performed a number of functions, and in doing so allowed the community to demonstrate religiosity in ways that did not bind them to a particular church, 'untrammelled by any particular doctrine'.²

This was further demonstrated by parents enrolling their children at Sunday schools. Although there were several reasons for doing so it is clear that the need for religious and moral instruction was central to this. Sunday schools in the Dings continued to grow and had some success in keeping young people within religious institutions as they entered adulthood, particularly at Kingsland Road and the Shaftesbury.

In conclusion, the people of the Dings were 'outside the churches' only in that they did not attend services as regular churchgoers. In their daily lives and through their children they maintained a religiosity on their own terms. For them, 'religion was expressed outside the confines of official denominations'.³

² From the minutes of Charles Street Mission in 1880, quoted in A. B. Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey 1880-1939', (Birmingham University Ph. D Thesis, 1987), p. 96.

³ David Hempton, 'Religious Life in Industrial Britain, 1830-1914', in *A History of Religion in Britain : Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, ed. by Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Oxford : Blackwell, 1994), pp. 306-321 (p. 310).

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