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Newport Pagnell Baptists.

IT is difficult to say exactly when the Baptist Cause originated in Newport Pagnell. It may have been soon after 1645 when Edward Harrison, a Baptist, afterwards Vicar of Kensworth, was treasurer of the troops here. Paul Hobson too, who preached at Newport Pagnell during the Civil War, may have had something to do with it, while there is no doubt that John Gibbs,¹ the Vicar thrust out from Newport, was one of the founders. To quote from the Thompson Manuscript in Dr. Williams' Library, "In Mr. Gibbs' time there was a number of Baptists in this Town, and there is reason to think that this interest is of very much longer standing than the Independent." From the same manuscript it appears that Mr. Gibbs, the founder of the Independent Cause, who died in 1699, "loved these people and wished to have them brought into a regular church state and took great pains for this purpose but could not succeed. There was a Mr. Bennett among them whom Mr. Gibbs wanted to settle among them as their Pastor. He was a good Preacher and of exemplary behaviour, but the people could not agree among themselves about him; perhaps their sufferings had soured their tempers like many others of the excellent of the earth."

From the Northampton College Street Records, it appears that in 1707 the then Church was dissolved and advice sought as to "beginning the church state anew." On the 22nd June, 1709, the same Records record the instalment of Robert Hanwell into the pastoral office.

The first place of meeting is unknown, but in January, 1716 when the number of hearers was said to be 250, Robert Hanwell, then described as a Yeoman, and others, purchased for £24 10s. "All that messuage cottage or tenement with the appurtenances in Newport Pagnell aforesaid near adjoining to the malting belonging to the dwellinghouse late of Samuel Christie Esq. called Bearditch Coppy and containing two bays of building now or late in the occupation of Thomas Browne to be held in trust for a Meeting House for the use of the several persons in and about Newport Pagnell aforesaid commonly called or

¹ For accounts of John Gibbs, see articles by Rev. Maurice F. Hewitt in *The Baptist Quarterly*, July 1927, and by F. W. Bull in the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* of September 1927.

distinguished by the name of the Baptist Congregation to pray read and hear Divine Service in according to the way and manner of the said Sect called Baptists."

The premises were converted into a Meeting soon after, as in the Northampton College Street Records there is a note that in July, 1717, there was collected "for ye Church at Newport Pagnell towards their new Meeting Place £6 1s. 8d." It was in March, too, of this year that Jeremiah Bass of Northampton was censured by his church for preaching here without their leave. Mr. Hanwell eventually went to London for a time (being a member of Mr. Noble's church) and then to Kettering, being ordained pastor of the Baptist church there on 10 March, 1729/30.

Mr. Joseph Palmer, who from 1746 to 1774 was pastor of Bildeston, Suffolk, ministered to the church for some time.

David Evans, who perhaps came from Great Gransden, and went to Biggleswade, was pastor in 1748.

Mr. William Coles, who was the stated minister in June 1761, and whose ministry here was for possibly the ten years 1758 to 1768, was in 1792 living at Ampthill, Bedfordshire, where he died in 1809. His only daughter Ann was the second wife of the well-known Andrew Fuller, the date of her marriage being 30th December, 1794. In Morris' Memorials of Fuller, she is described as the "only daughter of the Rev. William Coles, pastor of the Baptist Church at Maulden in Bedfordshire," being ordained there 26th October, 1768.

He was succeeded by Mr. John Hewson, who was pastor in 1774. From 1790 to 1794 John Muddiman of Long Buckby, and Thomas Chater of Olney, ministered here on alternate Sundays. On 13th August, 1797, Mr. Thomas Corby was ordained as pastor of the Baptist church at Newport Pagnell, though dwelling at Olney, there then being some thirteen members.

Soon after this, the Cause fell into most deplorable circumstances, "its purity of doctrine declined and it had fallen into a worse than Laodicean State." As a consequence, it was thought expedient to dissolve the Church Union. The minister left, the place was closed and the Cause itself apparently became extinct, "but God reserved to Himself a very small remnant even in this Sardis." After some time the Meeting House was lent to the Wesleyan Methodists, who occupied it for two years, when it was reclaimed, and the Rev. George Foskett, who was described as of Leighton Buzzard, became the minister. He laboured for about thirteen years with little apparent success. During the latter part of his ministry, however, there seemed to be somewhat of a revival and a church, consisting of seven

members, was formed on what were termed moderate Calvinistic principles.

The Covenant of Church Fellowship entered into at this time, namely the 24th July, 1824, was as follows:—

“ We who have this day made a public profession of our love to Christ by baptism consider it our duty to form ourselves into a Christian Church and we accordingly agree to the following particulars as expression of our Christian Union.

1. “ We consider the Bible as our rule of faith and practice so far as we understand it.

2. “ We profess to call no man master on earth but consider ourselves as brethren acknowledging our Master in Heaven even Christ.

3. “ We consider it our duty to promote this interest by our prayers conduct invitations and diligence in the use of the means appointed.

4. “ We make it our duty to pray for one another sympathize with and help one another as far as our ability shall extend.

5. “ We in a Christianlike manner will watch over one another and admonish one another in the Lord when occasion requires.

6. “ We unitedly intreat the Father of the Universe to preside over us the Lord Jesus Christ to wash us in His Blood and the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth.

7. “ We give each other the right hand of fellowship as the token of our Christian Communion.”

In 1826 Mr. Foskett left, going to Blisworth, and the Rev. John William Early, then of Colman's Green, succeeded him. For a time “ there was no stirring of the dry bones,” and great discouragement was felt. On the 25th December 1829 however, “ a day of Fast, Humiliation and Prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was held. It proved a day never to be forgotten. The attendance was numerous, a deep solemnity pervaded the place, and the prayers of the Brethren were fervent.” From that time, the congregation increased, and the Cause revived, in 1831 there being thirty members. Mr. Early died on the 31st May, 1833; Mr. George Hall of Two Waters, Herts, succeeded him in January, 1835, being formally given the right hand of fellowship on the 10th March in that year. Mr. Hall did not hold views which accorded with those of his deacons, and it is stated that he was eventually prevented from going into the pulpit by two deacons. On the 19th July, 1840, Mr. Robert Abbot of Heywood, near Manchester, was acknowledged as

pastor. He resigned and closed his ministry on the 19th October, 1845.

On the 2 May, 1847, Mr. William Pimm of Wooburn Green was received as pastor, but gave up the pastorate owing to ill-health and old age, on the 24th August, 1865.

He was succeeded by Mr. William Ward of Irthlingborough, whose Recognition Services were held on the 22nd January, 1867, his salary being £70 per annum. Serious disagreements arose, however, in 1869, and in May, 1870, Mr. Ward severed his connection with the church.

Mr. Henry Ephraim Tideman became pastor on the 29th March, 1872, at a salary of £52 per annum, but left about 1875.

Mr. Joseph Wilkins, of Stanstead, Essex, followed on the 28th December, 1877. He gave up the pastorate on the 12th March, 1892, and was the last stated pastor.

The Church Minutes from which several quotations have been given record one or two curious facts. For instance, it appears that on the 30th July, 1829, it was resolved that the quarterly collections to defray the necessary expenses of candles &c., be entrusted to Brother Trulove, and that the short ends of candles be considered as his perquisite. There are too, records of various expulsions for disorderly walking, one member being set aside for six months because his name was in the paper as Bass Singer when Glees and Songs were sung.

The Cause was never very prosperous, it being stated even in 1774, that the people would never agree to have a settled pastorate, so that the interest had always been feeble and low.

As will be seen from the foregoing records, the changes of pastorate were frequent, and the ups and downs of the church distressing. Of late years the Cause so declined that eventually the church ceased to be used as a place of public worship, and at the request of the surviving trustees the premises and properties were taken over by the Baptist Union Corporation, who on the 10th December, 1929, put up and sold the chapel by public auction. Several interments took place from time to time in the chapel, and prior to its sale, the Corporation arranged for the removal of the monuments and the reinterment of the remains in the new cemetery at Newport Pagnell, where a stone commemorating the event has been erected.

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