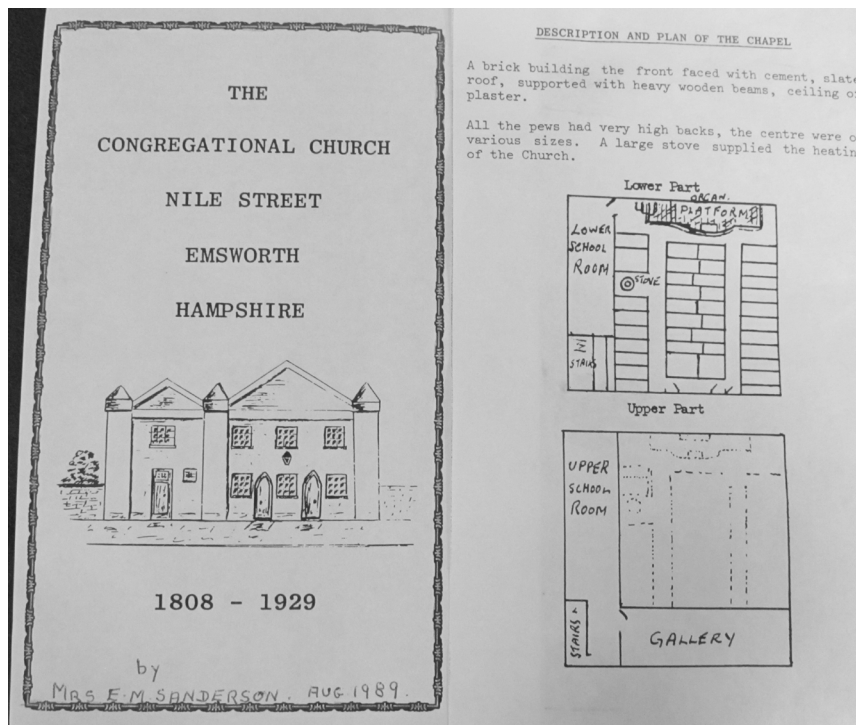


Olive/Olivia Holloway and Family

by Neil Spurgeon



Olivia fundraised the building of the Nile Street Chapel. The programme above can be seen on the blue Museum swingboards in the Main Room

Olive, known as Olivia, was baptised in St Thomas à Becket Church, Warblington, on 24th September 1783, the daughter of Joseph Holloway, a member of an Emsworth seagoing and merchant family, and Ann his wife (née Hendy).

Holloways had been living in the Emsworth and Prinsted area since at least 1495. A fisherman, John Holloway, left a will in Warblington in 1559, and there are intermittent records for the next century. A succession of Holloway ship masters, mostly engaged in coastal trade, appear in the records from 1650 onwards. Joseph, Olivia's father, was a ship master known as 'the Captain'.

During a famous storm in October 1775, as Master of the *Charming Mary*, carrying coals from Chester to Newry, he managed to save his ship when many others were wrecked. In thanks for his superb seamanship, the ship's owners presented him with a silver salver. This treasure was passed down the family.

It is mentioned in the will of his daughter Elizabeth who died in 1867 at Saxted House in Tower Street.

Saxted House is one of the most prestigious properties in the town. It was built by, or more accurately for, Olivia's uncle Benjamin, and was very nearly demolished by a German magnetic mine in 1941. From 1820 until Elizabeth's death in 1867 this house was occupied by various members of the Holloway family who also occupied the equally impressive Trentham House. These purchases give some indication of the family's central position in the story of the town.

Olivia's younger son Frederick wrote a biography of his brother Thomas. I am indebted to it for much of the information I have managed to glean about this indefatigable lady. As a girl, brought up in the Church of England, Olivia was noted for her piety. She was confirmed in Chichester Cathedral and is described as a beautiful, young teenager. From that time onward and

throughout her life, what her son describes as *“this saintly woman”* laboured for the love of her Lord.

She had a personal calling to serve as a Christian and seems to have had, and very much desired, a personal relationship with the Almighty. The relatively new and exciting non-conformist doctrines prevalent at the time, clearly attracted her and she wished to bring her religious zeal to the ordinary working people of Emsworth.

Nile Street Independent Chapel

Initially, Olivia Holloway had been holding meetings in her own home, then she hired a room in which she ran a school for a number of village girls. This venture was popular and successful, the numbers seeking instruction grew and it became necessary to fund raise to build a small chapel in central Emsworth for religious teaching and prayer. The Nile Street Independent Chapel was completed in 1808. Olivia began to preach the Word to adults as well as the children and her popularity, or perhaps her notoriety, grew. She is reported to have been a formidable orator, but not necessarily popular perhaps because of her firm but fair approach to sin.

At this time she began to be known as the ‘lady preacher’. On one occasion a number of Naval and Military officers came over from Portsmouth especially to see and hear *“the lady preacher”*, whose appearance and manner, when preaching, was considered to be singularly impressive. It is reported that she was always dressed from head to toe in white while she preached. One of these officers who dined with the Holloway family after the service is said to have remarked that *“we came, just for a lark, expecting to hear a ranting fanatic, but found an angel who spoke heaven-inspired words which none of us will forget, as long as we live”*.

During the course of her future husband’s training in Gosport, the Reverend Thomas Helmore occasionally assisted at this little meeting house. The couple married shortly after his ordination on 26th July 1810, in Warblington. Thomas took up a position

at the Baxter Independent Chapel in Kidderminster, later moving to Worcester, before finally taking up a living at the Rotherham Street Independent Chapel in Stratford upon Avon from 1820 until his death in 1845.

Thomas Helmore had been born on 8th March 1783 in Titchfield, where his father, also Thomas, had been a congregational minister. Whilst her husband ministered to the religious and broader educational needs of the community to which he had been called, running very active Sunday and later the British day school, Olivia Helmore was ministering to the sick and needy.

They had five sons and two daughters, all but the youngest couple being born in Kidderminster. Thomas the eldest, named after his father, was highly musical. He established and ran the choir at his father’s church in Stratford and also taught in the school. Following graduation from Magdalen College Oxford, he was ordained in the Church of England and took up a curacy at St Michael on Greenhill, Lichfield and very shortly was appointed a priest-vicar in the Cathedral there.

In 1842 Thomas Helmore was appointed Precentor and Vice-Principal at St Mark’s College, Chelsea. Four years later, he was appointed Master of the Choristers and Priest in ordinary to the Chapel Royal in St James’ Palace. In his time he was acknowledged as the recognised authority on plainsong in the Anglican Church and arranged a number of very well known carols including *Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel* and *Good King Wenceslas*. He collaborated with the noted lyricist the Reverend John Mason Neale in creating the two volume, well received works: *Carols for Christmastide* and *Carols for Eastertide* and then on his own, although using Neale’s translation of the lyrics from the Latin, his highly received *Hymnal Noted*.

Continued overleaf

Olive/Olivia Holloway contd

Holloway, the fourth son, named after his mother, was born on 14th December 1815. He studied at the Homerton Academy, a non-conformist college in London founded in 1768, now part of Cambridge University. Holloway worked for the London Missionary Society at Hope Fountain Mission, the second oldest mission station in Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia. He served as a missionary from 1839 (first in South Africa) until his death in 1880 from yellow fever in what is now Botswana. His tragic story is told in *No Cross Marks The Spot* by Stella Kilby.

Olivia died in 1844 and is buried in Stratford. Her husband, the Reverend Thomas Helmore, died the following year.
