

The Midland Churches of 1651.

MR. BOWSER has done well to invite a study of the thirty churches and sixty-one men who issued a joint General Baptist confession. In those days men met in private houses, and those in many villages formed one church, which might thus have a name as compound as a railway station, Blankney and Metheringham, Long Clawson and Hose. It is not hard to identify the modern churches of Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincoln, Coningsby, Boston, Spalding, Gosberton, Oakham, Wymeswold, Mountsorrel, Shepshed, Leicester, Earl Shilton, Sutton-in-the-Elms, Long Buckby.

The thirty churches held a meeting. From the records of the Fenstanton church we know of another, five years later, and of a third in Cambridgeshire. The Association habit was already formed. Forty years later, these churches grouped in two Associations, whose centres were Lincoln and Leicester. It is interesting that the New Connexion of General Baptists had its strength over exactly the same district, and absorbed many of these early churches. But now to details.

A little light is thrown on some of these men by a letter to Cromwell on the first of January, 1651/2, by the Humble Representation and Vindication, printed in 1654, by another Confession published on 15 March, 1659/60, by the Second Humble Address from Lincoln on 16 January, 1660/1, by the Third Humble Address on 23 February, 1660/1, by the licences of 1672 and 1673, issued under the Declaration of Indulgence, and even by the minute-book of the Lincolnshire Association in 1698. For the Lincolnshire references, thanks are due to the Rev. A. S. Langley, F.R.Hist.S.

LINCOLNSHIRE was a stronghold, as might be expected from the early work of John Smyth at Gainsborough and Lincoln city, and his followers in the isle of Axholm. Twelve churches sent delegates on this occasion. The most northerly was at North Willingham; this work can be traced at Cherry Willingham a score of years later, also perhaps at Kirton-in-Lindsey in 1663. One of the present delegates was young Ralph James, who signed the Second Humble Address in 1661, took out a licence in 1672, and was at the 1698 Association. The other was Daniel Cheeseman, who also signed both addresses; John Cheeseman was working at Folkestone in 1669.

Seven miles south-east lay Goulceby, where the Drewrys were leaders, as still in 1661. This appears to be the origin of the Asterby Church.

Lincoln church dated from 1626 at least, and to-day may claim (with Tiverton) to be one of the oldest churches whose history can be traced continuously. One leader here was Valentine James, who signed in 1661, and in 1672 took a licence for his house at Hackthorne. The name of his colleague, "John Johnjohns," is unique, not to say suspicious.

Seven miles south-east is Blankney. Of Gregory Allen and John Lucas nothing else is known; but men of the same surname abounded in the Bucks. churches.

Tattershall proved a permanent cause, though to-day it calls itself Coningsby. Nothing more is known of Codlyn, but John Lupton was soon chosen Messenger, or General Superintendent, and vigorously executed his office. He was at the General Assembly in London, 1654; on another journey to London in 1657 he bought the first minute-book for this church; he was a baker at Coningsby, and a farthing token was issued by him in 1663; he died in 1670.

Further down the Witham lay Boston, the site of another permanent church. Besides Edward Cock it had Richard Crawford, whose name puzzled the printer and many a reader, but suggests a Scot arriving by water.

Swineshead had William Barnes and William Hart, who in 1672 licenced his house at Collingham across the Trent, while John Thorp was licensed at Frampton hard by this place.

Surfleet had John Lacy and Robert Massey. The former soon moved to Hemingford Gray, took a licence for Godmanchester in 1672, was chosen Messenger by 1697, and took a leading part in opposing Caffin. Robert Massey had to resist Puritan intolerance before 1660. His family has long been known in his district, and the church survives at Spalding. In 1672 Richard Wale took a licence for his house at Pinchbeck, and the church at Gosberton dates itself from 1666.

Inland again, on a brook that drains into the Welland, lies Leasingham, represented in 1651 by Robert Tompson and Richard (not Robert) Machyn. The Lincolnshire Association book is cited by Adam Taylor as telling of assistance given the cause at Sleaford, three miles south, about 1700. Robert Tompson on 25 May, 1653, signed a letter to Cromwell as representing a Baptist church at Cranbrook, in Kent, and though the distance is great, we know other Baptists at this time sent down there as evangelists. If we look backwards, there were Thomsons of Louth who became Baptists at Amsterdam in 1609; if forwards, W. Thompson was at South Collingham in 1719, another W.

Thompson was famous at Boston from 1762 to 1794. Machin signed a Humble Address in 1661.

Seven miles south-west lies Welby, on the moors, whence Angleshaw and Everard attended. The cause itself can be traced in 1672 by John Skerrett taking a licence for Manthorpe. Angleshaw is not known. The Everards are well known: William in 1655 was Elder of Easton, Welby, and Westby; Robert wrote a pamphlet to which the present Faith and Order is annexed; he was a captain who did good service in 1659, became a Roman Catholic, and got into further controversy; the family yielded Baptists at least till 1860.

Westby is six miles south; here John Allen and Robert Cock were members in 1651. Allen in 1672 took a licence for his house at Easton, while Henry Hitchcock took another for Ingoldsby. Robert Cock signed in 1661.

The last of the Lincolnshire churches was at Thurlby, two miles south of Bourn. It sent three representatives, an exceptional fact, perhaps due to a linking with Langtoft, a long straggling village a mile north of Market Deeping. The Fenstanton records mention the church for five years longer, with the names of many members. The group can be traced at Stamford in 1672, with Abel Laine preaching at William Collington's house; also at Thurlby, in the house of widow Perk. The causes at Bourn and Hackenby may continue the tradition.

RUTLAND had three churches in 1651. One was at Burléy, and it seems to have had an uneventful existence, allying with Morcott in 1747, until in 1770 it reconstructed on a Particular Baptist basis, and took the name Oakham, joined the new Northants Association in 1773, and furnished an original subscriber to the B.M.S. in the person of Abraham Greenwood.

A second church was at Thorpe-by-Water in 1651, but a difference of opinion as to laying on of hands caused a division five years later. James Tiptaft (not Tientoft, which appears to be an error of the 1651 printer), headed the Thorpe group, which faded away; but the Tiptafts are known in other connexions. The more enduring section worshipped at Wakerley across the Welland in Northants, and at Uppingham, whence they were reported in 1715. But Anthony Snell had moved to Stickney in Lincolnshire, where he took out a licence in 1672. His name is printed here Suell, and might appear elsewhere as Sewell.

A third church was at Tixover in 1651, but soon met chiefly at Morcott or at Harringworth across the river, where the Stangers were leaders. The Lee family is well known at Spratton from 1702.

LEICESTERSHIRE again contained nine churches.

Waltham on the Wolds was evidently the meeting-place of

what afterwards centred at Knipton; this church passed on to the New Connexion. Its 1651 representative, John Parker, signed in 1661, while Henry Redgate was reported in 1669.

Wymeswould is still the seat of a church, which modestly and unnecessarily takes the date of 1780. Of William Franke nothing is known. Richard Lay was possibly related to Matthew Ley of Tixover, or the Lees of Spratton.

Normanton-on-Soar is really in Notts, though a few houses may be on the Leicestershire side. A little church still exists there, though the history has not been traced. Of William Wild nothing is known. William Parker was reported in 1669 from Loughborough, within four miles; but his work died out; when the Barton preachers began next century here, there was no Baptist foundation on which to build.

Mountsorrel is another case where the modern date of 1820 obscures the fact of a history which has one thread, albeit it wore very thin in 1788. Fielding is unknown; Kendall was reported in 1669 from Sibleby.

Whitwick is in the Charnwood forest. An Association that met at Peterborough in 1656 coupled together "Whitwell and Markfield," mentioning George More again; Hebb is unknown. This may be the origin of the Shepshed church that emerges in 1690.

Leicester is another enduring church, and it is strange that Friar Lane claims only 1665 as its date, when both Coniers Conigrave and Rogers are known as corresponding with Cromwell, when George Fox met the church in 1654, when William Inge and Thomas Christian attended Association two years later, promised a subscription for evangelistic work from Leicester, and undertook to stir up Earl Shilton and Mount Sorrel. The Christians were good Baptists in the neighbourhood for scores of years; Inge was reported in 1669.

Earl Shilton's representatives in 1651 are unknown afterwards. But in 1672 William Biggs took a licence to preach here at the house of Edward Cheney; both families kept up their Baptist traditions. All around, similar work went on: Richard Boosh at Ratby, William Peasant at Bosworth, John Jones in John Oneby's house at Barwell (Onebys were also at Long Lawford, in Warwick), William Sadler at Nuneaton, John Kitchin at Shilton. In Earl Shilton itself it is not clear that work was continuous; but the ancient Leicester Association in 1758 backed the appeal of the church at Earl Shilton for a building fund, without a hint that it was a new church.

Bitteswell had Thomas Morris and Thomas Townsend. The latter continued as Elder till his death in 1704. In 1672 John

Kitchin was licensed for Lutterworth, a mile away. This is the church well known as Sutton-in-the-Elms.

Theddingworth was the only other in the county represented in 1651, when William Poole and William Burdet appeared. Both were of staunch Baptist families, and Burdett took a licence in 1672 for his house at Mowsley. The group then showed also in William Hartshorne at Harborough, Henry Hartshorne at Lubenham, Thomas Carne at Sibbertoft across the Welland.

WARWICKSHIRE had two churches, not far apart. Easenhall is two miles south of Monk's Kirby and a mile and a half from Pailton. John Oneby flourished in 1669, and in 1672 took out a licence for Barwell in Leicester; widow Oneby had her home in Long Lawford licensed for Wilcox to preach in. The family flourished at Canterbury a generation later. The Perkins family also was staunchly Baptist: John in 1672 had his house at Shilton licensed for Kitchin to preach in; he is hardly likely to be the Parson Drove uncle of Samuel Pepys; Richard in 1672 took a licence for Weston; John of Winslow is known in 1700.

The other church was at Marston, probably the Marston on the Avon, though we must remember Butlers Marston, near Kineton, Lea Marston near Water Orton, Prior's Marston three miles from Byfield in Northants, Marston Green six miles east of Birmingham, and Marston Jabbett two miles south of Nuneaton. Richard Wills and Thomas Jeffs are unknown.

The puzzle is why the Coventry church, known in 1626, and existing to-day, was not represented; or whether these two groups really represent it, though they lived six miles away.

NORTHANTS was represented only by Ravensthorpe, near Long Buckby, and West Haddon. The cause seems continuous, though the centre has shifted slightly. Under the influence of Ryland the people imbibed Particular Baptist views, built in 1812, formed a new church 1819. But in the early period Francis Stanley held the banner till 1696, while Benjamin Morley went to strengthen the cause at Winslow, in Bucks, before 1698.

OXFORD had a single church on its northern border, at Horley. This is near Burton Dassett, in Warwick, where Baptists were known in 1672, and Weston, by Weedon in Northants, where they flourished by 1681. At Horley itself the cause persisted, Nathaniel Kinch being leader in 1715, and it had apparently a meeting-house in 1724, for he came then to White's Alley in London and took up a collection for a fire. John Danvers in 1654 was at the military church at the Chequer in Aldgate; perhaps colonel Henry Danvers was of his family. John Newman perhaps survived till 1691, when one of his name was a member at Dockhead, in Southwark.

BEDFORDSHIRE had a single church, at Sundon, five miles north of Luton. There were plenty of other churches in the county, but all Calvinist, and though some would fraternize with Calvinistic pedobaptists, they would not with Arminian Baptists. Sundon is heard of at intervals till 1759. Samuel Tide may be connected with the Tidds of Dunstable. Thomas Partridge was prominent at Dover in 1660 and 1669, while Samuel Partridge was at Aylesbury soon after.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE had the church at Fenstanton. Edmund Male figures constantly in its records. The Cock family was in many General Baptist churches, such as Amersham, Berkhamstead, Ford, Chalford St. Giles, Great Missenden, Brentford, in one direction, Westby and Boston in the opposite.

From the Fenstanton records, fully published in 1854, we learn that there was an Association meeting held at Stamford on 2 and 3 July, 1656, when two men were told off as Messengers for work in the west. The churches then mentioned were Leicester, Earl Shilton, Mount Sorrell, Nottingham, Winsford, Rempstone, Peterborough, Wisbech, Fenstanton, Ravensthorpe, Newton, Whitwicke, Markfield, Twyford, Langtoft, Thurlby, Bytham, Uppingham. Other churches in the district with which Fenstanton corresponded were Bourn, Haddenham (Cambs.), Spalding, besides a large group in Cambridge, who held a meeting in that town on 28 September, 1655.

Hamlets in Surrey and Sussex.

THE road from London to Brighton, between the North Downs and St. Leonard's Forest, passes near the villages of Hookwood, Horley, Charlwood, Crawley; on the alternative route to the east, the motorist runs through Horley Row, Copthorne, Worth, and Balcomb. In a tangle of lanes further east lie Inholme in Haroldsley, Shepherd's farm, the Outwood, Cogman's farm, Horne, Smallfield, Bysshe court, Burstowe, Turner Hill, West Hoathley, with East Grinstead as an outlier on the road to Lewes and Hastings. On the main road from Reigate to Sevenoaks will be found Nutfield, Bletchingley, Godstone, Oxted, and Limpsfield. In these obscure hamlets, all within seven miles of Horne, Baptists kept open house for one another to worship in, perhaps as early as 1650, certainly as late as 1823. To-day, over the whole area, Baptists have only modern