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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

A Note on Baptist Beginnings in Bristol

BAPTISTS in Bristol, whose forefathers began soon after 1600, are surprised to read Dr. Winthrop Hudson's categorical statement that "practically all the early Baptists had been Congregationalists before they became Baptists." Also, it is a surprise to hear that we Baptists owe little or nothing to the Anabaptists. Some of us always remember them when we sing the *Te Deum*: "The noble army of martyrs praise Thee."

For Baptist beginnings in Bristol we go to the early pages of the Broadmead Records. There are two editions: the earlier one published by the Hanserd Knollys Society in 1847, edited by E. B. Underhill; and the later edition included in the Bunyan Library in 1865, edited by Nathaniel Haycroft, minister of the Broadmead Church.

Soon after 1600 a group of earnest Christians in Bristol, then the second city in England, found themselves drawn together by a deep longing for the Word of God as given in Holy Scripture. They also obtained no help from the lifeless formality they so often found in their parish churches. "The hungry sheep look up but are not fed," wrote John Milton at this time. Whenever a godly and evangelical vicar appeared, such as Mr. Yeamans at St. Philips, then people would flock to hear him.

Gradually, however, this group of believers were led to the conclusion that the only way for them was separation from the Church of England. Sometimes this fellowship would invite "lively and powerful preachers" from South Wales to come and minister to them both the Word and the Sacrament. Such visitors would stay in the home of William Listun, a glover in the city and a man outstanding both in personality and ability. Another leader in those early days was Robert Haynes, a writer and school-master. Both are mentioned many times in the early pages of the Records. The editor of the Broadmead Records Edward Terrill (1635-1686), received his training and instruction from Robert Haynes, and also became a writer and school-master. He married a widow, Mrs. Dorothy Heath, who was the daughter of William Listun.

The meetings of this group of Separatists began to attract attention, and soon there followed disturbance and persecution. During one of their meetings in High Street "the house was assaulted by a rude multitude and seamen, so that they broke all the windows because they heard there was a strange conventicle of puritans." When this outrage was laid before the Mayor of the city "instead of justice being done, he imprisoned several of the godly that met; whereupon some of them, being public, active and spirited men, drew up a petition to Parliament that then sat, against the Mayor of the City, for suffering them to be abused, and imprisoning them when they complained." This petition was taken to London by William Listun, and presented to Parliament. The Government soon made it known that they "well resented their case in Bristol, which so startled the Mayor of the City that it abated the fury of his spirit." When William Listun returned to Bristol he soon heard rumours that he was to be arrested, yet undismayed he went about his business as usual. A message came inviting him to meet the Mayor, who "entertained him civilly."

An important landmark is the year 1640, when "the providence of God brought to this city one, Mr. Canne, a baptized man." He had come to Bristol from Amsterdam and described himself as "Pastor of the Ancient English Church" in that city. Six years earlier he had published a book, *The Necessity of Separation from the Church of England*. Planning to stay awhile in Bristol he put up at the Dolphin Inn, but one of the fellowship, Mrs. Hazzard, "went to the Dolphin Inn and fetched him to her house, and entertained him all the time he stayed in the city. He helped us much in the Lord, being a man skilful in Gospel order. Like unto Aquila, he taught them the way of the Lord more perfectly." Before John Canne departed he "left with them a printed book treating of the same and divers printed papers to that purpose."

Several signs make it appear that John Canne "a baptized man" had convinced a good number in this separated group, to become baptized believers. So a second fellowship was formed in 1640 or soon after, wherein all the members were baptized. This included the two leaders, William Listun and Robert Haynes. The Broadmead Church also began to baptize in 1677. The second Church met in "the Fryers," monastic buildings still surviving, and used for over 250 years by the Society of Friends. Before long this second Church was strong enough to call a minister, Henry Hynam. In the Records, under 1652, this Church is evidently well established, for concerning the first Church we read: "The Lord awakened some in this Church to consider that there was no ground for baptizing children, much less for sprinkling them; and therefore they had not been rightly baptized according to Scripture. Whereupon one of our members, namely Thomas Munday, being con-

vinced in the year of our Lord 1652, he desired leave of the congregation to go and join himself to the other Church in Bristol, that were all baptized, having one Henry Hynam for their teacher. They gave him liberty to depart and join himself to the other Church aforesaid."

We do not know when Henry Hynam was appointed, but when he died on the 19th of April, 1679, he was almost the first to be buried in the new burying ground in Redcross Lane, bought jointly by the two churches and maintained by them until the year 1926. "There they buried that weak but holy, lamb-like servant of God, Henry Hynam, pastor before brother Gifford." For some years before Hynam's death, Andrew Gifford (d. 1721) had served as assistant pastor. He was ordained in June, 1677. Led by him the Church bought land in the Pithay that had been "a sope house," on which they built a chapel of their own in 1699. This remained the home of the Church until 1817, when they removed to Old King Street, to a large chapel seating 1,060. Now, after nearly 150 years they have settled down into their fourth home upon a spacious site in Cairns Road, situated in a very large suburb of the city. The site at Old King Street was needed by the city in the re-planning for a new shopping centre.

From these two Baptist Churches, Broadmead and the Pithay, have sprung all the Baptist churches in Bristol—there are now twenty-five—as well as many others in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Not one of these owes its beginning to Congregationalists. The two mother churches, through John Canne,¹ have a direct link with Amsterdam and the Mennonites there.

GORDON HAMLIN

¹ An article on John Canne can be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.