A brief Baptist Church history

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1 First stirrings of an idea

The idea of believer's baptism had gradually been abandoned after the second century AD even though some Christians continued to baptise believers. From the twelfth century AD various groups had begun to criticise the Roman Catholic church, at the time the only recognised Church in western Europe (Robinson, 1912).

In England in the middle of the fourteenth century unrest about the directions in which the Roman Catholic church was heading led some people to question its authority and its involvement in politics. One of these was John Wycliffe (c. 1328–1384) whose great determination was that people should have a Bible to read in their own tongue. This determination spread to other countries, particularly Switzerland and Germany, where Martin Luther (1483–1546) stressed that the Word of God was the sole authority for Christians to follow and, although he didn't aim to bring about the collapse of the medieval church, this is what happened.

Among the groups that sprang up about this time were the Anabaptists, who differed on points of doctrine and organisation but agreed that the Scriptures were the authority for their faith. In Zürich in 1523 Conrad Grebel (1489–1526) and Felix Manz (died c. 1527) met in a private home for Bible study and shared the Lord's Supper using ordinary bread. The following June Conrad Grebel suggested the idea of believer's baptism and in December 1524 Felix Manz argued that infant baptism was invalid. At the time any philosophical or religious dispute was solved through a public debate and on 17 January 1525 Manz was opposed by Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), who had himself introduced new forms of the Lord's Supper. Zwingli won the debate but on 30 January 1525 a group including George Blaurock and Conrad Grebel met at Zollikon, a village near Zürich, where Blaurock asked Grebel to baptise him; then Blaurock baptised the others in the group (Hayden, 2005). On 7 March 1526 Zürich council made re-baptism punishable by drowning and on 5 January 1527 Karl Manz was arrested and condemned to death (though there are conflicting accounts about whether he was executed immediately or escaped and was executed later).

Other leading Anabaptists of the time were Thomas Müntzer (1490–1561) who emphasised the spiritual nature of belief and had no interest in sacraments and Michael Servetus (1511–1553) and Faustus Socinus (1534–1604) who both questioned the idea of the Trinity. The ideas of Socinus were later to split the Baptist community in England.

A particularly sad episode took place in Münster, in Germany, after Bernhard Rothman, who had previously been banned by the Bishop of Münster, became the Lutheran pastor in February 1533. Anabaptists swarmed to the city and in 1534 won an election which brought Jan Matthys to power. When he was killed, Jan Bockelson (also known as John of Leyden) proclaimed himself king, ordered a return to the Old Testament and told everyone to wait for the second coming. Münster was besieged and the Anabaptists slaughtered; some escaped and ten turned up in London in 1575. Five recanted, two were burned as heretics and the others were banished or imprisoned because the

Münster incident had given Anabaptists a bad name.

However, a number gathered round the Roman Catholic priest, Menno Simons, whose brother had died in anti-Anabaptist violence in 1535. On 12 January 1536 he joined the Anabaptists, rejecting the violence of Münster, and is remembered as the founder of the Mennonites.

Though the Anabaptists first expressed many of the ideas which characterise modern Baptists, such as the belief that all can be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, recent historical research suggests that their influence on Baptist churches in England only came after such churches had been founded independently in England (Hayden, 2005).

2 Developments in England

Under the rule of Henry VIII (1491–1547), protestantism in the form of the Church of England emerged because of Henry's clash with the Pope on the question of divorce. The corrupt nature of the Church made some Puritans try to reform the Church from within but, even after the attempts by Elizabeth I (1533–1603) to reconcile the differences within the Church of England, some felt that more drastic measures were needed. Because of this they split from the Church and formed new groups who became known as Separatists.

John Greenwood (1556–1593) entered Corpus Christi (or Benet) College, Cambridge, in 1577–8 to study theology, receiving his Bachelor's degree in 1580–1 and being ordained a priest. What led to the change in his religious beliefs is unknown but after five years he was deprived of his benefice and began holding secret religious services at the home of Lord Robert Rich, of Rockford, Essex, who was interested in his doctrine. When Lord Rich and a clergyman named Robert Wright, who was associated with John Greenwood, were arrested and thrown into prison, John Greenwood went to London where he formed a secret congregation at the house of Henry Martin. Here, early in October, 1586, he was arrested while conducting a service and lodged in the Clink prison.

Ten years his senior, Henry Barrowe had entered Cambridge in 1565, receiving his degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1569–70, and becoming a lawyer. Hearing of Greenwood's arrest, he visited Greenwood at the Clink where he was arrested and locked in with Greenwood. Many times during their imprisonment Greenwood and Barrowe were taken before the authorities of the Church of England and questioned as to their religious beliefs, among them that infant baptism as practised in the Church of England was invalid.

Finally, on March 23, 1593, Greenwood and Barrowe were brought to trial at the Old Bailey and, after a temporary reprieve on March 31 following an appeal to the Lord Treasurer, were secretly taken early on the morning of April 6, 1593 to Tyburn and hanged without ceremony.

After the imprisonment of John Greenwood, Francis Johnson, who had been John Smyth's tutor at Cambridge (see below), became pastor of the Greenwood church in London and when its members fled to Holland he became pastor of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, the church of which Arminius had been pastor until his appointment to the staff of Leyden University in 1603. John's son, Abel, probably returned with his mother to Heptonstall, because both his son, Thomas, and his grandson, Thomas, were baptised in the Parish Church. His grandson was a weaver and emigrated to North America in 1665 (Greenwood, 1914).

While John Greenwood argued for the separation of church and state and his ideas informed the separatist churches who settled in North America, the covenant idea was central to John Penry (1553–1593), a Welshman, who studied at Cambridge and Oxford and then became a preacher. He joined Greenwood's Separatist Church in 1592, after

criticising the authorities for not providing enough Bibles in Welsh and studying Puritan arguments. He wrote

> The Church I believe to be a company of those whom the world calleth saints, which do not only profess in word that they know God, but are also subject to his laws and ordinances in deed. With his Church, I do believe that the Lord of his mere favour hath entered into a covenant that He will be their God and they shall be His people. The seals of the Covenant are only two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Church on earth I do not believe to be perfect, although in regard to the order which the Lord has appointed it for the same it must be absolute, but to have many faults and wants in it; yet I assuredly believe that all the true members thereof shall, at the day of judgement receive their perfect communion by Jesus Christ and be crowned with Him with eternal glory, of His mere grace and not for any merit of their own.

This doctrine came to lie behind the English Separatist movement. On May 22, 1593, he was hanged at St Thomas Waterings along with William Dennis at Thetford and John and Elias Coppin at Bury St Edmunds. Among the grounds for Penry's execution was a letter addressed but never sent to Elizabeth I in which he wrote:

> Briefly, Madam you may well see the foundation of England rooted up; but this cause you will never suppress.

The following year John Smyth (1570–1612) became a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, where he had been a student since 1586, but he gave this up in 1600 to became a preacher in Lincoln. At this time he was a straightforward Anglican clergyman with a leaning to Puritan views but two years later he was sacked for upsetting the local community. So he moved to Gainsborough where he came in touch with Thomas Helwys (c. 1575–c. 1616)

Thomas Helwys had returned in 1595 after three years legal studies in London to his family home at Broxtowe Hall, Billborough, near Nottingham, and married Joan Ashmore. In due course he came into contact with a number of other dissidents within the Church of England, Richard Barnard of Worksop, John Robinson of Scrooby and John Smyth. John Smyth was also in touch with Richard Clyfton, rector of Babworth (1586–1604), and William Brewster as well as Thomas' cousin, Gervase.

John Robinson (born c. 1576) had been a minister at St Andrew's Church, Norwich before coming into contact with John Smyth in Gainsborough. Richard Clyfton had resigned his post in 1604 and gone to live at Scrooby Manor House, the home of William Brewster. The Scrooby Separatist Church was established by those there in 1606 and John Robinson became its pastor. All were gradually adopting the Separatists' view of the church as an independent gathering of adult believers, insisting that, even when a church has chosen elders, it loses none of its covenanted authority.

After James I had approved a new set of canons for discipline in the Church of England in 1604, John Smyth was charged on 26 March 1606 with preaching without a licence when he took a service on 2 March in the absence of the minister appointed. It is not clear what the exact effect of this was on the local congregation but, from 1607 to 1609, John Smyth styles himself the pastor of Gainsborough (Hayden, 2005).

In the autumn of 1607 William Brewster was forced to resign his posts as bailiff and postmaster and on 1 December and 15 December he failed to appear before the High Court and the Ecclesiastical Count respectively, having gone into hiding. He was fined £20 for failing to appear at the first hearing (Dolby, 2012). Ten years later he was a publisher in Leyden, publishing a book by Francis Johnson.

2.1 The first English Baptists

The events described above may have persuaded the group that it would be safer to move to Amsterdam and each settled their affairs and moved there. Possibly in conjunction with them, John Robinson of Norwich moved with his congregation to Leyden (Whitley, 1932).

In *The character of the beast* Smyth and Clyfton (1609) set out the arguments for believer's baptism. John Smyth then baptised himself by affusion before baptising Thomas Helwys and a group of others who by this act broke from the other Separatists to form the first English Baptist church.

In February 1610 John Smyth and thirty-one others decided to join the Mennonites but Thomas Helwys and the rest chose to form a distinctive church. Helwys (1611) set out his reasons in a declaration which, among other things, attacked the Calvinist view that only certain people can be saved. He also decided that it was his duty to return to his country rather than flee from persecution and in 1612 he and a number of others returned to England to establish the first Baptist congregation on English soil at Spitalfields. He may have been encouraged in this by his uncle, Geoffrey, who was a merchant tailor and aldeman of London (Whitley, 1932). That year he published *A short declaration on the mystery of iniquity* which is a plea for religious tolerance but he was imprisoned in Newgate Prison where he died some time before April 1616 when his uncle gave £10 to his widow.

Among those who had returned with Thomas Helwys was John Murton from Gainsborough, who had married Jane Hodgkin and gone to Amsterdam in 1608. He was also imprisoned but managed to publish a series of papers including *Objections* (1615), *Truth championed* (1617) and an appeal to the King (1620) which was powerful enough for people to be writing rebuttals to it thirty years later during the English Civil War.

The successors of Helwys and his group became known as General Baptists because they believed in general redemption, that Christ had died for all and no one was beyond the reach of God's saving love. The Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) had set out similar arguments and his followers were soon to be known as Arminians (Johnson, 1617).

By 1620 there were General Baptist churches in Lincolnshire, Coventry, Salisbury and Tiverton and by 1625 there were two London churches, one in Spitalfields and one in Southwark. In 1626 the churches in Deptford (presumably the Southwark church), Gainsborough, Salisbury, Coventry and Tiverton wrote a joint letter on matters of doctrine to the Waterland Mennonites and John Smyth's church in the Netherlands; this was highly unusual as separatist churches rarely communicated on matters of doctrine (Whitley, 1932). Of these churches, Deptford became Unitarian in 1916, Gainsborough closed many yeas ago and Salisbury, Coventry and Tiverton are still in existence, though

only Queens Road, Coventry, as it is now called, appears to be aware of its history.

In 1990 nine Baptist churches celebrated 350 years since their foundation in 1640: Berkhamsted General Baptist Church, Broadmead (Bristol), Kingsbridge, King's Stanley, Newbury, King's Road, now Abbey, Baptist Church, Reading, St Alban's and Warwick. Of these Broadmead's membership included Baptists though not all members may have shared Baptist principles at this time (Hayden, 2005), King's Stanley has records dating back to 1640 showing that it was a 'Seventh Day Baptist' church at that time, Abbey Road was first mentioned in 1652 and Warwick hosted the founding of the Midland (Particular) Baptist Association in 1655.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the General Baptists took an active part in public life though they were frequently treated with suspicion. They published books and articles and engaged in missionary activity which they found was most successful when a person settled in a particular area; between 1641 and 1700 they engaged in at least 109 public disputations, a quarter in London. They served on Parliamentary Commissions and in the New Model Army and provided chaplains, partly because Anglican chaplains were afraid of losing their benefices if they became Army chaplains, and, though the Army was later purged of Baptists, General Baptists continued to support political radicals in Parliament.

Early in the English civil war they began to meet for mutual support against the royalists and by the mid-1650s there were local associations in the Midlands, south Wales, Berkshire and the west of England among others; several groups met in London in 1654 and in 1660 there was a General Baptist Assembly. After 1654 the associations met regularly for conferences and from time to time issued declarations clarifying General Baptist beliefs; in 1678 the declaration called for acceptance of the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian creeds and also suggested a discipline procedure which could be used within churches (Hayden, 2005).

Their biggest challenge came from the Quakers, first meeting in 1647 under George Fox; the church in Manstield was the first to turn Quaker and they had great success in Westmoreland and Cumberland in 1651 after which other General Baptist churches joined the Quakers (Whitley, 1932).

As Thomas Helwys had argued that the church is its congregation and therefore does not need a minister, there were no specific qualifications to be a minister; instead the General Baptists tended to emphasise the role of messenger, initially anyone moving around the country but from the mid-1650s an evangelist, planting and supporting churches.

By 1718 there were 19,000 'hearers' at 120, mostly rural, churches in Kent, Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and the west of England.

2.2 The Particular Baptists

The Particular Baptists emerged in various parts of England and North America in the 1630s out of those in the Separatist movement who disagreed with the Puritan Anglicans' desire for a Puritan state church. Many General Baptists, on the other hand, had been Puritan Anglicans who had left because their views of the gospel had taken them out of the Anglican tradition.

Some of the congregations who had fled to the Netherlands to escape persecution in England returned in June 1620 to join the *Mayflower* on its voyage to New England. In 1631 Roger Williams (1603–1683) had emigrated to New England and, coming to believe that infant baptism was wrong, had with eleven others received believers' baptism in 1639 and formed a Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, which had become a refuge for those who did not assent to the Puritanism of the Bostonians.

In London there had been an Independent Calvinist church, that is, a church which believed that only certain people had been predestined to believe, since 1616 led by Henry Jacob (1563–1624) who did not rule out a Puritan state church. He was succeeded by John Lathrop (1584–1653) who in 1632 along with other members of the church was arrested by the Bishop of London, William Laud, for failing to take the oath of loyalty to the Church of England. Eventually, in 1634 he was pardoned on condition that he left the country for Massachusetts which he did. (He fathered thirteen children and is famous in the US as an ancestor of, among others, both Presidents Bush (Wikipedia, 2009).)

Eighteen of his congregation had escaped arrest and on 12 September 1633 ten members were formally released from membership to set up a fully Separatist church under John Spilsbury. In 1637 Henry Jessey (1603–1663), a Puritan Anglican, was invited to become pastor of Lathrop's church. He had studied at St John's College, Cambridge, becoming a Puritan in 1622; he was ordained in 1626, becoming curate of Assington, Suffolk, in 1627 and moving in 1633 to work for Sir Matthew Boynton in Yorkshire until 1636 when he returned to live with his family in Uxbridge. In 1638 William Kyffen (1616–1701), a successful wool merchant, and five other members of this congregation were released to join John Spilsbury who supported believers' baptism (Hayden, 2005).

In 1641, after he had raised the issue of baptism, Richard Blunt was sent to the Netherlands to receive advice on believers' baptism and in January 1642 Richard Blunt and Mr Blacklock baptised each other by immersion and went on to baptise fifty-one others. On 17 October 1642, William Kyffen and three others debated believers' baptism with Dr Daniel Featley, who had published an attack on it, and in the next couple of years went on evangelistic missions, baptising people in Kent and elsewhere. When the independent church at Broadmead, Bristol, was forced to flee after Prince Rupert captured Bristol in 1643 in the first round of the English Civil War, those who believed in believers' baptism joined William Kyffen's congregation at Devonshire Square until their return in 1645. Others however, including Thomas Ewins, who had been pastor at Llanvaches Church, Chepstow, which had moved to Bristol in 1642 and joined Broadmead, and Robert Purnell, an Elder, had attended Henry Jessey's church (Hayden, 2005).

Henry Jessey continued infant baptism until 1644 after Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691) had returned from New England in 1641 and joined the congregation. Knollys had been been born and educated in Lincolnshire and at St Catherine's College, Cambridge, becoming an Anglican priest in 1620 and vicar of Humberstone in Lincolnshire, but he had subsequently renounced his orders and in 1636 become a separatist, fleeing to New England to escape a court order which nonetheless was executed on him in Boston. On his return to London in 1641 he became a school master, spent a brief period as an army chaplain and then returned to teaching at which point he came into contact with Jessey. In 1645 Jessey was baptised by Knollys who had left in 1644 to lead another congregation, and he then baptised Thomas Ewins and Robert Purnell. However, like

Jessey, they continued to accept paedobaptists into the congregation at Broadmead (Hayden, 2005).

In 1644 seven London churches met to adopt the *London Confession*[1]; this differed from the 1596 *Separatist Confession* in adopting the 1619 Calvinist declaration of the Synod of Dort (now Dordrecht) and baptism by total immersion; admission to the congregation through believers' baptism was given

- in the name of the Triune God
- upon personal confession of repentance from sin
- upon avowed trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

However, Henry Jessey refused to sign the London Confession because he believed in open communion (Blomfield, 1912) though he continued to maintain good relationships with both Particular Baptists and other separatists and to write extensively. In 1661 he contributed to a pamphlet produced by Fifth Monarchists hostile to the restored monarchy and was briefly imprisoned (Hayden, 2005).

In 1646 Thomas Collier, who had been with William Kyffen in Kent in 1643, visited Guernsey, Portsmouth and Poole before moving on to become the major figure in the development of Baptist churches in the west country but he abandoned orthodox Calvinism (Collier, 1674), becoming a General Baptist and persuading the Gloucestershire and Worcestershire churches to join him (Whitley, 1932). This led to him being declared a heretic by the London churches but it did not dent his church planting in the west country (Hayden, 2005)

In 1649 the Glaziers' Hall church sent John Myles (1621–1683) to Wales, where he founded the church at Ilston Beck on the Gower Peninsula; in 1663 this congregation emigrated to Massachusetts where they founded the town of Swansea and took the records of the church with them which are now held by Brown University, Rhode Island (Wikipedia, 2009). In 1650 Thomas Patient, who had also been with William Kyffen in Kent in 1643, and John Vernon founded churches in Ireland.

In 1650 Parliament voted to offer commissions to people who would spread the gospel in the north of England and Thomas Tillam, a member of Hanserd Knollys' church in Coleman Street, London, accepted a commission; he made several tours during which he baptised several people and set up a church at Stokesley, Middlesbrough, in 1653. However, when he returned from his commission, he was not accepted back into Coleman Street. He went on to form a church in Colchester before moving to the Continent where he became a Seventh Day Baptist though they rejected him for bringing the Seventh Day Baptists into disrepute.

While the Particular Baptists do not appear to have been as involved in the English Civil War as the General Baptists, many took an active part in the Commonwealth with William Kyffen serving as MP for Middlesex in 1656–58. He had been a childhood friend of John Lilburne, the leader of the Levellers, who wanted a republican state, but Kyffen ended up arguing against him. Some people believed that the 1653 Parliament of Saints, as it was called, was the prelude to the Fifth Monarchy when Christ would

[1] *The Confession of Faith of those churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists, etc.* London 1644

return as King and were dismayed when Cromwell dismissed Parliament and accepted the title of Protector. They supported the return of the Jews because they believed this was a necessary prelude to the coming of Christ.

The Particular Baptists debated whether ministers should be paid by the state and whether they should pay the tithe to the church. As the Commonwealth drew to its end in 1659 twenty Particular Baptists, including Henry Jessey, issued a *Declaration* setting out their obedience to the state, hostility to Roman Catholics and Quakers, perhaps because they had seen what had happened among the General Baptist churches many of which had become Quaker meetings, and tolerance of episcopacy and Presbyterianism. They had rightly judged the possible mood following the restoration of the monarchy.

2.3 The Restoration

At the time of the Restoration in 1660, there were four broad groups of Baptists:

- General Baptists
- Particular Baptists
- those prepared to fraternise with independents and paedobaptists, and
- Seventh Day Baptists.

But each church responded differently to what was to happen over the next quarter of a century.

Initially, Charles II had been disposed to tolerance but the Fifth Monarchy uprising in 1661 changed everything and, with the introduction of the Clarendon Code (four Acts passed between 1661 and 1665 which restricted the rights of 'non-conformists,' that is, those who would not conform to the 'code'), life became very difficult for the Particular Baptists in urban areas such as London and Bristol with a number of pastors spending lengthy periods in prison; there are no records for John Bunyan's independent Baptist church in Bedford from 1663–1668 (Hayden, 2005). The more rural General Baptists appear to have been much less affected as they continued to meet openly during this period though John Myles' Particular Baptist Church at Ilston Beck in rural Wales chose to emigrate in 1663.

Nonetheless, by 1669 there were 420 Baptist preachers in places as far apart as London, Bristol, Lincoln, Worcester, Coventry, Lichfield, Plymouth, Dover, Deal, Chester and Liverpool (Whitley, 1932). There was some relaxation in 1672 when a Royal Indulgence was granted to congregations that registered their meeting places and, for example, John Bunyan's church in Bedford took immediate advantage of this. But three Baptists were involved in the 1683 Rye House plot and, after the 1685 rebellion by the Duke of Monmouth, two of William Kyffen's grandsons were hanged by Judge Jeffreys in his notorious treatment of the West Country rebels.

After the Glorious Revolution in 1688 brought William and Mary to the throne, the 1689 Toleration Act repealed the 1664 Conventicle Act which had banned meetings of more than five people outside a Church of England church but the restrictions on holding services within five miles of a Church of England church, on holding public office and on attending university were retained.

The Particular Baptists took immediate advantage of the relaxation and over 150 ministers and messengers, from as far afield as Northumberland, Essex and Cornwall, met on 3–9 September 1689; they drew up a new *Confession of Faith* which remained in force until 1832, proposed a fund to support ministers (who hitherto had had to support themselves), agreed on Sunday worship (and so excluded the Seventh Day Baptists some of whom became the nucleus of the Seventh Day Adventists) and agreed that an elder from one church could administer the Lord's Supper in another where necessary.

In 1690 the Midlands Association, founded in 1655, was re-founded at Warwick and had nine members by the end of the century. In 1691 the Northern Association was re-founded. By the end of the century there were ten English and two Welsh Particular Baptist associations. However, the attempts by Particular Baptists to hold national assemblies faltered in 1692 and there was no Particular Baptist national assembly until 1813 though local associations, notably the Western and Welsh associations, continued to meet regularly and Particular Baptist congregations continued to increase.

For the last decade of the seventeenth century, there was a major debate initially about the place of singing in church and then the place of psalms. In fact, Katherine Sutton had published a volume of hymns thirty years earlier which had been recommended by Hanserd Knollys in 1663 (Mallard, 1963) but the debate was re-ignited by the publication by the prolific Baptist writer, Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), of *Spiritual melody* (1691), a collection of nearly three hundred hymns. He had been a tailor in Buckinghamshire who at the age of twenty-one had been called to ministry by General Baptists in Winslow; he was prosecuted for writing a children's book setting out Baptist doctrine and was invited to Southwark church but he decided to become a Calvinist and moved to a Particular Baptist church (Whitley, 1932). The Particular Baptists left congregational singing up to the church whereas, because John Smyth had objected to singing in church, the General Baptists rejected it but allowed solo singing until the 1733 conference.

2.4 Mitchel and Crosley

William Mitchel, born 1662, and David Crosley, born 1669, were cousins from Heptonstall. Mitchel was converted to Presbyterianism in 1680 and began preaching in 1684 but was arrested in 1685 and sentenced at the Wakefield sessions on 13 January 1686 to imprisonment at York. He was released in 1687 and, with the passing of the 1689 Toleration Act, John Moore, one of his converts, registered houses at Rawdon, Guiseley and Horsforth; around twenty such houses were registered in what is now West Yorkshire. Meanwhile, David Crosley had encountered Baptists during preaching tours of the Midlands and Home Counties and in 1692 was baptised by John Eckels in Bromsgrove Church, the same year in which the church at Bacup was erected in part to provide a base for Mitchel and Crosley. Until 1694 Crosley continued on his preaching tours, returning to support Mitchel in Rossendale. At the time Mitchel had not been baptised and the churches at which both preached were variously described as Baptist, Independent or Congregational though they both gradually came to be identified as Baptist.

Among the churches which were established directly or indirectly through the Bacup church were those at Barnoldswick (1694), Rodhill End and Stoneslack (1700), Gildersome (1707) and Rawdon (1712) where there was a history of dissident clergymen. In

1717, the churches at Rodhill End and Stoneslack combined to become an independent church with Thomas Greenwood as their pastor and opened a meeting house in Heptonstall. In 1731 the members living in Huddersfield left to form Salendine Nook

Meanwhile, Mitchel had died in 1705 and Crosley had moved to London to take over Hanserd Knollys' church but he was dismissed for 'gross immorality' and took refuge with Gildersome church in 1710; however, in 1719 he was charged by various Yorkshire churches with 'scandalous sins.' He appears to have been shunned by the churches in London with whom he tried to take refuge but, after he had published a poem about his relapse and recovery, he was admitted to Heptonstall church and spent his last years at Tatop Farm, Goodshaw where he supplemented his income by teaching.

In spite of their renown as preachers, neither Mitchel nor Crosley ever took any steps to become ordained.

3 The eighteenth century

3.1 The General Baptists

A major problem for the General Baptists was that, if congregations were independent, there was no way of enforcing particular views on them. Everything had to be done by consensus and, where consensus could not be obtained, people had to agree to differ. This meant that ideas like Arianism, that Jesus did not exist prior to his earthly birth, and Socianism, that Jesus is not one with the Father, could be accepted by some congregations and not by others. Often these discussions ended in legalistic disputes and in 1696 the General Association, comprising Buckinghamshire and the Midlands, split from the General Assembly, representing Kent, Sussex, Essex and the West Country, only reuniting in 1731 by agreeing to avoid discussing their differences (Rinaldi, 2008).

At a meeting of dissenting groups at Salters Hall in 1719 the Presbyterians and the General Baptists, notwithstanding the 1678 declaration, argued that one should rely only on scripture, which is open to Arian or Socinian interpretation, while the Congregationalists and the Particular Baptists argued that people should also rely on the creeds. However, not all members of the groups attending followed the majority line of their group with both Particular Baptists and General Baptists taking the side of the other (Whitley, 1932). So it is perhaps not surprising that there were plenty of contacts between General and Particular Baptists and also a tendency for General Baptist ministers to join the Particular Baptists even if few of their congregations did (Hayden, 2005).

There were recurring debates about singing in church, no doubt affected by the late seventeenth century debates, and finally at the 1733 General Baptist conference it was left up to congregations. As the General Baptists, like the Quakers, tended to take a strict biblical view of marriage and not being 'yoked unequally,' Association meetings were often the place for matchmaking until the rule was relaxed in 1744.

In 1737 the General Baptist Fund was set up, among other things to support ministerial training; however, reluctance to give funds meant that the first student was only paid for in 1792 and the 1803 Assembly noted the lack of monies in the Fund.

In 1788, the year after Josiah Wedgwood had produced his famous medallion of the kneeling slave, 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?', the Assembly did support the abolition of the slave trade.

3.2 Dan Taylor and the New Connection

Dan Taylor (1738–1816) was born at Sourmilk Hall, 16 Horley Green Road, Claremount on 21 December 1738, becoming a coal miner on Beacon Hill at the age of five. Yet his gifts were early manifested. He could read well at the age of three and grew up with an

eager love of learning.

While he was growing up, developments were taking place in the East Midlands which would affect his life. The Countess of Huntingdon, an early convert to Methodism, had formed the 'Countess of Huntingdon's Connection,' a group of Calvinist Methodists within the Anglican church. One of her servants, David Taylor, met Samuel Deacon of Ratby who in 1745 built a house at Barton Fabis in Leicestershire for a congregation, at the time Methodist. In 1755 they adopted believer's baptism without any contact with other Baptists and then expanded into Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire before coming into contact with the Lincolnshire General Baptists. However, they were unhappy about the Socinian leanings of some of the General Baptists.

When Dan Taylor was fifteen he came to faith through Methodism and joined formally at twenty; he walked long distances to hear his favourite preachers, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield, and at twenty-two became a local preacher, taking his first service in Hipperhome in September 1761 (Taylor, 1818). But he became dissatisfied with what he saw as the authoritarianism of the Wesleys and, when he came across William Wall's *The history of infant baptism* (1705), he became convinced that it was wrong.

He broke with the Methodists in 1762. But, through his reading of the New Testament, he could not accept the Calvinism of the Particular Baptists from whom he sought baptism and they refused to baptise him. Instead he was recommended by a Particular Baptist minister, possibly Richard Smith of Wainsgate who died in 1763, to seek out William Thompson, the General Baptist minister in Boston.

On Friday, 11 February 1763 he set off for Boston with John Slater; they slept under a haystack that night and reached Gamston, near Nottingham, the following evening. Discovering the next morning that there was a Baptist church, but too late to attend the morning service, they attended the afternoon service taken by the assistant minister, John Dossey. After questioning him for three days, Joseph Jeffery, the senior minister, baptised Dan Taylor in the River Idle on Wednesday, 16 February 1763.

On his return to Yorkshire, Dan Taylor preached in the open-air at Far Nook, Wadsworth, and he, John Slater, John Parker, William Crossley and an unnamed lady formed an independent society. Within a few weeks, they were meeting at Higher Needless (now 1, 3 and 5), Wadsworth Lanes, and decided to join the Lincolnshire Association of General Baptists. In May 1763 Dan Taylor attended the Lincolnshire General Baptist Assembly where he met William Thompson who accompanied him back to Wadsworth, baptised fourteen people who formed a church and administered the Lord's Supper. That autumn Dan Taylor was ordained by Gilbert Boyce at Conningsby when John Dossey preached on 1 Timothy 3:1. The following year he acquired the land and began the construction of Birchcliffe Chapel, becoming its first pastor. He attended the General Assembly and visited various churches in order to raise funds for Birchcliffe — which may have been when he first met Samuel Deacon of the Barton Group. He was also invited by William Thompson to preach at the opening of Boston's new building on 24 June 1764. In 1765 he was appointed the Lincolnshire delegate to the London General Assembly and in 1767 he deputised for William Thompson at the Assembly. In 1769 he participated in the meeting which led to the formation of the New Connection.

The meeting in December 1769 appears to have been an attempt to broker a deal between the Barton group and the Lincolnshire General Baptists. It was followed up by

a meeting on the 6 June 1770 at Church Lane, Whitechapel attended by Samuel Deacon (Barton), John Tarratt and Nathaniel Pickering (Kegworth), John Grimley (Loughborough), William Smith and George Hickling (Longford), Francis Smith and Thomas Perkins (Melbourn), Dan Taylor (Wadsworth), William Thompson (Boston), John Brittain (Church Lane), William Summers (The Park), John Knott (Eythorn), James Fenn (Deal), J. Stanger (Bessell's Green), David Wilkin (Halstead), Charles Parman (Castle Headingham) and R. French (Coggeshall). Eight came from the Barton group and the remainder from Lincolnshire, Essex, Kent, London and Yorkshire (Taylor, 1818).

The group agreed six articles:

- *On the fall of man* — that sin is universal
- *On the nature and the perpetual obligation of the moral law* — that is, 'Love God and love your neighbour'
- *On the person and work of Christ* — that Christ is fully divine and died for our salvation
- *On salvation by faith* — for everyone
- *On regeneration by the Holy Spirit*
- *On baptism* — the need for baptism (Taylor, 1818)

as the basis for membership of the New Connection. However, after five years, this requirement was dropped as it looked too much like a creed to which most General Baptists were opposed and ministers simply had to affirm their conversion experience. Gilbert Boyce, who had ordained Dan Taylor, tried to stop the meeting going ahead and the New Connection was initially just an association of twenty-five General Baptist representatives who met annually.

At their meeting on 22–24 May 1771, they decided to split into a northern and a southern group, those in the south mostly being ex-General Baptists rather than Methodist/Independent churches but by 1775 the southern group had stopped sending representatives. From 1777 the New Connection became an assembly of churches and from 1795 only representatives of churches could vote. General Baptist churches such as Maltby, (1773), Killingholme (1778), Yarmouth (1778), Kirton-in-Lindsey 1779), Ashford (1782), Gosberton (1784) and Wisbech (1785) all joined the New Connection and, by 1831, 33 of the 108 New Connection churches were ex-General Baptist churches.

This process had accelerated after William Vidler's admission to the General Baptist Assembly in 1801 and Dan Taylor's withdrawal in 1803. Following their withdrawal from the General Baptist Assembly, the New Connection instituted its own Assembly attended by ministers, elders or two representatives of a church. In 1813 the New Connection banned Socianism and in 1815 the Old General Baptist Assembly embraced Unitarianism. While some General Baptists opposed Unitarianism and tried for another sixty years to obtain a reconciliation with the New Connection, the New Connection were finding they had more in common with the reformed Particular Baptists than with the General Baptists.

While they rejected external control, they saw assemblies as a support for ministers, deacons and church representatives and accepted the co-ordinating and advice giving

roles of conferences. For example, when the church at Haley Hill in Halifax invited Dan Taylor to leave Birchcliffe in 1782, the matter was referred to the local conference and then to the Assembly for advice. Similarly, when in 1785 Church Lane, Whitechapel, invited him to be their pastor, it was put to the Assembly where there were seventeen votes in favour and eight abstentions.

Church meetings within the New Connection were for both fellowship and management and women were always accepted as equals. At Birchcliffe Dan Taylor introduced 'experience meetings' based on the Methodist class model with the difference that, whereas the Methodists saw the class as the route to entry, Baptists generally saw it as a consequence of entry though the Barton group of churches followed the Methodist practice more closely. They began with singing and prayer and then each member talked about their situation; they ended with prayer and thanksgiving. The leaders of the experience meetings met every six weeks for mutual support, when they would be joined by Dan Taylor who would not normally be a leader. There were discipline meetings every six weeks and once every three months a compulsory service for all church members. By 1770 the church had 69 members (Taylor, 1818).

Dan Taylor initially supported himself as a part-time farmer and teacher, taking in as many as fourteen boarding pupils at his home at Hirst Farm, Wadsworth. His younger brother, Rev. John Taylor, founded several Baptist chapels, among them, Queensbury (1773), Haley Hill in Halifax (1777), Shore, near Todmorden, and Burnley. In 1782, the Haley Hill chapel became independent and Dan Taylor was invited to become their pastor which he did in 1783 but in 1785 he moved to Whitechapel, London, where he remained until his death in 1816.

Dan Taylor has been called 'The Wesley of the Baptists.' Certainly his evangelistic journeying rivalled those of the founder of Methodism. He is said to have travelled on foot and horseback some 25,000 miles to attend 250 conferences, preached 20,000 sermons and published 50 books and pamphlets. Though Dan Taylor never held a formal position other than as a pastor, he was widely accepted as the leader of the New Connection and his advice was regularly sought (Rinaldi, 2008)

3.3 The Particular Baptists

In the aftermath of the Clarendon Code, the congregation at Broadmead had split and in 1679, Edward Tervill, one of the two key elders at the church alongside Robert Purnell, made a gift to the church to support a second minister to train new ministers. This was quite a departure because Samuel How (1639), whose book remained in print until the nineteenth century, had argued against educated ministers as had Thomas Collier who had evangelised much of the west country.

How's book had arisen out of a declaration by John Goodwin, who had returned from exile in Geneva to become pastor of Coleman Street church, that 'a man could not preach except he had learning, human learning.' How had challenged this doctrine and been permitted to preach a sermon against it but there had been so much initial antagonism to his ideas that the book had first to be published in the Netherlands before it found widespread popularity in England. While not saying to what extent he agreed with How's arguments, William Kyffen had contributed a postscript to the

sixth edition deploring the treatment How had received from fellow Christians at the time (Kyffen, 1700). The congregation voted Goodwin out of office in 1645 and invited Hanserd Knollys to become their pastor.

However, also in response to the Clarendon Code, dissenters' academies had been set up to counter the ban on people who were not members of the Church of England taking degrees at university. These primarily catered for working class dissenters because wealthy dissenters could afford to study in Scotland or on the Continent and there were no restrictions on them practising their professions on their return to England. In the first decade of the eighteenth century Henry Sacheverell led a campaign against dissenters' academies which had resulted in attacks on dissenters' meeting houses in London in 1701 and he was still preaching against them in 1709 (Hayden, 2005).

Broadmead's first choice, Caleb Jope, failed to train any ministers and left in 1707 but in 1717 the Bristol Baptist Fund was set up to supplement the provisions of Tervill's will and from 1720 Bernard Foskitt started to train ministers. By 1758 he had trained forty English and forty Welsh ministers and he was succeeded by Hugh Evans who, together with his son, Caleb, founded the Bristol Education Society in 1770. Caleb succeeded his father in 1781 and by the end of the century 200 ministers had been trained at the Bristol Academy including Andrew Gifford Jnr, Dr Thomas Llewellyn, who taught for the London Education Society, and John Sutcliff.

Together with John Ash, Caleb also published *A collection of hymns adapted to public worship* (Ash and Evans, 1767) which was followed by Dr Rippon's selection (1787) which, when reissued with Isaac Watt's *Psalms and Hymns* in the nineteenth century, came to be known as the *Complete Rippon* and became the standard Baptist hymn book for the nineteenth century.

While the General Baptists were tearing themselves apart by controversy, the Particular Baptists started the century by consolidating around the 1689 *Confession* with Bernard Foskitt leading a campaign for the Western Association formally to adopt it which it did in 1733 leading to the remaining General Baptist churches in the association leaving by 1735. However, the last quarter of the century saw a quiet revolution within the Particular Baptists which can be traced back to James Hartley, a member of Wainsgate church, who had been converted by the preaching of W. M. Grimshaw and formed the Baptist Church at Howarth, first gathering people there in 1748 and establishing them as a church in 1752; he continued as their pastor until his death in 1780.

John Fawcett (1740–1817) who was born in Bradford attended Haworth to hear James Hartley and then Rawdon, being baptised in 1758 by William Crabtree, the minister of Westgate, Bradford. The following year he married Susannah Skirrow, a member at Rawdon, and, with encouragement from James Hartley, started to learn Greek and Hebrew. He was called to Wainsgate in 1764, remaining after he had received a call to Carter's Lane in London in 1772 and later writing the hymn 'Blessed be the tie that binds' to recall his decision to stay. In 1777, with other members of the church, he left to found Ebenezer, later Hope, Baptist Church in Hebden Bridge.

John Fawcett shared with his New Connection colleague, Dan Taylor, with whom he studied the bible, a passion for education and, after John Sutcliff, a teacher in Dan Taylor's school, chose to be baptised by John Fawcett, Dan Taylor taught him Latin while John Fawcett prepared him in Greek and Hebrew and sent him in 1772 to train at

the Bristol Academy. In 1775 he became the minister at Olney in Buckinghamshire (then associated with the Northamptonshire Baptist churches) where his Anglican counterpart was the hymn writer, John Newton, who became a friend and hosted a number of Baptist ministers at the 1776 Midland Association meeting.

John Sutcliff became increasingly dissatisfied with the strict Calvinist position of many Particular Baptists and, when he began to be criticised by them in 1780, cited Jonathan Edwards' 1747 arguments for abandoning strict Calvinism and arranged for them to be republished in 1784 (Hayden, 2005). Jonathan Edwards had earlier written about his conversion work in Northampton, New England (1737), and been visited in 1740 by George Whitfield, the evangelist and friend of the Wesleys.

In 1784 John Sutcliff proposed to the churches in Nottinghamshire that there should be special monthly prayer meetings to include prayers for the whole world: 'Let the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the globe be the object of your most fervent requests!'

William Carey (1761–1834) was prepared for ministry by John Sutcliff between 1785 and 1787 and ordained in 1787 by him and Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) who had finally plucked up the courage to publish his *Gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptation* (1785) which also argued against strict Calvinism. Seven years later William Carey published his *Enquiry* (1792) and the following year the Baptist Missionary Society was formed with the Baptist Society for Itinerant Preachers coming five years later. These developments laid the foundations for the formation of the Baptist Union in 1813 (chapter 4).

In 1792 John Fawcett was invited to succeed Caleb Evans as head of the Bristol Academy but declined preferring to continue with his own dissenters' academy, Ewood Hall, which provided Particular Baptists ministers for the north and, most notably, William Ward (1769–1823), the printer who joined William Carey in India in 1800 and was responsible for printing the many Bibles in different Indian languages that the Serampore Press published. In 1804 Fawcett supported the setting up of the Northern Baptist Education Society which invited William Steadman, whose evangelistic tour of the south west had inspired the establishment of the Particular Baptist Home Mission Society, to become head of the Bradford Academy. He accepted, became pastor of Westgate Church and opened the Academy in rented premises in 1805 with one student, moving later to a disused warehouse in Horton which came to be known as Horton College (Shipley, 1912).

In 1837, when the Lancashire and Yorkshire Baptist Association split, a second academy was opened briefly in Accrington to be followed by one in Bury which later moved to Manchester (Whitley, 1932). On 4 September 1859 Horton College opened in new premises in Rawdon, becoming known as Rawdon College, and in 1963 merged with Manchester Baptist College to form the Northern Baptist College, thus reuniting the two strands of Baptist education in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

4 The nineteenth century

In retrospect, the nineteenth century can be seen as a gradual coming together of the Particular Baptists and the New Connection and there were early signs of converging interests though it was not until 1891 that union was finally secured. For example, at their meeting in Boston in 1816 the New Connection formed the General Baptist Missionary Society headed by J G Pike who in 1817 wrote that General Baptists should be involved in mission even more than Particular Baptists. In 1808 the New Connection had formed an Aged Ministers Fund to support those ministers no longer able to support themselves and in 1810 an Itinerant Fund which in 1821 became the General Baptist Home Missionary Society (Rinaldi, 2008).

In 1813 the Particular Baptists held their first Assembly since 1692 when those Particular Baptist churches who were sympathetic to the principles set out by Andrew Fuller (1785) and William Carey (1792) agreed to form the Baptist Union. Those who were unsympathetic to Andrew Fuller's reformulation of Calvinism were led by William Gadsby of Manchester and John Warburton of Trowbridge and did not join the Baptist Union. They remained linked primarily through newspapers that circulated among them and became known as Strict Baptists. Some created the Strict Baptist Assembly which in 1980 merged with the Assembly of Baptised Churches to create the Grace Baptist Assembly. Others are members of the Golden Standard Strict Baptists who continue to follow William Gadsby's rejection of Fullerism.

The 1832 Particular Baptist conference no longer made the 1689 *Confession* a condition of membership and reorganised the Union into Associations; by 1860 about one third of the General Baptist churches who had not joined the New Connection had joined the Union.

In 1828 the Corporation Act was repealed enabling dissenters to hold local government posts and the following year the repeal of the Test Act gave the same rights to Roman Catholics. In practice, dissenting Deputies in the City of London had agree to fight the fines imposed on them in the eighteenth century and they had won their case in the courts in 1767 though the Act repealing them was not to be passed until 1828 (Hayden, 2005). The 1832 Reform Act gave many the vote; nearly all were strong Whig, later Liberal, supporters. However, these changes had less impact on New Connection churches until the arrival of John Clifford (section 4.2) as they tended to see the answers to social problems in personal rather than social responses. But in 1849 they set up a 'Dorcas society' to relieve the poor and the following year a Denominational Fund for relieving ministers who had become incapacitated. The New Connection also gave its support to the Anti-State Church Association founded in 1844 and to the numerous bills put forward up between 1850 and 1868 to exempt dissenters from paying the church rates which went towards the upkeep of the Church of England (Rinaldi, 2008).

Meanwhile, the New Connection began to train some of its own ministers. Unlike the Particular Baptists, the General Baptists had set no great importance on educating

ministers; ministers were simply 'called' by a congregation. There had been a fund since 1737 but there had not had enough money in it to support a student until 1792. However, Dan Taylor had taken in students, like his Particular Baptist neighbour, John Fawcett, and in his confession of faith of 1785 to the Whitechapel Church (Taylor, 1818, pp. 470–477) had set out what was to become a popular nineteenth century view, that God had given us both the book of creation and the Bible in order to instruct us in His ways. So His revelation was to be found in both, though you needed to read the Bible to get the total revelation.

In 1797 the New Connection set up an Academy to support the training of ministers which the following year became an actual institution run by Dan Taylor until 1811 when it moved to Wisbech where Joseph Jarrom led it from 1813 to 1837. However, Wisbech was considered a bit too out of the way and in 1825 the Leicestershire Educational Society was formed; in 1838 the two institutions merged and moved to various locations ending up in Nottingham where it was when the churches of the New Connection joined the Baptist Union. Eventually in the nineteen-twenties its assets were transferred to Rawdon Baptist College.

In 1865 the New Connection set up a Board of Reference to assist in changes of pastor, being very mindful that Dan Taylor had been opposed to any direction of a particular congregation. This was followed in 1871 with an Arbitration Committee to deal with disputes.

Initially the management of a church lay in the hands of the elders with deacon being seen as a calling similar to that of a minister and appointments being for life. From around 1861 that came to be questioned and deacons began to be elected for fixed terms and increasingly to take over the leadership roles of the elders (Rinaldi, 2008). Some churches practised laying on of hands as part of the ordination of ministers and deacons but this was gradually replaced by welcome meetings because the laying on of hands was seen as too much like the apostolic succession.

Lay preachers like Thomas Cook were also recognised and the 1859 New Connection Conference drew up a definition of lay preaching that covered Sunday School teachers as well as other visiting preachers who might not be ordained. Baptists of all convictions had become involved in the Sunday School movement, originally initiated by Robert Raikes of Gloucester in 1781 to educate poor children, but by the middle of the nineteenth century mainly catering for 'respectable' children (Carpenter, 1851). Not only did they find it difficult to attract the poorer children for whom Sunday School had originally been intended but they also failed to make many converts through Sunday School.

The 1851 census showed that the Free Churches claimed just under half of the church going population (Whitley, 1932). They were respected and influential, and their high moral standards were carried into public life. Successful business people were often from the Free Churches, not least because the dissenters' academies had been much quicker to teach subjects like science and engineering than Oxford and Cambridge, which members of the Church of England could attend, and everyone knew of the standards of chapel folk — lapses didn't pass unnoticed. The Baptists built large impressive chapels and powerful preachers commanded huge congregations. The chapels were often the centre of community life. Temperance Leagues, Mutual Improvement Societies and Sports Clubs all flourished.

Not all became involved in the temperance movement — Spurgeon (section 4.1) called

it a 'distraction' — but in 1841 Thomas Cook organised his first excursion from Market Harborough to a temperance meeting in Leicester where his wife had opened a Temperance Hotel; it was not until 1874 that a Baptist Total Abstinence Society was formed; around that time unfermented wine began to be used in churches, though this issue often led to disputes in individual churches.

The increased contact between Baptists both in England and Wales and in Scotland exposed many differences in practice and interpretation. Initially, baptism had been regarded as essential for taking the Lord's Supper but that left open the question whether one should baptise those who did not intend to become members of the church.

From the 1830s there was a gradual shift towards open communion. The 1861 Trust Deeds of the Metropolitan Tabernacle permitted admission to communion on profession of faith without baptism but the leading Scottish Baptist philanthropist, William Quarrier, left Blackfriars Church, Glasgow, in 1863 over the issue of open communion though he later acknowledged he had been wrong to do so (Gammie, 1936). However, by 1882 open communion still remained less common among General than among Particular Baptists (Rinaldi, 2008).

By the middle of the nineteenth century General Baptist churches were inviting Particular Baptist ministers to preach in their churches, General Baptist students were studying at the Particular Baptist academy in Stepney and in 1861 a General Baptist church invited a Particular Baptist student from Regent's Park College, the name and location of the Stepney academy since 1855, to become their minister. By 1870 one sixth of General Baptist pastors came from a Particular Baptist background, not so much because the members of the New Connection had changed as because Particular Baptists had moved towards New Connection positions. Similarly, there was a trend for New Connection ministers to move to Particular Baptist or independent churches (Hayden, 2005).

However, by the late nineteenth century, it had become clear that the New Connection was faltering; its base had been predominantly rural, particularly among frame knitters in the Midlands (Rinaldi, 2008), and, though it had grown from 16 to 200 churches by 1840 and its numbers continued to grow between 1840 and 1870 until there were 275 churches in 1891, they did not grow as fast as the population. In 1868 John Clifford argued that the New Connection had become 'genteel' when Kegworth church built an indoor baptistry after over a century of baptisms in the River Soar (Rinaldi, 2008).

Though New Connection churches were formed in urban areas, the Particular Baptists were much more active in the urban centres to which most of the population had moved over the nineteenth century and by 1883 the overall number of losses in the largely rural New Connection churches exceeded the number of baptisms. As the negotiations with the Baptist Union progressed, a Federation Board was set up in 1888 to oversee mergers of smaller churches and in 1891 all the New Connection churches were given the opportunity to join their local Baptist Union Association while the two missionary societies and the home mission funds were united.

4.1 Charles Haddon Spurgeon

During the nineteenth century, there was increasing acceptance of biblical criticism, spurred on in part by the nineteenth century craze for excavating sites in the middle east. The first effect of these discoveries was to reinforce faith in the Bible as history; many eighteenth century Christians had been happy to accept the Old Testament in particular as a collection of myths telling a spiritual story. The discovery that many sites and many events mentioned in the Old Testament were real places and events was initially seen as a boost to those like the Baptists who had seen their faith as firmly grounded in the Bible.

But as recognition developed that, for example, the Bible had been assembled at different times from various collections of writings and that the King James Bible had not been based on the most accurate versions of the Greek and Hebrew originals, people began to ask more searching questions of the Bible and some Christians became alarmed that the baby was being thrown out with the bathwater. Chief among these was Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), a gifted preacher and organiser.

Converted at 15 in a Primitive Methodist chapel, he was baptised and the following year called to minister to Waterbeach Baptist Church, Cambridgeshire, from where, after a three months probation, he was called in 1854 to New Park Street Church, Southwark, the church of Benjamin Keach. His success as a preacher led to huge congregations and the church had to seek alternative accommodation. In the end, the Metropolitan Tabernacle was opened in 1861 to accommodate those who wanted to hear him. By this time, he had begun what was to become Spurgeon's College and, following a donation from an Anglican lady supporter, Stockwell Orphanage, one of the earliest children's homes to adopt the cottage homes principle rather than the older more institutional style (Heywood, 1978). In 1865 he was instrumental in the re-formation of the London Baptist Association.

In 1873 proposals to replace the 1689 *Confession* with a simpler statement rang alarm bells for Spurgeon as he feared that Baptists were losing their Bible centred faith in the face of Darwin's theories and new arguments about the origins of the Old Testament. In 1887 two unsigned articles entitled 'Downgrade' were published by Robert Schindler and these were followed by articles from Spurgeon arguing that the Bible was being 'downgraded' by the Baptist Union and by his resignation from the Union. The resignation raised anxieties for some New Connection members about the proposed union with the Baptist Union and it was left to John Clifford, the leading New Connection minister, as the newly elected President of the Baptist Union, to handle the new Declarative Statement of Faith in 1888 which provided the basis on which individual churches could decide whether or not to join (Hayden, 2005).

4.2 John Clifford

John Clifford (1836–1923) went to work in a lace factory in 1848 and in 1857 to become a student at the New Connection College from where he was quickly called to Praed Street Chapel, enrolling as a student at London University. He was sufficiently successful that in 1877 the chapel was enlarged and became known as Westbourne Park Baptist

Church where he ministered until 1915.

Though he agreed with Spurgeon that baptism should not be the sole condition for entry, he repudiated any conflict between religion and science, having used his proximity to London University to take degrees in science, arts and law, and he became an active proponent of the 'social gospel' and, in 1899, an opponent of the Boer War and later of the settlement that concluded the War.

But he also argued for personal evangelism as the way forward; the early histories of the Particular Baptists and of the New Connection had been marked by individual commitment to personal evangelism which had led to rapid expansion in the numbers of believers and of churches but, with the increasing reliance on ministers and the Home Mission Funds, personal evangelism had declined.

As well as serving as President of the Baptist Union in 1888 and 1898, he was also the first President of the Baptist World Alliance, President of the National Free Church Council and a member of the Fabian Society; in 1921 he was made a Companion of Honour.

5 The twentieth century

5.1 John Howard Shakespeare

At the Nottingham assembly in 1898 John Howard Shakespeare succeeded Samuel Harris Booth as General Secretary of the Baptist Union and embarked on a campaign to raise the profile and reorganise the management of the Baptist Union. Part of the motivation for its formation had been a desire to co-ordinate support for the Baptist Missionary Society and it had operated from the BMS headquarters for most of its existence.

He therefore proposed setting up a Twentieth Century Fund for:

- 75 new churches
- support for village churches
- an Annuity Fund for retired ministers
- a new headquarters for the Baptist Union
- a Scholarship Fund.

In 1903 the BU moved out of their rooms at the BMS in Furnival Street to Baptist Church House, Southampton Row, where the BMS also had new accommodation.

In 1904 he oversaw the setting up of the Young Persons Union and the Baptist Total Abstinence Association and in 1905 the Baptist Insurance Company and the Baptist World Alliance. There had been Baptist Churches in North America since 1639 and there had been contact between them and Baptists in the UK as well as with missionaries who had spread Baptist ideas worldwide so that, though the first Baptists were English, the denomination was often much stronger in other parts of the world. For example, dissenting settler congregations in the American West had often adopted Baptist principles because Baptist ministers did not have to have a lengthy education or the laying on of hands to become ministers, both of which could be difficult to arrange. In 1904 John Newton Prestridge, editor of *The Baptist Argus*, at Louisville, Kentucky, had called for a world gathering of Baptists which John Howard Shakespeare had endorsed and, in October 1904, the Baptist Union of Great Britain passed a resolution to invite a Congress to meet with them in July 1905 when the Baptist World Alliance was formed (Wikipedia, 2009).

In 1908 the Baptist Historical Society was founded and in 1910 the Baptist Women's League. In 1890 the London Baptist Association had founded the Baptist Deaconesses Home and Mission; this had become independent in 1894 and led to the development of deaconesses and then to the Baptist Women's League. Deaconesses did valuable welfare and pastoral work within the denomination and in 1975 were offered the opportunity to transfer to the accredited list of ministers. In January 2009 Mabel Ingram, the last

surviving deaconess, who had declined the offer to join the accredited list, died (Hobson, 2009).

1910 saw the first inquiry about entry to ministry from a woman but she did not proceed. In 1918 Edith Gates became minister of Little Tew and Cleveley, Oxfordshire, and in 1922 she was enrolled as a probationer by the Recognition Committee.

In 1924 Violet Hedger became the first female student to complete her studies at Regent's Park College but did not get a church until 1926 when she went to Littleover in Derbyshire. By this time Maria Living-Taylor had been recommended by the Essex Association and was in fact working alongside her husband at Sion Jubilee Church, Bradford. But the number of women Baptist ministers remained small and only since the merging of the Deaconesses Order with the accredited list has their number begun to edge up in the wake of increases in other professions, though churches are often reluctant to appoint women ministers (Hayden, 2005).

There had been an accredited list of BU ministers since 1887 and the 1907 Assembly agreed in principle to accept all ministers approved by Associations prior to 1900 with relaxed rules for those starting between 1900 and 1907; thereafter, only accredited ministers should get funds from the Union. However, the scheme was not fully accepted until 1910 and not fully operational for another six years.

Meanwhile, in 1912, John Howard Shakespeare had proposed a Sustentation Fund to supplement the stipends of poor ministers and to pay for ten general superintendents; the Superintendents were in place in 1915, five of them being ex-Association secretaries who were now paid for centrally rather than locally. From 1916 help with ministers' stipends was conditional on some form of inspection from the new Superintendents.

He reorganised the Baptist Tract and Book Society into the Kingsgate Press and purchased *The Freeman* newspaper which had been founded in 1855; in 1910 he purchased *The Baptist* and merged them to become *The Baptist Times*, which he edited. It was published by the BU until 1960 when it became independent again but declining sales meant it was only able to continue in the twenty-first century with financial support from the BU. In 2011 it was wound up and in 2012 replaced by a website run by the BU Communications Department.

The formation of the Free Church Federation in 1892, which became the National Free Churches Council, and the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference inspired huge confidence in Christians which was to be shattered by the experience of the First World War. In *The churches at the cross-roads* John Howard Shakespeare (1918) accepted the possibility of episcopacy as the price for unity but he was opposed at the 1919 Assembly by T R Glover, Classics Fellow at St John's, Cambridge, and, when the 1920 Lambeth conference made clear that unity could only be based on episcopal succession, Shakespeare's vision became discredited. He gave his last major sermon at the Baptist World Alliance in Stockholm in 1923, suffered a cerebral haemorrhage in 1925 and died in 1928.

Though Shakespeare had pointed to the true origins of Baptists in the separatist and congregationalist movements (Hayden, 2005), he had taken the Baptist Union away from those first visions and created a Baptist Union with a lot of power through its control of resources but no responsibility since responsibility remains with individual Baptist churches. A century later, the dilemmas posed by Shakespeare's reforms still haunt the Baptist Union.

5.2 Ecumenism and mission

In 1926 Melbourne E Aubrey took over as General Secretary and remained in post until 1951. He gained a lot of support from Dr H Wheeler Robinson, who had become Principal of Regent's Park College in 1920 and steered its move from London to Oxford where it is now a college within the University. But he had to deal with the fallout of Shakespeare's concern for wider church unity in the form of the Baptist Bible Union which brought together those who objected to the BU and also challenged the way the BMS was being managed.

The nineteen-thirties saw a discipleship campaign and the increasing involvement of the Union in social and political issues, including that of pacifism. With the Second World War, the issue of how ministers should respond was avoided with the decision by the government that ministers would be a reserved occupation, needed to help in the reconstruction after the war.

In 1937 the first meeting to consider a World Council of Churches was held but further work was put off by the war and it was eventually founded in 1948. The following year, Baptists from all over Europe met at Rüschlikon in Switzerland to form the European Baptist Federation which now has members throughout, and a few from outside, Europe.

In 1951 E A Payne succeeded Melbourne Aubrey and he in turn was succeeded by David S Russell[1] in 1967, Bernard Green in 1982, David Coffey in 1991 and Jonathan Edwards in 2006.

The Baptist World Alliance held jubilees in 1955 and in 2005 when David Coffey became President of the BWA.

Meanwhile, the BMS, now BMS World Mission, had greatly increased the number of countries in which it is working including many in Europe and the number of ways in which it is possible to serve as a missionary, from Action Teams which undertake six month projects, through short and medium term commitments to mission to long term missionary service of the sort traditional until the middle of the twentieth century.

The National Free Church Council was succeeded by the British Council of Churches and in 1987 the BU along with other denominations adopted a statement on Christian unity which replaced the British Council of Churches with the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland since 1 September 1990) incorporating the Roman Catholics. Within this grouping, the BU regularly cooperates with the Methodist and United Reformed Churches on matters of social concern.

In 1989 the Baptist Union decided to leave its premises in Southampton Row for new premises, Baptist House, which opened in Didcot in 1990 and now accommodate the BU, the BMS and the headquarters of the Girls Brigade of England and Wales as well as providing conference facilities for Baptists and others. However, in 2011 a financial crisis at the Baptist Union prompted the establishment of a Futures Group which proposed focusing resources on accredited ministers, devolving many Home Mission responsibilities to associations and reducing the number of associations (Futures Group, 2012). It is too soon to see where that will take the Baptist Union but the strict Calvinist churches who declined to join two centuries ago continue to maintain that tradition and to regard themselves as inheritors of the traditions laid down by the first English Particular

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Baptists nearly 400 years ago.

It is easy to worship as Baptists in Britain today, but in many parts of the world people are still being persecuted because of their faith; Baptists continue to stand on their faith in human rights campaigns both in supposedly developed countries and against repressive regimes while some have joined peacemaker groups in war-torn parts of the world, bringing Baptists in the tradition of Thomas Helwys back in touch with the Mennonites whom John Smyth joined over 400 years ago.

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