

THE LONDON ASSOCIATION OF STRICT BAPTIST MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

Baptist churches, whilst independent in their church polity, also discovered the strength to be secured through association, but in the capital little progress had been made in this respect even by the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1846 the London Baptist Association, formed in 1834, numbered thirty-three churches,¹ but was acutely aware of widespread apathy and the growing tension between open and strict communionists. In the Association's first Circular Letter, *On the Objects of Christian Associations and the Means of Securing Them, and the Motives by which their Prosecution is Urged*, the moderator, the Revd Edward Steane (1798-1882), stated as the third object: 'Occasions will be carefully sought for special prayer and humiliation before God, in order that the blessing promised to a supplicating people may be fully secured'.² The *Primitive Church Magazine*, organ of the strict communionists, recorded: 'The London Baptist Association has recommended the setting apart of Monday, the 14th of September, as a day of humiliation and prayer, on account of the low state of the churches within its limits, and throughout the country at large'.³ The day found no mention in the *Baptist Magazine*.

Stirrings in the hearts of the LBA churches were matched by a few of the unconnected strict-communion churches, who five months earlier had also planned to take action. The catalyst was a layman, James Oliver, a deacon of Trinity Street Chapel, Southwark, who on 31 March 1846 sent a circular letter to certain London ministers:

Dear Brother, You are particularly requested to attend a special meeting of ministers at Br. Rothery's, 71 Aldermanbury on Friday next at ½ past 3 precisely, to consider the propriety of adopting immediate measures for the better organization of the Strict Baptist Churches in London. Pray do not fail to attend, as the presence of every one is indispensably necessary.⁴

Despite the mere seventy-two hours' notice, twelve ministers attended, in addition to James Oliver, the only layman present. The ministers were Charles Box (d.1881) of Enon Chapel, Woolwich; Philip Dickerson (1795-1882), Little Alie Street Chapel, Goodman's Fields; Edward Ranson Hammond (1795-1860), Romney Street, Westminster; Hugh Killen, Cumberland Street, Shoreditch; William Norton (1812-90), Editor of the Baptist Tract Society and the *Primitive Church Magazine*; George Herbert Orchard (1796-1861), Highgate; Joseph Rothery, Buttesland Street Chapel, Hoxton; William Ward, Enon Chapel, West Ham Lane, Stratford; William Williams (1773-1847), Grafton Street, Soho; James Woodard, Ilford; Christopher Woollacott (1789-1879), Little Wild Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields; and George Wyard (1803-73), Soho Chapel, 406 Oxford Street. Five other ministers were invited: William Blackwell Bowes (1803-58), Blandford Street, Marylebone; John Cox (1802-78), Wellington Place, Shacklewell; Daniel Curtis (1799-1853), Homerton Row; Robert William Overbury (1812-68), Eagle Street, Holborn; John Peacock (1779-1864), Spencer Place, Goswell Road; however, all five and their churches boycotted the event.

The meeting in Rothery's manse was chaired by Philip Dickerson who invited James Oliver to state his plan. After consulting with his pastor, Benjamin Lewis,

and other brethren, Oliver had concluded that it was 'highly important to originate an Association forthwith'. Oliver's plan, for 'an Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches in and about London', comprised seven rules: the first, including a twelve-point basis of belief, was unanimously accepted by all present. It was further agreed that 250 copies of these Rules should 'be printed, and a few copies sent to each London Pastor at present co-operating with the Strict Baptists, and recommending a decision of the churches, where practicable by the 17th inst.' These short statements of belief are typical of those being produced by individual churches at that tie, often forming the preface to the Church Minute Book.

The next meeting was held a fortnight later on 17 April 1846, in the vestry of Cumberland Street Chapel, Shoreditch, and was chaired by the Revd Benjamin Lewis (1791-1858), of Trinity Street, Southwark. Ministers reported that the plan had been adopted by four churches (Grafton Street, Little Alie Street, Trinity Street, and Enon, Stratford) and eleven ministers (Charles Box, Philip Dickerson, Edward Ranson Hammond, Hugh Killen, Benjamin Lewis, George Herbert Orchard, Joseph Rothery, William Ward, William Williams, Christopher Woollacott and George Wyard). They resolved 'that such churches and ministers as have given in their adhesion to the plan proposed, be now formed into an Association, to be called "The London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches". A further meeting was called for Friday evening, 15 May 1846, at Little Wild Street, 'to receive the adhesion of other Churches, appoint officers and adopt such other measures as may be deemed necessary'.

A sub-committee of four, appointed to draw up bye-laws, produced no less than fifteen, including the annual appointment of a treasurer and two secretaries (one to be a minister). Another, over-ambitiously, specified that public meetings should be held monthly, whilst others ruled that no minister or place should receive a second appointment until all in association had had their turn; those who took part in the one-hour discussion after tea should be limited to ten minutes each, and the seven o'clock evening lecture should 'close as nearly as possible by a quarter-to-nine'.

Little Wild Street, although since 1836 in membership with the London Baptist Association from which it had now resigned, from the beginning made a significant contribution to this new Association. One of its messengers, William Stiles of 23 Lisle Street, Leicester Square, was elected treasurer, although through inability to attend the meetings he resigned in December. The other was the pastor's son, John Christopher Woollacott, who was appointed joint secretary with Benjamin Lewis. These secretaries remained in office throughout.

Although annual income rarely exceeded £20 and a balance was always left in hand, the treasurers changed frequently. Stiles was succeeded by Nathanael Kevan, a messenger from Cumberland Street. His minister, Hugh Killen, left early in 1848 to take up the pastorate of Mill Street Baptist Church, Bedford, and under his successor, the Revd Charles Smith, the church withdrew from the Association, later to join another Strict Baptist association, the London New, so Kevan's membership of the Strict Association ceased. James Oliver was appointed in his place for twelve months, when he was replaced by William Bowser, from Enon Chapel, Stratford, and he managed to survive to the end. All these men were also committee members of the Baptist Tract Society, of which Oliver was treasurer.

The first public meeting was held on Tuesday, 16 June 1846, at Little Wild Street. After tea, taken by about sixty people, addresses were delivered on the 'Faith of Assurance' by four speakers, William Williams, Philip Dickerson, Joseph Rothery, and William Chappell, minister of Providence Baptist Chapel, Mote Road, Maidstone, Kent and secretary of the Kent and Sussex New Association of Strict and Particular Baptists.⁵ The Kent and Sussex New Association had been formed two years previously on 11 June 1844, when the *Primitive Church Magazine* observed: 'This is the first Strict Baptist Association which has been formed in consequence of the spread of general redemption and free-communion in our churches'.⁶ It was therefore an encouragement to the London Strict Association that William Chappell not only attended and spoke, but also brought a letter stating that his Association felt 'gratified in hearing of, and do most cordially and unanimously congratulate you on, the formation of an Association founded on the great doctrines of Sovereign and Distinguishing Grace with Strict or Primitive Communion, and do hereby express our united approval of your endeavours for the maintenance and dissemination of the above principles.'⁷ The evening sermon, 'both evangelical and argumentative', was on 'The Advantages of Union in promoting the cause of Christ', by the Revd George Wyard, who 'took occasion to defend the formation and explain the objects of this new association'. The minutes of the day's proceedings conclude 'the attendance was highly encouraging, and the spirit pervading the whole assembly apparently,

Resembling that above
Where streams of endless pleasure flow
And every heart is love.

Clearly the writer of the minutes is quoting from memory the last three lines of Benjamin Beddome's hymn, but the bliss described applied only when sectarianism had disappeared!⁸

Three meetings were held at Trinity Street Chapel, Southwark, on 18 August 1846, the first a committee meeting attended by five ministers and four lay messengers, when the 15th Bye-Law was adopted and 250 copies of the Bye-Laws, by now complete, were ordered to be printed for the use of the messengers and ministers. Tentative plans were drawn up for the first Annual Meeting, proposed for April 1847 at Grafton Street, Soho. At the Tea Meeting six spoke successively, each for ten minutes if they adhered to Bye-Law IV, on 'The Nature, Objects and Influence of Christian Hope'. At the Public Meeting 'Br. Wheelock, the Pastor of a Strict Baptist Church at New York consisting of 600 members, read, prayed and delivered a short address'. This was the Revd Dr Alonzo Wheelock, pastor from 1840 to 1847 of the Sixteenth Baptist Church, New York, formed in 1833 originally in West Sixteenth Street. A controversialist, Wheelock published a discourse contending that, while the sacrifice which procured the atonement was made on the cross, the atonement was made in heaven. Finally, Philip Dickerson preached on 'The Doctrine of a Sinner's Justification before God'.⁹

The next meetings were held at Grafton Street on 20 October 1846, under the chairmanship of the minister there, the Revd William Williams. The approved postage account (14s 6d) was enough to buy 174 penny stamps. The previous

committee meeting had commissioned both the writer and the subject of the first annual Circular Letter, but this was subjected to scrutiny before publication, as the Minute Book relates:

Br Lewis read the Circular Letter he had been appointed to draw up on 'the Scriptural Constitution of the Christian Church', after which he retired, that the meeting unfettered by his presence might express their views thereon. After much conversation, on the motion of Br Ward it as Resolved: To omit those passages, that were open to controversy among ourselves, and so to shorten it, that the expence [*sic*] of printing 500 might be met by a charge of not more than 2d for each letter, and that Brs Norton, Rothery and Dickerson with Br Lewis, form a Sub-Committee to carry out such Resolution.

Three visiting ministers took part in this meeting: Thomas Owen, pastor at Cranfield, Bedfordshire, 1841-70; Stephen Davis, recently retired from the Baptist Irish Society which he had served 1816-45; and Johannes Gerhardus Oncken from Hamburg, Germany.

In the evening the first Annual General Meeting was held, with Benjamin Lewis in the chair. The Minute Book notes, 'The attendance was large and a delightful spirit pervaded the assembly'. Letters from the seven member churches were read and their statistics given, revealing a total membership of 961. Although this averaged 137 members per church, four churches fell below this figure, three very considerably. The three large churches were all long-established, the smaller ones more recent. (The final column gives the number in Whitley's *Baptists of London*).

Church	Date	Minister	Members	W. no.
Little Wild Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields	1691	Christopher Woollacott 1835-63	145	40
Little Alie Street, Goodman's Fields	1753	Philip Dickerson 1831-70	392	52
Trinity Street, Southwark	1773	Benjamin Lewis 1825-53	155	61
Grafton Street, Soho	1812	William Williams 1814-47	74	98
Stratford, Enon Chapel, West Ham Lane	1843	William Ward 1843-50	37	169
Cumberland Street, Shoreditch	1841	Hugh Killen 1843-47	119	170
Westminster, Great Smith Street	1846	John George 1846	39	204

Three months later William Williams died on 27 January 1847, aged 73, and the church ceased its existence upon his death. The church at Great Smith Street sought to unite under the pastorate of Edward Ranson Hammond, shown in the 1847 *Baptist Manual* as transferring from Westminster to Grafton Street in May 1847, but the union was not successful, and in March 1848 Hammond removed to West Malling, Kent.

At the next meetings, in Cumberland Street Chapel on Tuesday, 15 December 1846, 'Br J. Woollacott reported that the sub-committee had altered and somewhat curtailed the Circular Letter read at the last meeting, and that the Secretaries finding 1000 could be printed for £3 3s 0d - had ordered that number and fixed the price at 1d, thus if all be sold, securing a small profit'. The printer's account came to £3 7s 0d, which included four shillings for alterations.

The pattern of these bi-monthly meetings continued with a Committee Meeting at 3.00 p.m., followed by a Tea Meeting at 5.00 p.m., usually attended by about ninety people. From 6.00 to 7.00 p.m. a subject for discussion was introduced, and five or six people, of whom the majority were ministers, each expounded the chosen theme for ten minutes. The evening meeting was similar in form to a mid-week evening service, and concluded at 8.50 p.m., visitors from the provinces or overseas often took part, and the culmination was the address, of which both subject and speaker were appointed two months earlier. The titles of these addresses, the discussions, and the Circular Letters evidence a mixture of concern for Christian unity, basic doctrinal concerns with a Genevan orientation (e.g. Perseverance of the Saints, Divine Sovereignty, the Doctrine of Election, the Elect, Particular Redemption), local church organization and development, discipleship, Protestant consciousness, and biblical and adventist concerns. These addresses and discussions were fully reported in the *Primitive Church Magazine*.

The struggles of the smaller churches to keep pace with their commitments locally and to the Association became more apparent in 1847. The meetings on 16 February at Little Alie Street arranged for the meetings on 20 April to be held at Great Smith Street, but this was changed at the eleventh hour to Trinity Chapel, Southwark. Some six months later, at the second annual meeting held on 19 October 1847 at Cumberland Street Chapel, Shoreditch, only five churches were represented, the absentees being Grafton Street and Great Smith Street, now combined under Hammond, who excused himself from addressing this meeting as arranged 'in consequence of necessary absence from town'. John Woollacott reported that forty-eight of the recent Circular Letters (*The Relative Duties of Church Members* by Philip Dickerson) had been supplied to Mr F. Wheeler for the friends at Grafton Street, but were not yet paid for. The general malaise of this combined church is conveyed in the cryptic cogent of the Association's Minute Book: 'A letter from Mr Cooper, late messenger from the church under Br Hammond's care, was read - explaining that although a letter had been prepared, yet circumstances have since occurred, which render it unadvisable to send it to the General Meeting'. In December the Association decided to take action:

Reference having been made to the case of *he united churches, late under Br Hammond's care*, and he having reported that, having failed in securing an eligible place in which to meet for worship, and his belief that it was designed

to break up the communion, the various members uniting with neighbouring churches, as circumstances might determine. It was resolved, That with a view to express the sympathy of this Association, and see if some measure cannot be adopted to enable the people to maintain their union with one another - That Brs Oliver and Rothery be appointed a Deputation from this meeting, to wait on the Deacons and confer with the Church accordingly.

The deputation reported on 15 February 1848 that they had had an interview with the deacons and, though desirous of continuing together, they could find no suitable place in which to meet. Br Hammond said that the church met monthly, that some had been dismissed and others were seeking dismissal to other churches and therefore he saw no probability of the friends continuing to form a separate church.

Enon Chapel, Stratford (then in Essex), had the smallest membership of any church in the Association. Formed in 1843 under the pastorate of William Ward, it had joined the London Baptist Association in 1845 but changed to the Strict Association in 1846. On Wednesday, 21 September 1847, it was the subject of a special committee meeting convened at Rothery's manse 'to consider an application for pecuniary help which the church at Stratford had requested their pastor to lay before the Association'. The ensuing discussion revealed some of the tensions and problems faced by that church, but proved to be the opening chapter of a saga which continued throughout the Association's life.

Br J. Woollacott read a letter he had received from Br Ward explaining the cause of such application. It appears that with diminished means the church has been called on by Capt. Whittle, the Lessee of the building, to pay an additional amount of £12 for Ground Rent. Reference having been made to certain reports relative to a disagreement between the Pastor and some of the members, Br Rothery said that he and other Brethren had been engaged on the previous evening in their investigation and trusted the result would show that the differences had all been adjusted. Br Ward made a Statement as to the present position and future prospects of the church - answered sundry questions proposed to him by the Brethren - all of which went to prove that without help the church would be overcome and destroyed by its difficulties. Conversation arose as to the propriety of securing the Building to the denomination by purchasing the Lease of Capt. Whittle, in preference to paying an increased ground rent, and it appearing evident further information and consideration was necessary prior to a decision on the main question.

It was resolved to appoint two laymen, James Oliver and William Bowser (the latter from the Stratford church), as a deputation to Captain Whittle, to obtain from him the lowest terms on which he felt disposed to let or sell the church building.¹⁰

The second annual meeting, on Wednesday, 19 October 1847, heard 'That Capt. Whittle had offered the Building for £250, subject to a ground rent of £8, or to let on a lease at £22 per annum'. Another special committee meeting on 5 November 1847 discussed the sub-committee's recommendation, 'to guarantee to Capt. Whittle the owner of the Chapel, the Rent of £20 for one year to commence from Michaelmas, 1847: - it being understood that the church engages to make every possible effort towards raising the above sum'. The Minute Book records:

Br Ward after answering questions and giving further information relative to his future prospects, withdrew from the Meeting. The Brethren present, after expressing deep concern to be guided rightly in the appropriation of the funds entrusted to them by the churches, and apprehending that the prospects before Br Ward even with the pecuniary assistance contemplated were anything but cheering and satisfactory, requested the sub-committee to confer again with Br Ward on this matter specially. After doing so they reported that in the event of the cause at Stratford not prospering under Br Ward's ministry and a manifest revival of the Lord's work being withheld, that he should feel it his duty to retire - he would renew his efforts and these failing, he undertook at Lady Day next to place the Chapel under the management of the Committee of this Association. Such report being deemed sufficient and with such mutual understanding, it was moved by Br Dickerson, seconded by Br Hammond [whose own church was in disarray at this time!] and Resolved unanimously, that provided the church at Stratford agree, with a view to raise all they can in their own locality towards making up the rental, to have collections on the Lord's Day twice in the quarter, and on those occasions seek the preaching services of a London Minister, hoping thereby that both the congregation and collection may be improved, that, in that case the recommendation of the sub-committee be adopted, - and that the Treasurer on hearing from Br Ward that the church at Stratford have undertaken so to do, be hereby empowered to guarantee on behalf of the Association the sum of £20 for one year from Michaelmas last.

At the next Committee Meeting, on 21 December 1847, William Ward was willing, personally, to place Enon Chapel at Lady Day, 25 March 1848, under the management of the Association Committee, but could not speak for his church members. However, the Association Secretaries had also resolved to do what the Committee required and the Treasurer had given Captain Whittle an undertaking that the Association would be responsible for the rent. Throughout 1848 and 1849 Ward continued to appeal to the Association for financial help. At a special Committee Meeting on 26 September 1848 it was unanimously agreed that £5 per annum be granted, to be paid in quarterly instalments, and this was renewed on 28 August 1849 for a further year.

On 15 January 1850, in the Secretary's report, J. C. Woollacott said that he had received a communication from the Deacon of the church, announcing William Ward's resignation as the Pastor, and desiring that the pulpit might be supplied by brethren from the Association. Woollacott confirmed that from 11 November 1849 he had been successful in making those arrangements, 'which he had reason to believe had proved satisfactory to the friends a Stratford', and he was asked to continue them. A month later on 19 February it was resolved 'that Br Dickerson be requested to enquire concerning the internal state of the church, as well as the success which attends our efforts to promote the cause'. The intervention of the Association benefited the church; Messrs Oliver and J. C. Woollacott visited Stratford during the summer of 1850 and recommended the church to select from their visiting preachers one who would supply them for three months. Accordingly they invited Mr J. Hinckley, a member of Little Alie Street. Although the church

continued to seek financial assistance, Hinckley's ministry proved acceptable and in December 1850 he was invited to supply for a further six months. He wrote on 28 May 1851 to the Association, reporting favourable progress, and at the sixth General Meeting on 21 October 1851 the church asked the Association to advise on making this ministry permanent, and also to continue to give financial assistance. The Association told the church to approach Hinckley direct concerning the pastorate, and agreed to continue their £5 grant for another year. Sadly the annual report a year later records that Hinckley had suffered a stroke and was unable to continue his ministry at Stratford.

The first general meeting of the newly-constituted London Strict Baptist Association held on Tuesday, 20 September 1853, confirmed that £2 had been voted to Stratford 'in defraying the expense attendant upon the removal among them of Mr [William] Wise, whom they had called to the pastoral office'. At the same meeting, Hinckley, who had returned to Little Alie Street, was confirmed as one of its two messengers to the Association for the ensuing year.

Another small church was formed at Phillip Street, off Kingsland Road, Hoxton, on 3 March 1848, under the ministry of the Revd Thomas Pepper. It was unanimously accepted for membership on 18 April 1848. Half a mile south of this church, off the opposite side of Kingsland Road, was a struggling, pastorless cause at Union Street, opened on 9 January 1848 by the Association, which had assumed full responsibility for it. At the Association Committee Meeting on 15 February 1848,

The Sub-Committee appointed to enquire into *he proposition* as to the taking of the place of worship in *Union Street, Kingsland Road* as a Preaching Station in connection with this Association, Reported that, in conversing together after the last Public Meeting, it appeared to them desirable to take the place - that Br Rothery said he would see to opening it, as well as the supply of Preachers till next Meeting - and that as Mr Nicholas was about to give it up at once, he went with him to the Land Lady and took it on behalf of the Association for twelve months at the Rent of £10, and that Br Lewis gave an order on the Treasurer for the Sum of £8, for the purchase of the fixtures, which was considered a very reasonable valuation - That the said place of worship was opened on Lord's Day 9 Jany last - Bn Norton and Rothery preaching on the occasion.

Evidently the Association saw this kind of church-planting as an integral part of its role because the meeting further agreed that 'Bn Rothery, Dickerson and the Secretaries be appointed a sub-Committee to take the necessary measures for supplying the Pulpit at Union Chapel until the next Meeting; and that they be requested to prepare and submit at that Meeting a Set of bye-laws for the regulation and management of this and other Preaching Stations which may be occupied by this Association.' At the next meeting on 18 April, Rothery reported that the prospects were 'highly discouraging' and at the following meeting on 21 June the sub-committee's report was read and ordered to be minuted:

The little Chapel at Union Row, was opened as a preaching station at Xmas last, and has therefore been used for that purpose six months. It was opened

on Lord's Day Dec'r 27th, Br Rothery preaching in the Morning and Br Norton in the Evening. The congregation at no time large, has fluctuated considerably, and the average attendance now is not more than a dozen persons. The appearance of things as a whole, it must be confessed is far from encouraging - a principal hindrance being as I believe the want of local influence. Could persons be found on the spot, if only one or two, who would take an interest in the cause, and make the thing known in the neighbourhood, and if a person or two were to commence a Sunday School, it is my opinion that good might be done. At the commencement two members of Buttesland St Church preached, and very frequently Mr Crowe, but very little impression has been at present produced. Our dear Brother Norton has lately taken an active part in endeavouring to raise a cause here, and could one or two persons of the character above named be procured to render their aid, there is no doubt, that under the blessing of God, our dear brothers exertions would be rendered very useful. It was found necessary to make some repairs and alterations which have cost 20s/=, but perhaps a part of this may be obtained from the Landlady. The only services which at present have been held are on the morning and evening of the Lord's Day. (signed) Jos: Rothery June 20th, 1848.

The bye-laws proposed by the sub-committee for the regulation of preaching stations were approved. From this time the location of the chapel is given as 'Union Row, Kingsland'.

Thomas Pepper, minister of the nearby church, and Mr William Bowser, deacon of Enon, Stratford, were appointed to superintend the preaching station at Union Row until the October general meeting. Although at the August committee meeting they reported that 'hitherto the place had been supplied, but that no effectual measures had yet been taken to carry out the recommendations in the bye-laws', they were able to report in October that 'the congregation was much improved and there was every reason to believe permanent good was doing: it was intended to hold a Public Tea Meeting there very soon'. Norton still retained responsibility for the building, and at the 19 December meeting had written to say that the building was now let for two evenings a week, commencing 22 May 1848, at thirty shillings a quarter to Mr Barron of Stoke Newington, treasurer of the Kingsland Teetotal Society. Norton had used this rent to pay the cleaning woman of the church. He had also spent on repairs, hopefully reclaimable from the landlady. The total balance due to him was 19s 6d, which he offered as a donation to the Association. One of the ministers invited to preach at Union Row was the Revd George Herbert Orchard, minister at Highgate 1843-March 1848, when he accepted a call to Bridlington, Yorkshire. Although a staunch strict-communionist until his death in 1861, Orchard acted at Union Row much to the displeasure of the Association committee:

It having been intimated that the Ordinance of the *Lord's Supper* had been administered by Mr Orchard sent by Mr Pepper to preach at Union Row - it was moved by Br Woollacott, seconded by Br Woodard and *Resolved* That Br Pepper be requested to desire Mr Orchard to desist from so doing in future,

it being the deliberate opinion of this Committee that, *to break bread* among the people, even altho' limited to baptized believers unless they have been first organized and formed into a distinct Church, *is highly inconsistent and unscriptural.*

It was further moved by Br Burgon, seconded by Br Woodard and *resolved* 'That if the Brethren at Union Row feel themselves sufficiently strong to justify *their union together as a separate section* of the Church of Christ, that this association will afford them all that assistance and countenance which under the circumstances may be requisite.'¹¹

Some four months later, at the meeting on 21 August, the church responded to the offer of autonomy in a letter, signed by S. Francis and others, 'the very encouraging prospects and hopeful signs which had recently sprung up under the ministry of the word, and further that they be allowed to rent the place of the Association during the next 12 months. Br Francis, who was in attendance, was called in and confirmed all the statements in the letter and expressed himself as willing to become personally responsible for the due payment of the rent'. The Teetotalers, reducing their meetings at the chapel from twice to once a week, asked for the rent to be halved to £3 per annum. These matters were referred to an adjourned meeting one week later, when on the motion of the Revd Benjamin Lewis it was resolved 'That it is undesirable to underlet as proposed - that if Mr Francis will undertake to pay for the fixtures in the course of 12 months, this Association will authorize him to treat with the Landlady for the occupation of the place for next quarter, on behalf of himself and friends, this Association withdrawing altogether therefrom'. Unfortunately, the landlady was not as pliable as they had hoped and at the Fourth General Meeting on 16 October, one of the Secretaries, John Christopher Woollacott, reported that:

Mr Francis and his friends were perfectly willing to accept the Resolution passed by this committee 28 August - that an unforeseen difficulty however having arisen, *the Landlady* (Mrs Cooper) objecting to transfer the tenancy in the same terms - *that Mr Francis had given* to Br Woollacott a *written declaration, guaranteeing the Rent* from Michaelmas last, and the *payment of £8 for fixtures* within 12 months.

It was reported on 15 January 1850 that 'final arrangements for the transfer of the place to Mr Francis, were on the eve of completion'. However, on 20 August it was stated that Mr Francis had only managed to repay half of the £8 required for fixtures, and a letter was read from Mr Haines, 'the present Deacon', requesting a three-month extension of the term for repaying the balance. On the motion of the Association Treasurer, Mr Oliver, it was resolved 'That we cannot recognize any other than Mr Francis as answerable for the money, but that three months further be granted for payment, as requested'. The transfer within the church of authority from Mr Francis to Mr Haines was a sign of dissension at Union Row. At the Fifth General Meeting on 15 October 1850, it was reported that the full amount due from Mr Francis on account of fixtures had been paid, and also that 'Mr Francis and other friends had taken a place at their own risk for preaching near the Balls Pond

Road', and had applied to John C. Woollacott 'to have the pulpit supplied by preaching brethren from the Association, engaging to defray their Travelling Expenses'. Woollacott had 'felt it right without calling the committee together, to make such arrangements . . . and the Meeting had been opened for Worship accordingly on Lord's Day 22 September'. Woollacott's action was approved and he was requested 'to attend to all necessary future arrangements'. Four months later on 18 February 1851, 'Mr Francis reported that he had closed the station in the Kingsland Road as it did not answer'. Although this breakaway faction did not survive, the mainstream at Union Row, since 1849 under the ministry of J. P. Searle, continued there until 1854 when they moved to Beulah Chapel, 153 High Street, Hoxton, renaming it Ebenezer. In 1857 Searle retired and joined the Baptist Board in 1858.¹²

The Association did not accept into its membership every applicant. From the chair of the Committee Meeting on 17 April 1849, Thomas Pepper proposed Br Garrett, pastor of the church at Church Street, Stoke Newington, for membership, but two brethren exercised their right of postponement until the following meeting. On 19 June the application was defeated by five votes to one, so both church and pastor remained outside the association. When, some sixteen months later, the Revd William Ball, pastor of the Wandsworth church from 1843-64 applied for admission, it was unanimously granted.

The Association's increasing involvement with the problems faced by these infant causes resulted in the committee gradually adopting a more cautious approach. King Street Chapel, Camden Town, had been supplied with preachers from the Association since 27 October 1849, a fact not minuted for over a year when, on 17 December 1850, it was mentioned, together with the request by Mr Small, a deacon applying on behalf of the church for association membership. No decision ever appears to have been reached on this application and it was quietly forgotten, doubtless because both parties were aware that this church which had commenced in 1847 under the ministry of J. Slade had by 1849 joined the rival London New Association. At the meeting on 15 April 1851 a letter was read from the Deacon of the church stating that Br Ward (previously pastor of Enon, Stratford, 1843-50) had been invited 'to labour stately among them, to which he had assented; and also expressive of thanks for the assistance afforded by the Association in their time of need'. Four months later, on 19 August, Mr Small again wrote stating that the cause was £5 in debt and seeking help and counsel. On the motion of Br Pepper, £2 10s 0d was voted to them and they were advised 'to continue the effort and give themselves to earnest prayer for the Divine blessing'. Another letter from Mr Small on 17 February 1852 sought pecuniary aid. Two months later his final letter stated that the place had been given up, but that the church met at present from house to house, that £1 10s 0d was owing for rent - and £2 18s 0d borrowed money. The Association resolved that a final grant of £1 10s 0d be made to enable the friends to pay the arrears of rent.

The Revd William Harding Bonner, minister of Unicorn Yard 1847-51 and a committee member of the Association, on 17 February 1852 naively submitted a financial appeal on behalf of the church at Mill End, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, which on 20 April was refused, 'It being stated that Mill End was at least 18 miles

from town, Resolved, That it is considered too distant to justify any aid being afforded to the church there, from the funds of this Association'.

Attendance at bi-monthly meetings and preparation of addresses, discussions and circular letters imposed considerable strain upon committee members. This stress showed in various ways: the April and June 1850 committee meetings were attended by only one minister, but by five and eight laymen respectively. On 20 August 1850, 'It having been reported that Br Rothery had administered the Lord's Supper to an Open-Communion Church at Islington, on the motion of Br Oliver, it was resolved that Bn Lewis and Bowser be requested to confer with him on the subject'. This indicates how even the committed were under threat of changing practice. The minutes do not reveal the outcome, but Rothery was again under attack the following summer when, on 17 June 1851, 'Br Burgon reported that himself and Br Whorlow had seen Br Rothery who acknowledged his indebtedness to the Association in the sum of £3 and expressed his regret that he had been unable hitherto to return it, but pledging himself to do so within two months'. On 19 August it was reported that he had not fulfilled his promise, and on 21 October that he had now promised to repay the amount 'by the first week in November'. Matters came to a head with the minute of 20 April 1852: 'Reference having been made to the £3 due to the Association from Mr Rothery, on the motion of Br Oliver it was Resolved, that Br Rothery having now for a considerable period held £3 belonging to the Association, received by him from the Treasurer on account of rent due for the Chapel at Kingsland, and not having fulfilled the promise long since made to the brethren appointed to visit him on the subject, that he would return the money within a short time, *Resolved, That Br Rothery be no longer considered a Member of this Association, and that he be informed thereof by the Secretaries*'. A cynic may be tempted to think that the loss of three pounds weighed more heavily with the committee than did the communion question.

There were other tensions. On 19 October 1847 the Revd Christopher Woollacott, taking for his text Revelation 2.1, addressed the public meeting on 'The Inspection of the Churches by the Lord Jesus, indicated by His walking among the golden Candlesticks'. This was immediately followed by a sermon from the Revd George Wyard on Jude 3b, 'I exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'. Both addresses were reported in the *Primitive Church Magazine*.¹³ In 1848 the Revd James Woodard wrote a 32-page Circular Letter on 'The Connection between doctrinal error and spiritual declension'. All three mature ministers were sending a warning note to the members of the Association.

Mr Searle,¹⁴ one of the lay messengers from Phillip Street, Kingsland Road, Hoxton, also perceiving the general apostacy, gave notice of motion in August 1848 'That the Association take into consideration the propriety of communicating with all the Strict Baptist Churches in and around London, briefly detailing the objects of the Association, and earnestly inviting co-operation with them, in their stand for apostolic truth and their endeavour to stay the wide spreading defection from the discipline of the Primitive Churches'. However, there is no record of any action.

At the committee meeting on the afternoon of the Third General Meeting, 17 October 1848, letters were read from the church at Cumberland Street and the Revd

George Wyard resigning connection with the Association. These, together with the Revd James Woodard of Ilford and four other churches not formerly in membership of the original Association, jointly formed the London New Association, an entirely parallel organization of strict-communionists. These seven founding churches¹⁵ were:

Church	date	members	minister	W. no
Essex, Ilford, High Street	1809	91	James Woodard 1840-70	88
London and Southwark, New Church Street, Bermondsey	1782		James Lane Meeres 1847-94	193
Bluegate Fields, Shadwell	1830		J. Milner 1831-56	144
Cumberland Street, Shoreditch	1841	103	Charles Smith 1848-57	170
Oxford Street (406), Soho	1780	340	George Wyard 1842-56	67
Unicorn Yard, Southwark	1720	190	William Harding Bonner, 1847-51	22
Middlesex, Camden Town, King Street	1847		J. Slade 1847-49 (?)	209

During 1849 the church at Enon, Woolwich, moved to the London New Association. Their minister, Charles Box, had been a founder member of the London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches, although the church itself had never been in membership. At the committee meeting of 15 January 1850 John Woollacott reported that 'in consequence of the long continued absence from our meetings of Br Box, he had applied to him on the subject; the correspondence between them was read; Br Box had replied that differences prevailing between him and brethren in the Association, *he had determined to leave it and unite with a new association more to his mind*'. Asked to explain those differences, he answered generally 'that he believed it to be our duty to preach the Gospel to every creature, to warn the ungodly, but *he did not believe it was the duty of every creature to believe with the faith of God's elect, but most of the brethren in the association, he said, did so believe and so say*. The Secretary replied neither did he so believe and more he felt that such was not the opinion of brethren in the association, *whereupon it was Resolved*, on the motion of Br Oliver That the *conduct of the Secretary be approved*, and that *he be further directed to state that this Meeting repudiates the sentiment which has been attributed to the association by Br Box, and request that the Brethren*

who as he states do so believe and so say, may be named'. A month later, on 19 February, a letter from Br Box expressed regret for having said *many* in the Association held the sentiment commonly known as Duty Faith, reiterated the imputation on *some* of the brethren but declined to mention their names. It was then resolved, 'That this meeting, notwithstanding Br Box's statement, not only affirms the resolution of the last Meeting but further, its entire ignorance of any brethren belonging to us as an Association, holding the views which he still declares, *some* not only believe but so say'.¹⁶

The 1849 *Baptist Manual* shows seven churches in membership of the London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches and eight in the London New. It also lists 67 Baptist churches in London and 36 in Middlesex, not counting those in Kent and Essex near enough to come within the orbit of a London association.¹⁷ This vindicates Searle's suggestion in August 1848 that there were many unassociated Strict Baptist churches in London, and shows that both associations represented but a tiny fraction of eligible causes. Three years later, when membership of the older association had fallen to six and that of the London New to five, the associations began to draw together, the initial move, characteristically confrontational, being made at the LASBMC committee meeting on 24 August 1852: 'Br Bonner referred to the title lately adopted by the New Association, viz: The Association of Baptists holding Particular Redemption and Practising Strict Communion, and proposed, That a fraternal letter be sent to that Association, pointing out the invidious charge which they have made, as though that doctrine were not held by us, in which it was Resolved, That the Secretary be instructed to write accordingly'. Fortunately this was received without rancour by the London New, whose reply was reported on 19 October: 'A copy of the letter sent by the Secretaries, agreeably to Vote of last meeting, was read, together with a very friendly and fraternal reply which had been received, expressive of a desire for a Conference, in the hope that measures might be adopted for an union of the two Associations'. They met at Little Alie Street on 9 November most amicably, and on 18 January 1853 united as the London Strict Baptist Association (often abbreviated to 'London Strict').

As their minutes have apparently not survived, the only records of seemingly less frequent meetings are those reported in the *Primitive Church Magazine*. Their Rules and Regulations were substantially similar to those of the LASBMC but included four new ones:

- 4 The deity and sinless humanity of Jesus Christ.
- 7 The divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit.
- 11 The divine authority and sole sufficiency of Scripture.
- 14 Congregational order and independence of the churches.

The inaugural meeting was one of the last gatherings in Union Chapel, Cumberland Street, Shoreditch, because its lease expired on 25 March and the church removed to Providence Chapel, Austin Street, Hackney Road, on 29 March 1853. The first public meeting of the new joint association was held on 15 March and the First General Meeting on 20 September at which the appointment of Joint Secretaries, one from each earlier body, James Woodard and John Christopher

Woollacott, was confirmed. The thirteen participating churches were listed, reports were given, names of their messengers stated, and their contributions to association funds detailed.¹⁸

Whilst the two associations were negotiating towards unity, the LASBMC was engaged in a witch-hunt against their member, the Revd Thomas Pepper, commencing at the committee of 19 October 1852. 'Reports highly detrimental to the character of Br Pepper being in circulation, on the motion of Br J. Woollacott it was resolved "That a deputation of two brethren be appointed to visit Mr Pepper and search out the correctness or otherwise of these reports. It was further resolved that Bn C. Woollacott and Oliver be the deputation'. On 21 December the deputation was not yet able to report, and at the final meeting on 9 February, it was resolved 'That the matter do now drop; this association not now having a separate existence'. There is no mention of Pepper or the Phillips Street church in the *Baptist Manual* after 1851, and neither joined the London Strict. Pepper subsequently went to a church at Stoke Newington, just over a mile north of Phillips Street, apparently taking his congregation with him.¹⁹

A more positive step with a significant missionary thrust was taken at the penultimate LASBMC committee meeting on 21 December 1852, when a further meeting at Trinity Street, Southwark, was planned, the selected subject for the chosen speaker, Revd William Harding Bonner, being 'The duty of preaching the gospel to every creature'. The projected meeting was, however, cancelled and replaced by a final meeting at Little Wild Street on 9 February 1853, which only two ministers and four messengers attended. Apart from dropping their enquiry into Br Pepper's character, they decided that the remaining copies of the last Circular Letter 'be not sold, but circulated gratuitously among the churches', and authorized the treasurer to hand over 'whatever balance remains in hand' to the new association.

The *Primitive Church Magazine* records three meetings of the London Strict in 1853, two in 1854, and one on 20 March 1855, after which reports cease and evidently the association died.²⁰ Although this united association existed for two years, there is little evidence of activity: there was one Circular Letter in 1853 and another in 1854. Finances were at a low ebb: the First General Meeting reported contributions totalling £11 0s 6d from the churches. The only recorded payments to churches were £2 removal expenses to Enon, Stratford, upon the settlement of Mr William Wise, and £1 per quarter for rent of a room at North Woolwich where an increasing Sunday School was conducted from across the river by teachers and others connected with Enon Chapel, Woolwich. This grant appears to continue one previously paid by the London New. At the Second Annual Meeting on 19 October 1854, prayer was offered by the Revd William Varley, who had been minister at Knaresborough, Yorkshire, 1853-4 and within a few days sailed to South Africa to take up a pastorate at Port Elizabeth. By then association finances had sunk to 'between two and three pounds'. At that General Meeting letters from the churches were read, 'furnishing matter both for joy and mourning, gratitude and humiliation'.

The failure of these associations was caused by their limited vision. Although the various titles all included 'London', hardly any concern or responsibility for the struggling masses of London was ever shown. They failed to obtain the support of

the majority of the churches who shared their doctrinal standards, some holding aloof even when their ministers joined. Only once did any of these associations take action on any matter outside their own theological interests. That was on 18 June 1850 when, along with simultaneous petitions from other churches and associations throughout the country, the LASBMC decided to petition the King of Sweden, 'praying his Majesty to grant Religious freedom to our brethren the Baptists now exposed to prosecution and banishment on account of their Religion'.²¹ These brethren who claimed religious freedom for Baptists in Sweden were unable to grant liberty of thought and action not only to fellow Baptists but to their own members, some of whom were suspected of holding 'the sentiment commonly known as "duty faith"' and others of administering the Lord's Supper to a congregation of baptized believers not previously formed into a church, or to an open-communion church in Islington.²² Such were the tensions which brought a few strict-communion churches to join with three ministers who had resigned from the LASBMC, Box of Woolwich, Woodard of Ilford, and Wyard of Oxford Street, but on this occasion supported by their congregations, and the Cumberland Street church which had also resigned, to form the London New Association. The marriage of the LASBMC and the London New was unsuccessful: the parties were weak and represented too small a proportion of the total strict-communion constituency, of which the majority apparently cared less for such deep theological discussions. Nevertheless, the lasting achievements, particularly of the earlier Association, were the extension of life of some struggling churches and the preservation of at least one which, left to its own devices, would not have survived. Enon Chapel, Stratford, now known as West Ham Tabernacle, is still alive today, one and a half centuries later, in membership of the Association of Grace Baptist Churches (South East).

With the demise of the London Strict Baptist Association in 1855, Particular Baptist churches in London were without any association until 1865 when the London Baptist Association was re-established. Many of the strict-communion churches later joined the Metropolitan Association of Strict Baptist Churches which was formed in 1871.

NOTES

This article is an abridgement of a chapter in the author's MA thesis, University of Keele 1991, 'Strict-Communion Organisations Amongst the Baptists in Victorian England'.

- 1 London Baptist Association 13th Annual Letter to the Churches, 1846, p.15.
- 2 London Baptist Association 1st Annual Letter to the Churches, 1834, p.9.
- 3 *Primitive Church Magazine*, III, New Series no.33, September 1846, p.339.
- 4 Ms Minute Book of the London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches in Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, unpagd. Hereafter 'Minute Book'.
- 5 *Primitive Church Magazine* III, New Series no.31, July 1846, p.263.
- 6 *ibid.* I, New Series no.7, July 1844, p.364. This statement overlooks the prior claim of the Suffolk and Norfolk Association of Particular Baptist Churches, formed 1829, 'maintaining . . . the necessity of Baptism upon a confession of faith as a pre-requisite to the Lord's Supper'.
- 7 Minute Book. The letter was dated 10 June 1846 and signed by William Pope, pastor of Meopham, Kent, as Association Moderator, and William Chappell as Secretary, at the conclusion of the Kent & Sussex New Association of Strict and Particular Baptists' Assembly at Borough Green, Kent, 9-10 June 1846.
- 8 Minute Book. The hymn, No.255 in Rippon's *Selection*, 'Let party names no more', was by Benjamin Beddome (1717-93).
- 9 *Primitive Church Magazine* III, New Series no.33, September 1846, pp.336-7. The detail on

- Whelock is from George H. Hansell, *Reminiscences of New York Baptists*, Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, 1899, pp.59-60.
- 10 Minute Book; but see London Baptist Association 13th Annual Letter to the Churches, 1846, p.2, 'About the year 1830 a few persons commenced religious meetings at Maryland Point, Stratford, and a church was formed in January 1838. Of this church Mr James Woodard was pastor until his removal to Ilford in 1840; soon after which they were deprived of their place of meeting, and were for some time scattered as sheep without a shepherd or a resting-place. In these circumstances, Mr Joseph Whittle, a master mariner in the merchant service, both gave them instruction, and liberally aided them in the erection of another chapel, which was opened May 16, 1842. They invited to the pastoral office Mr William Ward, a deacon of the church at Poplar, and he was set apart on the 26th of December, 1843. The church then consisted of fifteen members; the present number is thirty-five'. Whitley lists this church as W.169 in his *Baptists of London*, [n.d. but 1928], p.165, but gives inaccurate information about its ministers during this period. They were William Ward, 1843-50; J. Hinckley, 1850-2; William Wise, 1853-4.
 - 11 Minutes, 17 April 1849.
 - 12 Searle was succeeded in the pastorate 1857-68 by Samuel Green (1813-81).
 - 13 *Primitive Church Magazine* IV, New Series no.47, November 1847, pp.389-90.
 - 14 Was this Mr Searle the J. P. Searle who became minister of Union Row, Kingsland, Hoxton, 1849-57?
 - 15 *Baptist Manual* 1849, pp.10, 14, 17, 18.
 - 16 The underlining is copied from the original minutes.
 - 17 *Baptist Manual* 1849, pp.10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19.
 - 18 *Primitive Church Magazine* X, New Series no.111, March 1853, p.99; no.112, April 1853, p.132; no.119, November 1853, pp.373-5.
 - 19 The Stoke Newington church (W.224) was variously referred to as Salem or Newington Green or St Matthias Road, and listed in the *Baptist Manual* from 1854-9, with Thomas Pepper as pastor, following a period 1852-4 when 'J. Garritt' (who in 1849 had unsuccessfully applied for LASBMC membership) was pastor. Pepper was succeeded by Charles Cornwell, pastor 1863-71 before moving on to a 35-year pastorate at Brixton Tabernacle (W.491).
 - 20 *Primitive Church Magazine* X, New Series no.111, March 1853, p.99; no.112, April 1853, p.132; no.119, November 1853, pp.373-5; no.120, December 1853, p.402; XI, no.121, January 1854, p.26; no.124, April 1854, p.129; no.130, October 1854, p.328; XII, no.136, April 1855, p.130.
 - 21 Minute Book.
 - 22 G. H. Orchard, Minute Book, 17 April 1849. J. Rothery, Minute Book, 20 August 1850.

GEOFFREY R. BREED *Archivist, Kent Baptist Association, and formerly Minister of Sittingbourne Baptist Church.*

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PROTESTANT NONCONFORMISTS, 'STRANGERS', AND THE WEST MIDLANDS OF ENGLAND

A first conference, with this title, will be held from 4 p.m. on Friday, 28 July to lunch, Sunday, 30 July 1995 at Westhill College, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LL. The programme will include Alan Argent on 'The West Midlands and the founding of the London Missionary Society', John H. Y. Briggs on 'Elite and proletariat in nineteenth-century Birmingham Nonconformity', E. Dorothy Graham on 'Bourne College: a Primitive Methodist educational venture', W. Eifion Powell on 'The contribution of the Welsh Nonconformist diaspora to the West Midlands of England', David Thompson on 'R. W. Dale and the civic gospel', and David Wykes on 'A finished monster of the true Birmingham breed': Birmingham and the victims of the 1791 Priestley Riots'. Cost (a) B&B, all meals and conference fee £95 (b) excluding B&B, £59. Cheques payable to ADHSCL should be sent to Dr E. Dorothy Graham, 34 Spiceland Road, Birmingham B31 1NJ (021 475 4914) between 1 March and 31 May 1995.