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ABINGDON REVISITED 1656 - 1675

What follows is intended as a supplement to the article which Dr B. R. White contributed to these pages in 1974, 'John Pendarves, the Calvinistic Baptists, and the Fifth Monarchy'.¹ Drawing on Professor B. J. Capp's book, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (1972), together with his own researches, Dr White showed the significance of a leading Baptist millenarian in Cromwell's time. John Pendarves was minister of the Baptist church at Abingdon, Berkshire, from c.1650 till his death in 1656. Dr E. A. Payne had already drawn attention to the church's importance, but only within the limits appropriate to a general study of *The Baptists of Berkshire Through Three Centuries* (1951). With the help of Dr B. W. Ball's *The Seventh-Day Men* (Clarendon Press, 1994),² it is now possible to provide a fuller account of the church's life in the years following Pendarves' death. It is a remarkable story of fidelity to a lost leader.

The most notorious event in Pendarves' own story is his funeral at Abingdon on 30 September 1656, which was attended by people not only from Abingdon and Oxford, from London (where he died) and from Cornwall (the county of his birth), but from other places as far away and as distant one from another as Hexham, Hull, Norwich and Exeter.

When Pendarves came to Abingdon the commander in charge of the garrison there was the Leveller, William Rainsborough.³ When in October 1648 Rainsborough was mortally wounded in a scuffle, his funeral at Wapping was turned into a Leveller public demonstration.⁴ The authorities had no wish to see Pendarves' funeral become a similar occasion in the Fifth Monarchy interest, and to disperse those attending troops were sent, with resultant distress. This may look like over-reacting, but it was a nervous time. Less than a month later the Quaker, James Nayler, was the centre of a crowd in Bristol, singing 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Sabaoth'; the house they made for was an inn owned (though he did not live there) by Dennis Hollister, an MP in the Barebones Parliament of 1653, and on the title-page of a tract published that year by Hollister, now a Quaker but formerly a Broadmead Baptist, *The Skirts of the Whore Discovered*,⁵ is the name 'John Pendarviss'. What was going on? Penruddock's rebellion had been put down, and the Baptist Leveller, Wildman, had been set free; but Wildman was still intriguing, as was his confederate Sexby - in Carlyle's rhetoric 'the Hydra, royalist and sansculottist', has many heads' - and in April 1657 there was, in fact, a Fifth-Monarchist plot, led by Thomas Venner (who in 1661 made another attempt, and was executed). Venner was not at Pendarves' funeral (he was under arrest), but one of those present from London, John Jones, a Fifth Monarchist who had been in prison, had been preaching in March to Venner's congregation in Swan Alley. John Canne was there. So was another Barebones MP, the Fifth Monarchist, Francis Langden. The two attending from North Walsham in Norfolk were both of them

prominent⁶ in the leading Fifth Monarchist Baptist church there, and probably travelled as its representatives. The authorities had good grounds to be suspicious.

At this time a straightforward literalism, in place of more traditional typologies, was gaining ground with earnest students of Scripture, who, the more if they were also enthusiasts, could feel the attraction of a humanizing exemplarist Christology: 'Let him in constancy Follow the Master'. At the same time the demise of the monarchy, an incipient historicism and fascination with the law (strengthened by a legalist tendency within Calvinism) combined to focus attention on the King from whose Law not one jot or tittle was abrogated or ever would be: 'O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day'. Those who abandoned the baptism of infants as unscriptural sometimes proceeded to insist on the laying on of hands in reception into church membership; or to adopt dietary restrictions such as abstinence from blood; or to observe the practice of foot-washing; or to worship on Saturday instead of Sunday as the biblical Sabbath; or to refrain from broided hair or costly array; or to wait for consolation, or more actively to look for a redemption drawing nigh, in the King's promised return. Scripture is manifold, and there was no steady logical progression: laws, commands, prophecies, examples weighed differently on different minds and could cross the boundaries of what were not yet called denominations: *The Royall Law, and Covenant of God* (1655) was by the Quaker, James Nayler, *The Royal Law Contended for* by the Baptist, Edward Stennett: when Pendarves published his *Arrowes against Babylon* (1656), its second part was entitled *Endeavours for reformation in apparrell. Or Some reasons rendred for saints forbearing to put upon their garments such trimmings as are altogether superfluous, and apparently useless*: in this he recognized the 'danger of being numbred with the Quakers, seeing they are obsrved to speake much against pride in apparrell', but pointed out that the same objection could be raised to testifying against false worship and to speaking of the Spirit.⁷

A funeral that drew people together from far afield was also, of course, attended by some from Abingdon. At least seven of those who, from one source or another, can be shown to have been members of the Abingdon church in 1656 were present, one being Edward Stennett (of whom more later). From their meeting on 16-18 September 1656 the 'Abingdon' Association of churches, in which Pendarves had taken an active part, sent a letter to churches in Northumberland lamenting the 'stroke of the Lord' 'in taking from us our deare brother Pendarves, while he was yet young in yeares and a constant instrument in his hand of much good unto his people',⁸ and the three Abingdon church members who attended the Association's meetings most frequently were all present at the funeral a fortnight later. Others in membership were not,⁹ including two whose names are also in the Association's records, John Belcher and Captain Consolation Fox. Earlier a Leveller who had served in the regiment of the regicide, Richard Ingoldsby, Consolation Fox, who was perhaps born a radical,¹⁰ in all probability had Fifth Monarchist sentiments. Belcher certainly did. In April 1658 he was arrested with a number of suspects, one

of whom had been involved in Venner's plot; two of the others were at the funeral. In the Association Belcher had previously been in good standing, but by June 1660 (a month after the King's return) 'he standeth excommunicate by the church of Abingdon of which he was formerly a member', and the Association (not quite unanimously) requested its constituent churches to advise their members against hearing him preach or allowing him 'to be their mouth in prayer'.¹¹

For the rest of his life Belcher was in London as the elder of the Seventh-Day Baptist church in Bell Lane;¹² but with his fellow-elder, Richard Parnham, a Fifth Monarchist who had served in Ireton's regiment and had attended Pendarves' funeral, he retained a link with Abingdon through association with Edward Stennett, who had come to hold Seventh-Day principles, and from whom Belcher perhaps learned them while still in membership with him in the Abingdon church. In 1664 Belcher wrote the preface to Stennett's *The seventh day is the Sabbath day* and in 1667 Parnham¹³ wrote the preface to the second edition¹⁴ of Stennett's *The Royal Law Contended for*, and both men added their names to Stennett's in the 'Faithful Testimony' appended to this work. Stennett died in 1691, but in the previous year his son Joseph was ordained an elder at Pinners Hall in a service in which Belcher took part; and when Belcher died it was Joseph Stennett who preached his funeral sermon, *The Groans of a Saint* (1695).¹⁵

Belcher's association with Edward Stennett was, in fact, ecclesial as well as literary and personal. The strictness with which these churches treated membership, guarding the Lord's Table from those without, was mitigated by their readiness to allow transient membership to those already in membership elsewhere. It is a tribute to their friendship that, while Stennett was a transient member of Belcher's church in Bell Lane, Belcher was a transient member of the church to which Stennett ministered at Wallingford¹⁶ - as if in Christian defiance Stennett had taken up residence in the castle ruins in the town from which the troops had been sent to Pendarves' funeral.

In 1659-60 the church at Wallingford had twice been represented at meetings of the Association by Consolation Fox. Dr White suggests that Fox stayed on at Wallingford, and returned to Abingdon because Stennett had 'captured' Wallingford for Seventh-Day observance.¹⁷ Hostility between the two men is unlikely, however, Stennett had been a chaplain in the Parliamentary army, and had shown himself willing to collaborate with the Fifth Monarchist, Belcher; Belcher, it is true, was as staunch in his Seventh-Day principles as Stennett was, but if Fox did not share these (and his radical stance may have made him sympathetic), Stennett was notably restrained in enforcing his own views on others. In any case, if Fox did return to Wallingford, it was before, not after, Stennett went there. In the 1660s Stennett was still in Abingdon,¹⁸ and did not leave till 1671,¹⁹ and Fox was in Abingdon in 1664, when he was fined, and in 1669, when the church was meeting in his house²⁰ and he was excommunicated in the church courts.²¹ He was an Abingdon maltster and may, in fact, always have resided there, for a time exercising

oversight over the Wallingford church and representing it at the Association at its request. Abingdon and Wallingford are not far apart and were not, as now, separated by the railway line but connected by the river, then 'one of the major commercial routes',²² making movement between them a matter of course.²³ What seems likely is that Fox and Stennett were in collaboration and that at some point Stennett, who perhaps already had an interest in the church at Warborough,²⁴ also took over responsibility for Wallingford, and eventually went to live there. Concern of this sort was shared by others in the church, and was the continuation of a missionary activity characteristic of it ever since the years when Pendarves was its minister.

Three men who had been closely associated with Pendarves in the 'Abingdon' Association were John Tomkins, John Comes (Combes, Coombes) and John Jones.²⁵ At its fourth meeting, held in March 1650, the first at which the churches' messengers are named, of the three from Abingdon Tomkins' name follows that of Pendarves; at the next meeting, held in June, Comes was one of the two from Abingdon; and at the seventh, in the following December, the names of Comes and Tomkins appear together, and each of them continued to attend meetings as messengers from Abingdon. At the thirteenth meeting, in March 1656, John Jones signed next after Pendarves, but not again, for reasons to be noted shortly. Together, these three men, each of whom had been at Pendarves' funeral, now provided the leadership needed after his death.

On 12 December 1656, 'being still persuaded 'twill most tend to the Glory of God' (language that seems designed to carry their action back to what was already in their late minister's mind), ninety-nine persons formed a church at Longworth 'as a distinct church from ye Abingdon church', and invited John Comes, 'at present upon Triall, to see how ye Lorde will owne his labours amongst us', to be their minister, 'so long as himself shall be persuaded that his call' was 'from ye Lorde'.²⁶ Exactly a year later, on 11 December 1657, at a meeting at which messengers from Abingdon and other churches were present, the Longworth church was sufficiently well established to approve the separation of twenty-three persons to form 'a distinct Church' at Faringdon, and to give up Comes 'to be a Member with them' and to preach at Longworth only on one Sunday out of three and at Faringdon on the other two.²⁷ Membership, it seems, could be handled flexibly. Comes, who gave oversight to Longworth and now also to Faringdon, was an Abingdon miller and perhaps continued to reside at Abingdon, leaving resident responsibility for Longworth in the hands of John Jones, a Longworth man whose name stands first among those who joined the new church there at its foundation, and who was its messenger at the twenty-third meeting of the Association in June 1660. By the following month Jones, already 'an ancient grave Christian . . . formerly persecuted by the bishops' at the time of Pendarves' funeral, was in prison in Reading. This is the last we hear of him. His place at Longworth was filled by the Thomas Jones who signed next after him when the church was formed

and was probably his son,²⁸ and who also suffered imprisonment at Reading. In 1672 the Longworth church was meeting in his house, and he gave his garden for its burial-ground.²⁹

In 1660 John Comes was in prison with John and Thomas Jones, and in 1664 he was fined as a conventicler at Abingdon; but, just as to regard him as pastor at Longworth³⁰ is to ignore Thomas Jones, so to regard him as pastor at Abingdon³¹ is to ignore Consolation Fox and John Tomkins. In 1672 Comes took out a licence at Abingdon, but in the 1669 return, in which both Fox and Tomkins figure, Comes is not mentioned: like other members, he was probably elsewhere, itinerating.³²

It would probably in fact be a misreading to regard any individual as pastor at Abingdon in the 1660s; but if one member more than another deserves the title it is John Tomkins. Like Fox an Abingdon maltster (possibly they were partners) and fined with him and Comes in 1664, and again in 1669, Tomkins, as we have seen, represented the church together with Pendarves as early as 1653 and repeatedly thereafter; at a meeting held at Abingdon in 1656, a month after Pendarves' death, he was referred to as 'an elder of the church',³³ and in the return for 1669 he is its undoubted leader, or one of them. Here he and Fox are called 'Abbetto'^m of the meetings held at Fox's house and those of others, including another maltster, Simon Peck, who, once again, was at Pendarves' funeral and was fined in 1664 and 1669; more than this, in the 1669 return Tomkins is named with one other as responsible for the 'Strang'^m brought in' to preach.³⁴

Tomkins lived till 1708,³⁵ but when, in the 1670s, the church was at last in calmer waters, it chose as pastor not Tomkins or Comes, nor Consolation Fox, but someone from outside its borders who had spent the twelve years from 1660 to 1672 in Exeter, in prison, Henry Forty.

It is possible that Forty had local associations, for in 1647 a man of this name, which is not a common one, was Rector of St Mary's, Wallingford.³⁶ However that may be, in 1656 Forty had been associated with Pendarves and had come to Abingdon for the funeral.³⁷ He was a Devonian, from Totnes, and Pendarves, perhaps because of his Cornish origins, was often during his Abingdon years with Baptists in the West Country, where he attended meetings of the Western Association at which the Totnes church was represented,³⁸ and shortly before his death Pendarves joined Forty and other Devon ministers in signing a tract entitled *Sighs for Sion* (1656).³⁹ The publisher of this tract, Livewell Chapman, was a leading Fifth Monarchist; the Bovey Tracey minister, Thomas Glasse, who also signed it, was another (or soon would be); so was the quarter-master-general, John Vernon, with whom Forty had earlier signed *Heart-bleedings for professors abominations* (1650).⁴⁰ Since Forty also attended Pendarves' funeral, it was natural for the Government to harbour the suspicions that led to his imprisonment in 1660. After his release in 1672 he was in London with the church to which Henry Jessey had ministered, till in 1675 he became pastor at Abingdon.

Forty's pastorate, which continued for many years, not without excommunication

and a dramatic court case,⁴¹ is outside the limits of this paper; but one must surely be moved by the fidelity⁴² of the church which, having endured much suffering, chose a minister who had suffered more than any of them, and which, as if in loyalty to their former pastor, chose someone who was one of his old associates and had shared their grief in losing him. Both men were more than Fifth Monarchists. In founding an Association of local churches⁴³ Forty was following where Pendarves had led. Forty also wrote against the Quakers,⁴⁴ as Pendarves had done. He may even have helped to shape Pendarves, for he was the older man by seven years. In my end is my beginning.

Dr Payne thinks that as Forty lay in prison year after year his early Fifth Monarchist enthusiasm 'must have faded, or suffered transformation'.⁴⁵ This may be true; but perhaps Forty never was an out-and-out Fifth Monarchist. On this issue the gradations in motivation were more than usually delicate, ranging from intellectual conviction, millenarian hopes or reliance on divine justice to emotional excitement, a political policy or outright plotting. Moreover, 'guilt by association' might readily be assumed by an anxious Government when there was little or no justification in the facts. The Plymouth minister, Abraham Cheare, had signed *Sighs for Sion* like Forty and was imprisoned with him in 1660,⁴⁶ but he is not in Dr Capp's list of Fifth Monarchists.⁴⁷ Nor for that matter is Forty himself. The case 'against' Forty is much less clear than the case 'against' Pendarves.

In his article on Pendarves in these pages Dr White could be thought (as could Dr Payne before him) desirous of 'rescuing' the millenarian Pendarves from any charge of turning to a Fifth Monarchism overtly violent. More recently, in a contribution to the *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals* Dr White states that, though not involved in any plot, Pendarves did allow that arms could be taken up against the Government without sin. This is a useful reminder that the balance of judgment can change - and could in the seventeenth century. The names that have been before us are those of living, breathing persons, who continued to grow and whose views could alter with circumstance and further consideration. Pendarves needs no straitjacket of consistency. He was a man of vision, an inspirer, whose influence worked in many directions at once and continued to work powerfully after his death. One man in the church might go on to be a full-paced Fifth Monarchist, as John Belcher did. In another, such as Stennett, the seed of Seventh-Day convictions might come to flower. Another might be moved by Pendarves' example to preach to, and care for, other churches associated with Abingdon. Many, it is clear, were simply inspired to 'occupy till I come'. For faithful church members this meant to endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and having done all to stand.

NOTES

1 *BQ* 25, no.6, April 1974, pp.251-71.

2 References are provided to Dr Ball's book but

not to Dr White's article, nor to Appendix I of Dr Capp's book, to which I am much indebted.

- 3 See Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains 1642-1651*, 1990, pp.162-3.
- 4 See *DNB*. In 1663 Henry Jessey's funeral 'was attended by four or five hundred persons' (*DNB*).
- 5 For access to this tract and to others in the Bevan-Naish collection at Woodbrooke, Selfy Oak Colleges, Birmingham, I am indebted to the Librarian, Christina Lawson.
- 6 See Ball, p.249.
- 7 A copy of Part II only is in the F. J. Powicke collection (Box 5) at Woodbrooke.
- 8 *Association Records*, 1971-4, ed. B. R. White, p.165.
- 9 A variety of reasons for non-attendance suggest themselves: illness, absence from home, anxiety to avoid trouble, desire not to compromise innocent church members.
- 10 His name, Consolation, suggests that he was of the family of Help-n-High, Hopewell and Sign-Build Fox, sons of Humphrey Fox, suspended Rector of Forthampton, Glos. (see G. I. Soden, *Godfrey Goodman*, 1953, pp.192, 292-3); for Help, Rector of Pool Keyne, Wilts, and Hopewell, Vicar of Lydney, Glos., see *Walker Revised*, ed. A. G. Matthews, Oxford 1948, pp.173,174, and for Hopewell also *The Cruelty of some Fighting Priests published*, 1660, p.9.
- 11 *Association Records*, p.205.
- 12 Belcher's stormy career at Bell Lane, which included imprisonment in the Tower, is traced by Dr Ball, but is not part of the story of the Abingdon church.
- 13 For identification of R. P. as Richard Parnham (rather than Robert Purnell, as Whitley), see Ball, p.111.
- 14 For facsimile of title-page of 2nd edition (1667), see Ball, p.110; the 1st edition (dated 1658 by Whitley) appears not to be extant.
- 15 See Ball, p.110, n.42.
- 16 See Ball, pp.105, 109, 111, 172.
- 17 *Association Records*, p.214, n.112.
- 18 For Stennett's correspondence from Abingdon with the church newly gathered at Newport, Rhode Island, see Ball, pp.170-1. Belcher and Parnham were also corresponding with Newport: see Ball, pp.107-9.
- 19 For the date, see Ball, p.168, with n.19, and p.178, n.71 (correcting Clapinson).
- 20 *Association Records*, p.214, n.112.
- 21 B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 1983, p.105.
- 22 Capp, p.78.
- 23 For a report in 1659 of the reception at Wallingford of a new member from Abingdon, see *Association Records*, p.192.
- 24 The Abingdon brazier named Stamp who preached to the Seventh-Day Baptists at Warborough may be assumed to have been Stennett's disciple, if not emissary: see Ball, pp.172, 179.
- 25 John Jones of Longworth is to be distinguished from John Jones of London (cf. first page of this article), and of course from John Jones of Macs-y-garnedd (the regicide) and other Welshmen with this name.
- 26 John Stanley, *The Church in the Hop Garden*, [1934], pp.66-7.
- 27 *ibid.*, p.69.
- 28 Rather than his brother, as E. A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire*, 1951, p.39.
- 29 *Association Records*, p.210, n.47, and p.213, n.96.
- 30 Stanley, ch.xix.
- 31 In this judgement of Professor Capp Dr Payne concurs, but uncertainly (pp.40, 53).
- 32 For a list of places where he is reported as preaching, including Warborough, see Stanley, p.79.
- 33 *Complaining Testimony*, 1656, cited by Dr White, *BQ* 25, p.266.
- 34 *Original Records of Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence*, ed. G. L. Turner, 1911-14, i.113-14.
- 35 For reference to Tomkins' portrait and to that of the Abingdon bottlemaker, John Tomkins, probably his son, who later became pastor of the church, see Payne, p.69.
- 36 *Walker Revised*, p.69.
- 37 Payne, p.51.
- 38 *Association Records*, p.106, n.20, and p.107, n.24; at one of these meetings Pendarves was one of a radical minority who scrupled the laying on of hands in ordination (p.103).
- 39 Whitley, 36-656; Wing C 3761-2, s.v. Abraham Cheare (the first signatory); copy in Angus Library (1 ⊆ 1 (8)).
- 40 Whitley, 6-650; Wing H 1310; copy in Angus Library (1 ⊆ 8 (A)).
- 41 See Payne, pp.54-5; on 11 July 1686, the day after Forty and seven church members were released, 'many hundreds' assembled for worship.
- 42 Including that of a number of women, among them Pendarves' widow Thomasine and Simon Peck's widow Katharine, with others who opened their homes for worship, such as Jane Tuckwell, one of the Abingdon members, at

- Longworth, who in 1656 had formed the church there: see Payne, pp.44-6, and Stanley, pp.84-5.
- 43 See Payne, pp.62 and 72; churches in the Association included Longworth and Faringdon.
- 44 See Whitley, 24-674, Wing Q 12 and H 1924; and Whitley, 25-675, Wing K 1705, with two copies in Angus Library (1 j 16 (6) and 1 j 24 (5)).
- 45 Payne, p.52.
- 46 *ibid.*
- 47 If 'guilt by association' is to be applied fairly,

we should note that in 1666 Cheare was involved in a memorial for Thomas Glasse, *A mite from three mourners*, the titlepage of which also recalls the death of the Fifth Monarchist, Kohn Wigan (Whitley, 8-666; Wing C8), and in 1667 in a memorial for John Vernon, *Bochim* (Whitley, 3-667; Wing T 16), in both cases with the Fifth Monarchist, W[illiam] A[llen] and in the latter also with J. M., whom Whitley identifies with John Mason, and J. T., who may have been John Talbot, both of them Fifth Monarchists.

GEOFFREY F. NUTTALL

BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL MEETING 1995

The Annual Meeting will be held on 1 July 1995 at Bristol Baptist College.

10.30 a.m. Coffee

11.00 a.m. Society Business

11.30 a.m. Lecture by the Revd Dr W. M. S. West,
President of the Baptist Historical Society,
A Twentieth-Century Baptist

Lunch

2.00 p.m. Lecture by the Revd Dr Brian Haymes,
Principal of Bristol Baptist College,
A Basis for Baptist Union

3 p.m. Bristol walkabout

Cheques for £5 to cover lunch to the Revd Stephen Copson,
9 Silver Birch Road, Erdington, Birmingham B24 0AR