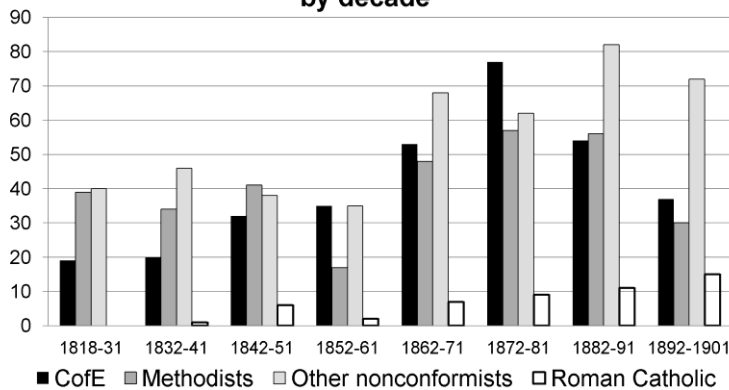


Churches and chapels: the long view (England)

A 200-year perspective to help make sense of today's changes and pressures

data for England only, except number 3 – rest of UK a different story

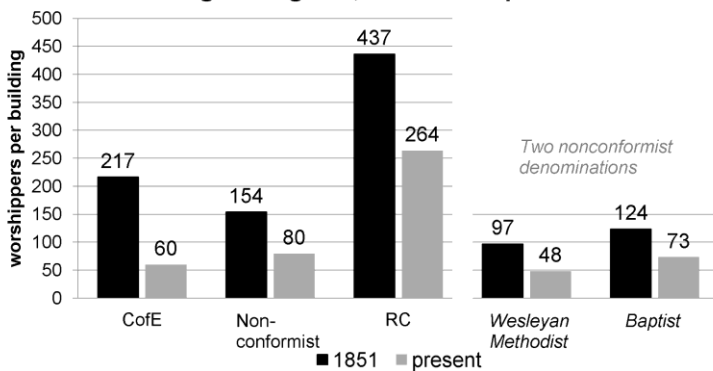
Kent: number of new church buildings, by decade



1. Church building in the 19th century

- Population nearly quadrupled 1800-1900
- Churches not full in nineteenth century, building on expectations, competition
- All denominations built; Free churches more than CofE; RC started low, accelerated
- **Legacy of overbuilding and overseating**

Number of all-age Sunday worshippers per church building* in England, 1851 and at present*

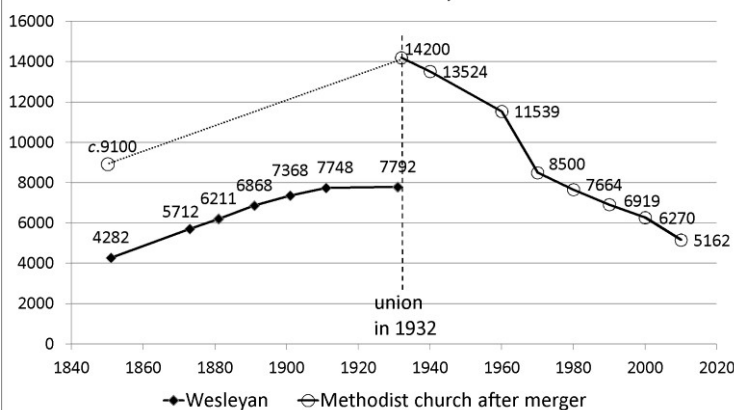


* for 1851, regardless of whether the 'church' was a separate building
* for 1851, the best-attended service on Sunday; for the present, all Sunday services

2. Fullness of churches in 1851 & today

- Since ?1850s church attendance dropping as proportion of population – since ?1900 not matched by population growth
- Adaptation by closure, but closing more slowly than congregations reducing . . . so churches much emptier than in 1851
- CofE largest change since 1851 (harder/less willingness to close)
- **Explains some of today's pressures to adapt buildings / close them**

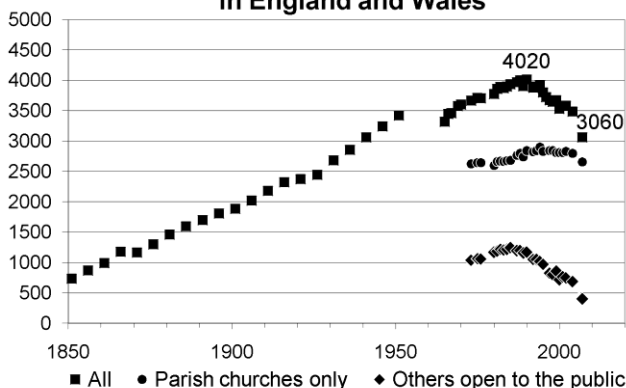
Number of Methodist chapels before and after 1932 union, Great Britain



3. Number of Free churches (Methodists as proxy)

- Fast growth in 19th century, levelling off, fast shrinkage 2nd half of 20th century
- Could be built on borrowed money (e.g. against future pew income)
- 'Easy' to open/close, considerable 'churn'
- About 10% listed (underlisted)
- **Methodist churches closing at approximately 2% per year**

Number of Roman Catholic churches in England and Wales

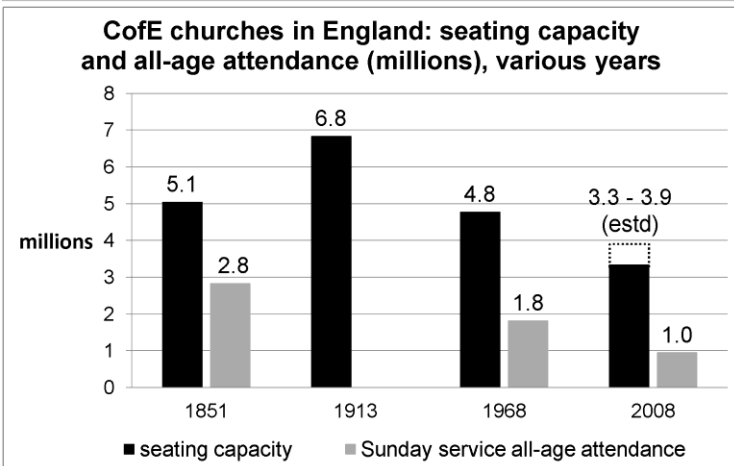
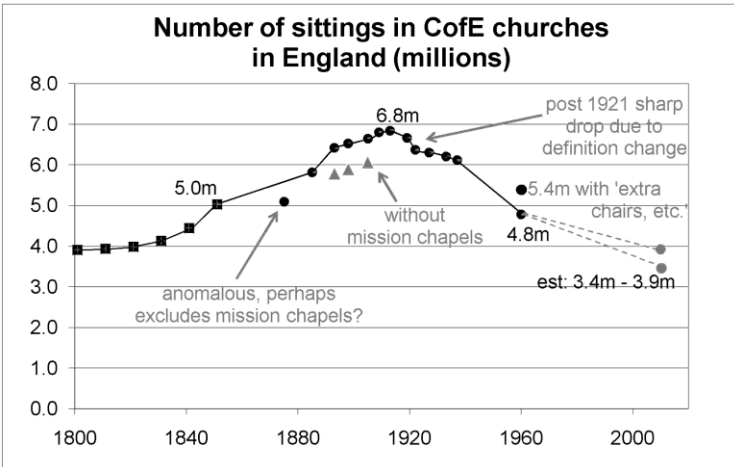
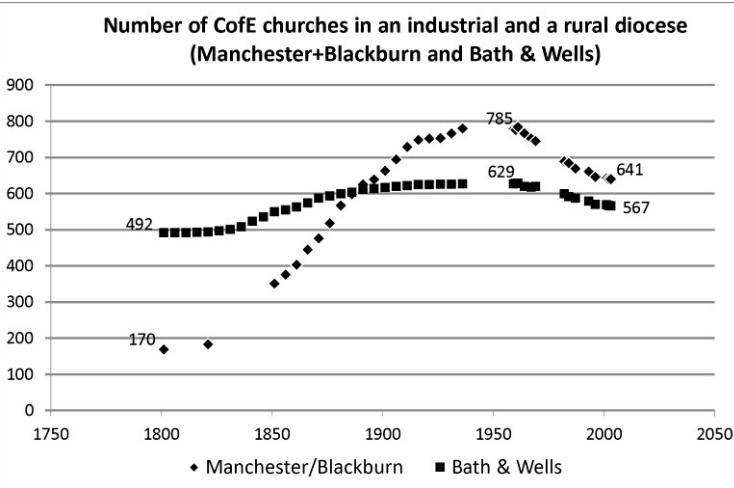
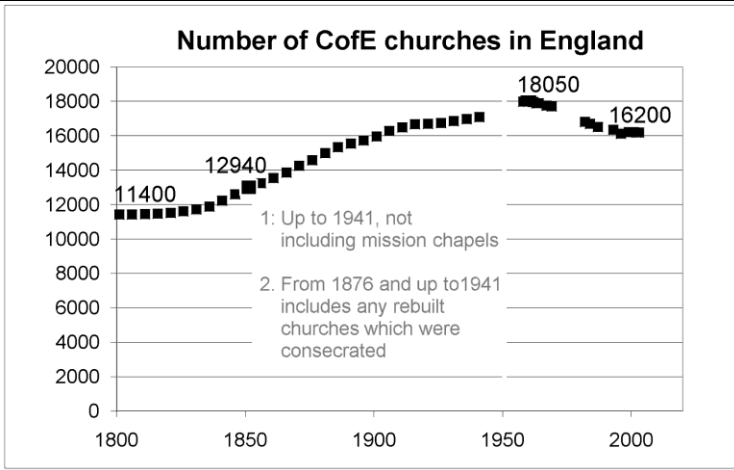


4. Number of Roman Catholic churches

- Low base, carried on growing until the late 20th century, approx sixfold increase, now closing
- 18% listed (underlisted)
- Same number of worshippers as CofE (approx), one fifth as many churches (approx) – churches worked hard
- 'Easy' to close

• **Rate of closure approx 1% per year**

5. Church of England churches



- Steady growth (slower than other denominations),
- Slow shrinkage of network during 20th century (harder/less willing to close, slower than other denominations' closure programmes)
- Closure includes closure of mission chapels
- Recent rate of closure 30 or fewer per year, now dropping (so less than 2% per decade)
- Most growth in industrial areas, and up to now most closures too – myth that closures have been rural medieval churches

- Victorian overpewing (grants, expectations, income)
- Thinning out of pews during much of 20th century in reaction to overpewing and reduced attendance
- Current rate of *total* depewing probably between 2% and 4% of churches per decade

- CofE still has overcapacity (e.g. twice number of seats needed at Easter)
- **Given the desire to avoid closure, new pressures include**
 - downward drift in routine attendance / smallest congregations
 - shortage of stipendiary ministers
 - reduced volunteering
 - shortage of young people (often wrongly described as 'ageing')
- **Helpful structural changes include**
 - public £ support & support officers
 - non-stipendiary ministry
 - wider use of buildings / base for regeneration
 - tourism
 - Friends groups

FOR REFERENCE

Number of listed places of worship (POWs)					
Larger figures rounded, totals separately rounded					
	All POW	Total listed	Listed POW		
			by grade of listing		
			I	II*	II
ENGLAND					
Church of England	16000	12020	4020	4230	3780
Methodist Church	5350	550	3	31	515
Roman Catholic	3230	570	22	100	450
Baptist Union	1950	250	0	11	235
United Reformed	1470	260	0	19	240
Other Christian	? 9000	860	30	120	710
Total Christian POW	? 37000	14500	4070	4510	5930
Non Christian faiths		52	3	15	34
GB & NI					
England		14500	4070	4510	5930
Wales		1990	170	470	1340
Scotland		2470	370	1570	540
Northern Ireland		900	42	140	710
TOTAL		19850	4650	6680	8520

- In England, CofE has approximately 83% of listed places of worship (61% of UK), and most of the highly-listed church buildings in England
- Other denominations underlisted (increasing appreciation and access)
- In England, CofE has about 45% of all Grade I listed buildings (religious+secular)
- Unlike most other listed buildings, many 'owners' are volunteers with no personal financial stake in the building
- Listing brings regulatory burden along with access to limited public funds

For sources of most of this material, see Trevor Cooper, 'How many seats in church?' in Trevor Cooper and Sarah Brown (eds.), *Pews, benches and chairs: church seating in English parish churches from the fourteenth century to the present*, 2011.

Trevor Cooper
17 January 2012 for APPG for Historic Churches and Chapels
cooper@eccclsoc.org