This paper will examine the involvement of the Church Missionary Society (hereafter referred to as CMS) in Egypt. In particular it will look at the way in which the mission related to the wider church and to British imperialism in Egypt.

The origins of the Anglican Church in Egypt are twofold. The first was the development of trade between Western Europe and the Levant. The British demand for cotton in the nineteenth century brought a growing number of businessmen to Egypt. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 gave a further boost to trade in Egypt as well as increasing its strategic importance. It was the British mercantile expatriate community which built the first Anglican Churches in Egypt. They saw them as the Church of England in Egypt, as part of their tribal identity, a bit of the baggage of Empire that travelled with them wherever they went. Their church was a club, like the Turf Club, from which members of other tribes were generally excluded. In the Second World War the club really came into its own as thousands of Allied troops found solace in the newly built All Saints’ Cathedral in Cairo.

The other force which lay behind the development of the Anglican Church in Egypt was a missionary one. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a tremendous growth of western interest in missionary activity around the world, notably in Africa and India. When attention turned to the Middle East, it was immediately appreciated that there was already a Christian presence and that the ancient Eastern Churches were the natural channels for Christian witness. Western missionaries believed that they could assist the ancient churches in this by encouraging their reform:
It is by bringing back these churches to the knowledge and love of the sacred scriptures that the blessing from on high may be expected to descend upon them.[1]

The early part of the nineteenth century saw a limited involvement by CMS with Egypt, mainly through the translation and distribution of literature, often in cooperation with German missionaries. In 1882, however, Britain intervened in Egypt on the pretext of supporting the Khedive against a Nationalist revolt led by Arabi. The subsequent 'veiled protectorate' encouraged CMS to seek greater involvement in Egypt. When the Revd F.A. Klein arrived in Cairo on 16th December, 1882, he joined forces with a Miss Whately who was already working among the poor of Cairo. Together, they opened a reading room for Muslims. Miss Whately died in 1889 but further women missionaries continued her work of teaching, visiting, and later, nursing. In 1888, Dr Frank J. Harpur was transferred from Aden to Egypt to establish medical work in Old Cairo and later at Menouf, in the Delta. These initiatives, combined with the work of the Revd W.H.T. Gairdner, were to become the main sources of membership and leadership in what eventually became the Episcopal Church in Egypt.

The Revd William Temple Gairdner arrived in 1899 and began a period of intensive Arabic study. By the end of a year he was giving several addresses in Arabic each week and by 1912 he was teaching Arabic to missionaries at the Cairo Study Centre. In 1917 he produced his book, *Egyptian Colloquial Arabic*, followed in 1925 by *The Phonetics of Arabic*. Gairdner's linguistic abilities enabled him to dialogue with Muslims with his associate, the Revd Douglas Thornton. Gairdner sought a positive expression of the Christian faith in these discussions, rather than negative point-scoring:

> We need a song note in our message to the Muslims, not the dry cracked note of disputation, but the song note of joyous witness, tender invitation.[2]

Gairdner used music, drama, poetry and pictures as well as articles and debate to present the Christian faith. He brought the Episcopal Publishing House into existence with the magazine, Orient and Occident at its heart. This publication was circulated as far as Palestine, Syria, India, Sri Lanka and
Indonesia. From 1917 onwards, Gairdner was joined in this venture by Constance Padwick.

Gairdner came to Egypt supporting the CMS policy which advocated reform in the Coptic Church and greater outreach by it towards Muslims. He had not sought the creation of an indigenous Anglican church. But by 1921, he had come to despair of such a policy in the short term. He felt that the Coptic Church of the time was incapable of providing an effective mission to Muslims. It had too great a history of persecution by the Muslim majority to admit Muslim converts and it tended to pass them on to the Anglican Mission for baptism.

In the year 1921, I rose up in wrath and gathered my colleagues about me, and declared that we should not go on like this any longer: in fact, that we must get on or get out.[3]

The American (Presbyterian) Mission had already developed an indigenous Evangelical Church. Gairdner felt that an Egyptian Anglican Church with its own pastors was also a necessity in the short term, though according to Constance Padwick, a permanent indigenous Anglican Church was never part of Gairdner's longterm vision:

Gairdner never dreamed that this would be Egypt's final way of life and worship. [4]

Small Anglican congregations whose membership included Syrian and Palestinian Christians had already started to grow up in Cairo.

It was decided therefore to retain the Anglican life and order as a home for converts against that day, of which Gairdner never wholly despaired (though appearances were against it), "when there shall emerge a reformed Orthodox Coptic Church, showing at least those two last 'notes' of a Church - evangelical militancy and Catholicity.[5]

In 1923, Gairdner drafted a policy statement, which was approved by the Archbishop of Canterbury:

The primary aim of the Anglican Church in Egypt is the evangelisation of the non-Christian population, and it does not desire to draw adherents from either the Coptic or the Evangelical Churches. Those who, in sincerity, find the Anglican Church their spiritual home are
welcome to join it, but the Church does not set out to gain their allegiance. Instead, it seeks to extend the right hand of fellowship to the Coptic Church so as to render it every possible form of service, and at the same time it strives for closer co-operation and greater unity between all the churches in Egypt.[6]

Gairdner threw himself into the development of the Arabic congregation, which eventually moved to the Church of the Saviour, Boulac. He acquired the unofficial title of the Bishop’s *wakil* (deputy) for the Arabic Church. Under Gairdner’s leadership, the first Egyptian, Girgis Bishai, was ordained deacon in 1924, and was made priest in the following year.

Gairdner had an ambitious list of objectives for his ministry but exhaustion contributed to his early death in Cairo on 22nd May 1928. His vision for the church was not to be fulfilled. Conversions from Islam slowed to a trickle. Apart from natural growth through reproduction, the small increases in numbers that the Church experienced came from those who had been born members of the Coptic or Evangelical Churches.[7] In 1922 the Episcopal Church in Egypt was reported to have 429 baptized members and 219 communicants. By 1940, there were approximately 700 members.[8] Though accurate figures are difficult to obtain this position has remained largely static until the present. Like many other Christian minorities in Egypt, Egyptian Anglicans have remained a tiny minority, defined more by family allegiances than personal commitment. Though the vision of Gairdner and other missionaries for the church had been one based on personal conversion, the Egyptian church became every bit as tribal as its expatriot counterpart.

Gairdner sought close links between the small Egyptian church and the expatriate congregations under Bishop MacInnes in Jerusalem:

> We are working steadily at drawing our Arabic community into closer and more organic connection with the English half of the Diocese. This is necessary from every point of view if the diocesan movement is to be a true one and the Bishop is to be the Shepherd of one flock and not two, as discrete as two kernel held together by one hard shell.[9]

It was to be many years before Gairdner’s vision of a single, united church, was to be realised. Both “tribes” existed side by side with little contact or overlap. For many years, unity seemed to lie only in the person of the bishop.
Until the 1970's these were always British and were therefore identified with the more powerful expatriot community. Bishop Llewelwyn Gwynne who was Bishop in Egypt from 1920 to 1946 and had a profound impact on the Diocese made this identification more extreme. He spoke little Arabic and had a generally low opinion of Egyptians:

> It is the policy of the British Foreign Office to say that the Egyptians are a most enlightened people with a strong sense of the good of their country and with high ideals of a righteous administration, but the real truth is that they are an uncivilised people…. It is only by consummate tact and wisdom on behalf of our local administrators that they are prevented from doing more damage to their own country. However, they yield to a strong hand, and are not vexed or resentful if we prevent them from doing stupid things.[10]

Perhaps the most important aspect of Bishop Gwynne's ministry was his work among Allied troops stationed in Egypt during the Second World War. Though Egypt remained neutral for most of the War, Bishop Gwynne was a fervent supporter of the Allied cause. Despite the rising tide of Egyptian nationalism, the leaders of the Anglican Church in Egypt always tended to side with British interests, jeopardising the mission of the Anglican Church among Egyptians and frequently placing Egyptian Anglicans in a difficult position. CMS missionaries had many reasons to be wary of the bishop and his links with British policy in Egypt. But there were also forces from their side which mitigated against further unity under the person of the bishop. Though publicly supportive of episcopacy as a defining mark of Anglicanism, CMS has tended to have an evangelical suspicion of the institutional aspects of the church and of the control over its actions which the hierarchy might seek. S. A. Morrison, CMS Secretary in Egypt indicated that this suspicion was strongly felt by the mission there. He saw attempts by Bishop Gwynne's successor, Bishop Allen, to interfere in the running of the mission as autocratic:

2. Relations with Diocese

a) Bishop Allen raised question of Morrison's enlistment of American resources, as subject to his approval and authority - a
claim to which Morrison objected. He has no use for an
autocratic episcopate.[11]

The Revd H. C. Gurney, Morrison's successor, indicated that this suspicion
was longstanding:

For fifteen years I have been quite unaware that CMS had a policy,
which included such clear suspicion of and distrust in the diocesan set-
up. It runs counter to all that I have believed in and have been working
for during these years.[12]

This lack of trust cannot help but have had an impact on the mission and
witness of the Anglican Church in Egypt. CMS has tended to maintain its
autonomy from the institutions of the wider church. Perhaps this afforded it
greater flexibility but it has meant that Anglican mission has tended to be
perceived as a specialist interest pursued outside the body of the Church of
England rather than the business of all Anglican Christians. Its proponents
have operated out of particular theological understandings which have tended
to be narrower than those of the Church as a whole. This has meant that
receiving cultures such as Egypt have not been exposed to the breadth of
Anglican tradition and their churches have often remained theologically
narrow as a result. In 1946, Canon J. McLeod Campbell wrote Christian
History in the Making, outlining some of these concerns. He recognised the
importance missionary societies in spearheading overseas mission but
suggested that just as chartered companies which laid the foundation of the
British Empire were taken over by the state, so too should the Church have
"supreme missionary authority" as had been anticipated by the Lambeth
Conference of 1920.[13] Overseas mission has, however, remained the
province of largely autonomous societies like CMS.

More significant in Egypt than the willingness of the CMS to place its
missionary work under the control of the wider church was its relationship with
British political influence in the country. It had been hoped in 1882 that the
'veiled protectorate' would have provided greater freedom for missionary
activity than had existed before. The reality was that Britain avoided any such
partiality, which might have further complicated its control of a mainly Muslim
country. Missionaries were obliged to confine their activities among Muslims mainly to acts of service rather than open evangelism. Education was a major part of that witness. S.A. Morrison was instrumental in the formation of a committee of liaison, the "Missions and Government" Committee of the Egypt Inter-Mission Council, to lobby the Egyptian Government on this and other matters. This was frequently done through the British Residency, which was seen as having considerable influence over the Government. During negotiations for the 1936 Treaty between Britain and Egypt, Morrison was among those who expressed concern that it should enshrine safeguards for religious minorities, ensuring that they were free to express their faith. This was particularly important for Christian schools such as those operated by CMS. The Egyptian Government had frequently expressed a desire to abolish some of these freedoms. Though sympathetic, Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner, appears to have been prepared to drop the issue in order to secure a treaty. He did, however, offer encouragement by suggesting that freedom of religion might be enshrined in Egypt's application to join the League of Nations:

Early in the negotiations it appeared that there was no hope of securing the insertion in the Treaty of any safeguard for minorities but interviews with Sir Miles Lampson (the British High Commissioner in Egypt), the British Foreign Office, and the State Department at Washington lend encouragement to the hope that provisions similar to those inserted in the Treaty covering Iraq's admission to the League of Nations will be demanded when Egypt submits to Geneva the application for membership of that body.[14]

Negotiations at Montreaux in May 1937 were seen by Morrison as beneficial for missionaries in that they abolished capitulations[15] and put a time limit on the life of mixed tribunals.[16] Both of these had contributed to the impression among Egyptians that foreigners, including missionaries, were above Egyptian law. The negotiations at Geneva for the admission of Egypt to the League of Nations were, however, less successful from the point of view of religious minorities:

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**
One of the major activities of the "Missions and Government" Committee of the Egypt Inter-Mission Council, of which I am secretary, was the conduct of negotiations with the Egyptian Government, the British Residency (now the Embassy) and the British Foreign Office (through the International Missionary Council) for the securing of guarantees at Montreaux and Geneva. But whereas some success, as we have indicated, attended the negotiations in connection with the Capitulations Conference, those at Geneva were frustrated by the point blank refusal of the Egyptian delegation to give any further assurances for the protection of minorities in Egypt to the League of Nations.[17]

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that Britain had sufficient influence over Egypt to secure these assurances. The fact that it did not do so suggests that it did not place a sufficiently high priority on them to wish to do so. Though Britain was a supposedly Christian country with an established church, it was prepared to sacrifice the interests of Christians in Egypt, including members of the Anglican Church there, for the sake of securing a favourable treaty with the Egyptian Government. The interests of the "British" church were not always co-terminus with those of the British state and the influence of the former over the latter certainly had its limits:

These Christian minorities have in the past been neglected and somewhat cowed by the rather blatant Moslem-Arab political sympathy shown by H.M.G. and its officials in these parts; largely on account of our desire not to offend the susceptibilities of the Moslem world in general and India in particular.[18]

One of the tensions with which British missionaries in Egypt lived was that the Egyptian press sometimes accused them of being the agents of British imperialism. This charge was sometimes used to undermine the Wafd Party which was sometimes seen as sympathetic to missionaries rather than to the growing nationalism within Egypt.[19] S.A. Morrison believed that among the many effects of the 1936 Treaty:

Another should be the liberation of missionaries from the oft-repeated charge of being political agents, and of being in the pay of the controlling Power.[20] No longer is there any ground for associating the missionary enterprise in the Egyptian mind with the supposed Imperialistic policy of Great Britain. In this respect, missions should gain rather than lose by the withdrawal of British influence.[21]
Missionaries were quick to reject the charge that they were British agents, though sometimes with a lack of self-awareness that today appears breathtaking. They were citizens of the occupying power and could not help but bring many British values and aspirations with them as part of their mission. Where their interests coincided with those of the British Embassy, some missionaries were willing to offer it practical support. In one of his reports, S.A. Morrison noted the widespread fear among Egypt’s elite of a Communist revolution.

In 1950, S.A. Morrison felt it incumbent on him to side with the rich and powerful by assisting the British Embassy in its efforts to oppose Communism in Egypt:

The British diplomatic officials have been making a special study of this question at the request of the Foreign Office and my help was solicited in providing information for the report which was sent home.[23]

In the following year, Morrison went further:

It will also be of interest to know that the Publicity Section of the British Embassy is publishing an edition of 5,000 copies in Arabic of a 32-page booklet I wrote under a 'nom de plume' on "Communism is not the Answer to Egypt’s Problems." This booklet is being published by a commercial book-seller in Cairo, so that the source of the subsidy will not be disclosed.[24]

This was at a time when western paranoia about Communism was very high and many Christians, including Morrison, believed it was their duty to oppose it. But this covert interference in the domestic politics of Egypt was a very dangerous ploy for any missionary, exposing all missionaries to charges of
being agents for foreign powers. It put all the laudable work being done by
CMS in such areas as education and health at some risk.
Perhaps this willingness to risk interference in the politics of Egypt was a
result of a changing political climate. In 1949, Morrison detected that the
atmosphere in which missionaries were operating had eased.[25] The failure
of the Arab attack on Israel had weakened the idea of a pan-Islamic Arab
block, encouraging Egypt to align herself with one of the western powers. The
excesses of the Muslim Brotherhood had shown the dangers of extreme
Islamic nationalism. In addition, the Egyptian Government was anxious about
the influence of Communism. A diverse religious context with strong links to
the West seemed desirable. Sadly for the Anglican Church, this situation was
not to last.
Continuing failure to negotiate a treaty between Britain and Egypt for the
withdrawal of British troops contributed to a rising new tide of Egyptian
nationalism. CMS’s continued control of its institutions in an increasingly anti-
British environment made it more and more difficult for them to be run
effectively, especially in the Delta and Canal Zone where anti-British feeling
was strongest. Staff were sometimes threatened.[26] In 1951, it was alleged
by demonstrators in Menouf that the Hospital there was being used as a
means of generating income to buy British arms:

They … say we are making money out of our institutions there to buy
arms with which the British are shooting Egyptians in the Canal
Zone.[27]

By 1952 things were getting worse:

Some of our staff must have had to suffer for their connections with us
at a time when employment with the British army was denounced by
the government as treason punishable by law; when workers were
being called upon to leave British firms employing them, and when
British goods were boycotted, even to the extent that doctors were told
not to prescribe British drugs.[28]

As a result of these sorts of accusations, 'CMS' was removed from the titles of
institutions in Egypt. The properties, however, remained in CMS hands. CMS
was reluctant to place its properties in the hands of local Egyptians because of experiences elsewhere:

We have found from very long experience that where the Church is very small in numbers there are great problems involved in giving it complete ultimate control over a vast institution involving a great amount of money and patronage.[29]

This caused frustration to C.M.S. personnel in Egypt as well as to local Egyptians:

At what stage does CMS London recognise a local Christian Council as being independent of mother's apron-strings, and allow it the freedom to improve or to ruin itself which God allows to all children through the gift of free will?[30]

It should also be noted, however, that members of the Egyptian Episcopal Church were reluctant to accept responsibility for CMS property. This was because they believed that while buildings and land remained in the hands of CMS they remained under the protection of the British Government. This situation had applied under the Capitulations which were a hangover from the Ottoman Empire but these had been abolished in 1937. Whatever the causes of the failure to hand over property, the effects were that their administration was made much more difficult after the Suez Crisis.

It was, though, some time before these effects began to be felt. In spite of the growing anti-British feeling in the early 1950's:

On the whole, the relations between the Egyptian and British members of the Hospital team had not been affected by the tension in the country.[31]

Jesse Hillman, CMS Secretary in Egypt, noted the attacks on British property of 26th January 1952 but said that:

None of the Christian institutions in Cairo were attacked, even when they were in the very centre of the devastated areas.[32]

Egyptian respect for buildings with a religious association was stronger than Egyptian hatred of Britain. When the Suez Crisis arose in July 1956, it took some time for its additional effects to be felt by the mission. As late as
September that year, the missionaries were experiencing few additional deprivations:

We are feeling most embarrassed by the number of friends who commiserate with us in the present situation, and who write to assure us of their prayers for our safety. We for our part feel that such sympathy is rather misplaced, in view of the perfect normality of conditions here and the evident friendliness which is shown to us in our ordinary contacts with Egyptians.[33]

It was not long, however, before events were to have a greater impact on CMS personnel. British doctors were struck off the Egyptian medical register. Their telephones were disconnected and radio sets were confiscated. Naturally, the question arose as to whether the remaining CMS missionaries should leave Egypt. In a letter of 1st November 1956, CMS left this decision to the missionaries themselves but expressed the hope that they would remain in Egypt as long as they were permitted to do so by the Egyptian authorities.[34] According to a memo of 2nd November, following a telephone call from Max Warren, General Secretary of CMS, to Jesse Hillman, all the missionaries wanted to stay, despite British Consular warnings that they should leave.[35] Events were, however, soon to overtake them. A few days later, CMS missionaries were among the 713 British people and 740 French who were deported by the Egyptian Government. They were treated courteously but their passports were marked 'no return'. Some were asked to sign a paper saying they were leaving voluntarily but they refused. The Egyptian Government alleged that they had been involved in anti-Egyptian activities:

The only measure taken by the Egyptian Government was the deportation of those nationals of the aggressor countries known for having carried out activities that are definitely detrimental to the country's cause.

(This accusation was later withdrawn in a statement by H.E. M. Omar Loutfi, Egypt's Permanent Representative at the United Nations, in September 1957).
Like the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, CMS was critical of the British Government's actions. It issued a press release on 4th November 1956 deploiring the British Government's activities in Egypt:

We are deeply concerned lest the recent actions of our government, even if successful for the moment, may make this [missionary] task much more difficult. All our Christian witness must be given in the context of the aspirations and the climate of opinion in the newly independent countries of Asia, which also profoundly affect Africa today. It is part of our privilege and our responsibility to understand these aspirations and to share this understanding with others.

If our Government appear to be trying to re-establish western control by force, the effect on the witness of our Society may well be disastrous. We therefore most heartily endorse, from our special angle the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury during the House of Lords debate: "Here surely we are wise to see what other people think of us."

But our concern is not only with our own work. We believe that the universal desire among formerly subject peoples for self-determination is a healthy movement of the human spirit. This means that our own country among others must accept a diminished position in the international scene. Some, consciously or unconsciously resenting this, may try to set the clock back. We hold it to be our Christian duty to seek, even at considerable risk, an open international society of justice and peace, in which all men can meet each other with mutual respect and in the dignity of freedom.[36]

Remarkably, much of the work of the Church in Egypt was able to continue under Egyptian leadership. Old Cairo Hospital was seized by the authorities but Menouf Hospital remained as a church institution, despite financial deprivations. The Episcopal College was taken over by the Egyptian Government but schools in Menouf and on Rhoda Island in Cairo continued their work as usual, as did the Literature Board. Services continued in English and Arabic at the Cathedral and in Alexandria. Churches in Maadi and
Helwan (suburbs of Cairo) and Suez were used by other Christian groups while those at Port Said and Ismailia were closed. Given that the British had bombed Egypt it is surprising that greater restrictions were not placed upon the activities of the Episcopal Church. It is a tribute to the good work that was being done in its name that the backlash against it was not greater. The Egyptian leadership left to keep things going could not be said to have been fully prepared for the sudden responsibility placed upon it but it succeeded in keeping things going. A shortage of missionary personnel in the months leading up to the crisis had perhaps helped by obliging Egyptian staff to take more responsibility. Perhaps the dramatic political events which had caused this sudden handover had precipitated something that should have been completed long before and might otherwise have been spread out over a number of years.

The relationship between Britain and the mission of the Anglican Church in Egypt was a complex one. Symbiotic in places. Antithetical in others. British imperialism had caused many setbacks to the Anglican Church in Egypt. At the same time, it should also be remembered that it helped to create a space in which the church was able to develop. The Church could have been expected to pay a higher price for its associations but was perhaps spared this because of its valued medical and educational work. Remarkably, it has survived and continues today, a small and largely static, but much more indigenous church, acting as bridge between the ancient and reformed churches and providing an important meeting point between Anglicanism and Islam. Born almost by accident, it remains questionable whether it should continue to exist. It could perhaps become part of a larger protestant church of the Middle East. Alternatively, the reform of the Coptic Church, for which the first CMS missionaries had hoped might one day reach the point where an Egyptian Episcopal Church is no longer considered necessary. A more likely scenario is, however, that it will continue like those deposited by other cultures, washed up by the high tide of British imperialism.

Notes:
i[3] Ibid. p263.
i[4] Ibid. p264.
i[5] Ibid. p264
i[7] Between 1925 and 1947, one hundred and seventy nine people were received into the Egyptian Anglican Church from other churches, one hundred and thirty seven of them from the Coptic Church. AS 35/49 G2 E1 1946-1948. CMS Overseas Division Asia 1935-1959, 174/12. CMS Archives. University of Birmingham.
i[15] Privileges, including preferential trade terms, tax-free status and exemption from local law afforded to foreigners.
i[16] System of courts reserved for foreigners.
Many of the scurrilous attacks on missionary work which appeared in the Arabic press during the newspaper campaign of 1933-4 have been reproduced, and the implication is that the Wafd party is lending its support to missionary activity. Morrison, S.A. Annual CMS Letter 1938, G3 AL 1935-1939. CMS Archives, Birmingham University Archives.