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The Old General Baptist Church at Norwich.

OVER a narrow arched passage between two tall houses in the winding street called Cowgate, near to the left bank of the river Wensum, may be seen to this day the words, GENERAL BAPTIST CHAPEL. They mark what was once the entrance way to the "Priory Yard Chapel," which for nearly two centuries was the meeting-place of a Church founded by the famous Thomas Grantham, the successor of which is Silver Road Baptist Church.

REV. THOMAS GRANTHAM.

Grantham had an adventurous career. Entering the ministry in 1656 at the age of twenty-two, his energy and organising ability were soon instrumental in the foundation of a group of small General Baptist Churches in South Lincolnshire. After the Restoration he suffered fifteen months' imprisonment in Lincoln Gaol and six months more at Louth as the penalty for his religious activities. Three times he had audiences with King Charles II., who, it is said, received him courteously and made promise to redress the wrongs of the General Baptists—a promise which, however, never bore fruit. In 1666 he was appointed an Apostle or Messenger of the Churches. He seems to have settled at Norwich about 1685, and besides forming the Church here he organised General Baptist Churches at Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn.

His relationship with his fellow-Nonconformists in Norwich was far from friendly, and it seems that he was on better terms with the Anglicans, to whom perhaps his Arminian views may have commended him. When he died in 1692 his body was laid to rest within the west doors of St. Stephen's Church, the Vicar, Rev. John Connould, a personal friend of Grantham's, conducting the funeral.

Connould had a great respect for Grantham, and directed that when he died his body should be buried in the same grave. When Blomefield wrote his *History of Norfolk* in 1745, this grave was marked by a black marble slab, engraved with Connould's arms and a long inscription in which he, Connould, is described as "*Verbi Dei fidus Dispensator, Antiquae Disciplinae rigidus Satelles, Pius omnibus bonisque charus.*"

AN EARLY LEASE.

The premises which Grantham's Church occupied in Cowgate were part of the remains of the Convent of the Whitefriars. An old Abstract of the Title to these premises has lately come to light. From this it appears that on April 17th, 1697, a lease of 700 years at £10 per annum was given by one John Chambers, a Woolcomber, to the representatives of the Church—Nathaniel Foxwell, Henry Taylor, and John Mingay, Worstead Weavers, Daniel Gilman, Cordwainer, and Ephraim Dowson, Robert Jessop, John Heett and Daniel Killingworth, Woolcombers, all of the City of Norwich. The premises are described as :

“ All that Messe. and tenemt. called the old Chapel being in length 41 feet within the wall and in breadth 21 feet with so much of the two tenemts : under it then in the posson of Elizath : Stubbs and Robert Browne as extend the length and breadth of the said Old Chapel. And also one piece of Ground on the South side of the sd : Old Chapel extending the whole length of the sd : building and of the breadth of 30 feet.”

The word “ chapel ” presumably refers to the previous monastic use of the building, which is described by Blomefield as :

“ The Friars' Hall with their kitchen under it, now the Anabaptist Meeting House, and the chapel of the Holy Cross at the West end thereof.”

John Chambers undertook to put the outward part of the roof in good repair before the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, and the lessees were to enclose their ground with a good and defensible wall by the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Christ then next.

THE BAPTISTRY.

The lease has a further provision respecting the Baptistry. The Lessees were to have the right

“ to pass to a certain Pool of Water in the Garden of the sd : John Chambers then in the posson of William Wallman to make use of the same as a place for dipping of such person or persons as shod : be brought or go thither to be dipped and for no other use or purpose so that they . . . did well and truly pay to the said John Chambers . . . the sum of 1/- for every time that the said water shod : be made use of for dipping so that they did no hurt or damage to the fruit trees bushes herbs flowers and other things growing or to grow for the time being in the sd : Garden.”

On their part the Lessees undertake to "keep the sd : pool in sufft : repair for their own use of dipping" and to "make good all Damages to be done to the sd : Garden walls or fences th-of or other things growing or to grow therein by reason of the sd : passage to the said Water or such dipping therein."

DANIEL KILLINGWORTH.

Daniel Killingworth, the last-named in the list of Lessees, was a prominent member of the Church. I think he was son-in-law to Rev. Thomas Grantham and father of Grantham Killingworth, who became a noted Baptist controversialist and a benefactor of the Church, to which he left a substantial endowment. In 1713, Daniel Killingworth agreed to "offitiate in ye work of ye ministry" once a fortnight, and three years later he was "unanimously chosen to serve God and this Church in the Capacity and Office of an Elder." He replied that his personal deficiencies with respect to qualifications and some other reasons did at present render him wholly unwilling to accept that request. Despite repeated invitations from the Church he was apparently never able to "find a willingness in himself" to take the office. He died in 1725 and was buried at the Old Chapel, where his tombstone, quoted by Blomefield, characterised him as Pious, Just and Liberal.

GENERAL AND PARTICULAR CHURCHES.

The General Baptist Church Meeting at the Old Chapel at the end of the seventeenth century was probably somewhat larger in membership than its elder sister, the Particular Baptist Church (now St. Mary's) then meeting at the East Granary—which had formed part of the buildings of the Convent of the Blackfriars.

The two Churches had no dealings one with the other—indeed, the Church books of each record excommunications of members who had fallen away to the other. A century later, when Joseph Kinghorn was building St. Mary's and his congregation was sharing in the worship of the Independents at the Old Meeting, he hired the Priory Yard Baptistry for 6/-, but the relationship between the two Churches even at this time seems to have been merely on a commercial basis. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that they began to draw together and to allow their bond of unity in the Baptist sentiments to overcome the doctrinal quarrel of two centuries.

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