Family Memorials: Carlton-le-Moorland Baptist Church, 1818-1856

This Tablet
Is a tribute of Affection to the memory
of George West, of Norton Disney
who was for 30 Years, the diligent, faithful,
and upright Deacon of this Church.
He departed this Life
the 27 of April 1820, Aged 56 Years.
Belov'd he liv'd, by all who knew his worth!
Lamented died; for all have felt his Loss!
The mortal Body rests beneath this Earth,
Th'immortal Spirit triumphs thro' the Cross.

This mural inscription is, or was when I transcribed it on 27 June 1932, in the Baptist chapel at Carlton-le-Moorland, Lincolnshire.[1] The little burial ground attached to the chapel showed that, like so many of his time, George West had known the sorrow of seeing his children called home before him. A single stone recorded the interment of George, son of George and Elizabeth West, who died on 7 January 1815, in the 24th year of his age; also of Elizabeth Andrews their daughter and relict of William Andrews, who died on 5 February 1817, aged 24; and of William Andrews, who died on 27 September 1813, aged 33.[2]

What of their mother, Elizabeth, the worthy deacon's wife? For her grave one must travel southwards into Northamptonshire, though there is no mistaking it when one finds it. A stone in the parish churchyard at Sibbertoft records:

To
the memory of
Elizabeth, Relict of
George West,
(of Norton Disney,
Lincolnshire)
who died January 6th
1840
aged 73 years.
"The memory of the just is blessed".

The inscription's form, with its careful punctuation, suggests exile. One may ask why Elizabeth West lies here, so far from home. The beginning of the answer is to be found in the Norton Disney parish register, in the entry of the marriage on 8 June 1826 of George and Elizabeth West's daughter Hannah to John Smeeton, of Great Humby,

Lincolnshire. Smeeton was "a name long and honourably known among Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Nonconformists",[3] and in about 1833 John and Hannah returned home, building at Theddingworth what the family called "The Top House"—otherwise "The Beeches", a house noticed in the *Victoria County History*. Theddingworth (where John Smeeton's son (d. 1913) augmented the endowment of the Congregational chapel and erected the village institute)[4] is actually just in Leicestershire; but when in 1877 he died, aged 88, he was buried with his forebears at Sibbertoft, as was Hannah two years later, aged 82, "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ", together with four of their children, one of whom, Lucy West Smeeton, once again predeceased her parents, dying in 1854, aged 19. Mrs. West evidently came to Theddingworth with her daughter and son-in-law, and this is why her grave is at Sibbertoft, among those of the Smeetons.

The marriage of Hannah West and John Smeeton at Norton Disney was part of a somewhat unusual phenomenon, the "double wedding". On the same day, and in the same place, John Smeeton's sister Mary, of Great Humby, where she had been keeping house for him, was married to Charles Williams, "of Newark upon Trent, clerk", otherwise minister of the Independent church at Newark: he had been ordained there in the previous year, on 14 April 1825, as the first pastor of a church formed in 1824, meeting in a chapel newly erected on land purchased by Thomas Wilson,[5] Treasurer of Hoxton Academy, where Williams received his education. A pleasing mutuality appears in the fact that John and Mary Smeeton's brother Samuel, of Kirton, Lincolnshire, signed as witness of John's marriage to Hannah West, while Hannah's brother Thomas signed as witness of Mary's marriage to Charles Williams. The second witness of each marriage was W. H. Newman, minister of the Carlton-le-Moorland Baptist church which Hannah's father had served so faithfully. After the ceremony, according to family tradition, all concerned enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. George Fillingham of Carlton, whose home was close to the chapel.

W. H. Newman had been pastor at Carlton since his ordination there on 15 September 1818. "Previously to Mr. Newman's stated labours, the interest was very low. Though the doors were kept open, yet, preaching not being constant, the attendance was small and irregular, and little attention was excited to religion . . ."[6] Newman and his wife Jane had been dismissed to Carlton on 31 August 1818 by Friar Lane Baptist church, Nottingham, of which they had become members on 5 December 1813.[7] Newman and Williams had been known to each other since 1823, when Williams began his "stated ministry" at Newark: on 17 September 1823 both men took part in a service at Grantham, when an Independent chapel was opened there, again under Thomas Wilson's patronage.[8] A stone in the Carlton burial ground explains why no *Baptist Magazine* or *Handbook* contains an obituary notice of Newman. It reads: "Sacred to the

memory of Benjamin, Edward, Eliza and John children of the Rev. W. H. and Jane Newman this stone is erected as a faint expression of esteem for W. H. Newman, now a resident in the United States but who was for several years the highly esteemed Pastor of this Church". The inscription bears no date, and at what point Newman left Carlton is uncertain; but it was some years before 1833, when Williams left Newark to become pastor of the Independent church in Endless Street, Salisbury, in succession to the Rev. J. Barfitt, who had removed to Grantham.

While Williams was still at Newark, a foundation-member of the Grantham church, William Robinson, a saddler by trade, had removed to Newark and transferred his membership to the church there. In time he became conscious of a call to the ministry, but was prevented by circumstances from going to college. Williams appealed to his patron; and in 1830, with financial assistance from Thomas Wilson, Robinson undertook a year's course of studies preparatory to the ministry under Williams' direction. Williams frequently corresponded with Wilson, and in a letter of 30 September 1830 states that Robinson's progress is satisfactory—including the eradication of faults of Lincolnshire pronunciation![9] During his twelve months at Newark Robinson often served the church at Carlton-le-Moorland, which was "then without a pastor", walking the nine miles there and back, and in 1833 he "accepted a unanimous invitation to labour among that people".[10] Here he remained for sixteen years. He was not, however, ordained, nor did he become a Baptist. In 1849 he became minister of the Independent church at Redbourn, Hertfordshire, and there, on 17 September 1850, he was ordained by Barfitt and others. Only four years later he died suddenly and was buried in the graveyard adjoining the chapel at Redbourn. He had found only three church members there, but left thirty.[11]

The friendship between the Williams, Smeeton and West families long continued. A daughter of John and Hannah Smeeton, who married the Rev. Henry Batchelor, called one of her sons William West. In about 1859 a nephew of John Smeeton and Mary Williams, Benjamin Smeeton, married Frances Anne West—two of his children were named Benjamin West and William West; and in 1860 the second son of Charles and Mary Williams, Frederick Smeeton Williams, married Louisa Hester West. A charming anonymous account entitled "A Boy's Summer Holidays: by an old boy", in four instalments in a Nonconformist magazine for 1866[12] preserves F. S. Williams' memories of lively holidays spent by his elder brother Charles and himself in the early 1840s with William George Smeeton and other cousins at Theddingworth and "over the bawling brook that divides the counties of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire". In the summer of 1843, when he was fifteen, Charles was sent to Theddingworth for a longer and more serious sojourn. A letter from his "truly affectionate Mother" asks "what you are doing, what are your plans and employments, these long evenings" and expresses her solicitude

for her "beloved child", that he might be preserved from sin and allured to holiness.

The families' friendship with the Fillinghams of Carlton-le Moorland also continued. This appears from an album given by Mrs. Fillingham to her daughter Mary on 30 December 1844, her fifteenth birthday. Those who wrote verses in it include not only the girl's mother and (24 February 1845) the pastor at Carlton, William Robinson, but S(arah) A(nn) Smeeton, her brother W(illiam) G(eorge) S(meeton) and their mother "H(annah) S(meeton) Theddingworth", and also "C(harles) W(illiams) Theddingworth", F. S. Williams and their mother M(ary) W(illiams), with dates which associate and help to identify their names. Most of the verses are pious and, to modern taste, often mawkish, but the two inscribed by the young Charles Williams in 1847 "To Miss Fillingham" and in 1848 "To M.P.F." are of another kind. The latter begins:

When I once looked upon thy face,
Arrayed in childhood's glee,
I little thought that I should trace
A verse of love to thee.

The young man preserved a letter of 24 April 1847 endorsed "Fathers letter of congratulation on my engagement"—"She is indeed a jewel of a girl", his father wrote; and on 14 June 1850 the two were married. By this time Mary Paddison Fillingham's parents had both died. She was not yet twenty-one, but her guardians gave permission for the marriage. There was no need to set up a new menage. Charles Williams came to his wife's home at Carlton-le-Moorland, and became a gentleman-farmer, with malting interests in the vicinity.

Carlton was in Fillingham country. Members of the family lived in a number of the neighbouring villages. Traditionally, I fancy, they were good churchmen. Certainly the stately table-tomb, erected with other Fillingham tombs in the parish churchyard at Caythorpe, a few miles from Carlton, with its inscriptions in memory of "George Fillingham, of Carlton-le-Moorland, in this county", who died in 1841, aged 48, and of "Melicent Mary, widow of George Fillingham, of Carlton-le-Moorland, in this county", who died in 1847, aged 61, are of a very different type from the simple gravestones, with their devout, if severe, inscriptions, of the Smeetons at Sibbertoft. There is evidence, however, that Mrs. Fillingham may have come of a Baptist family.

Her father's name was Samuel Wood, and her mother's (or grandmother's) Browne. In a letter of 1932 Dr. W. T. Whitley pointed to the licensing of their homes for Baptist worship in 1672 by Robert Wood of Carlton-le-Moorland and Edward Browne of Bassingham, a village close by. In their marriage licence in 1817 George Fillingham is entered as of Barlings (east of Lincoln) and Melicent Mary Wood as of Saxilby (north of Lincoln); but the coincidence of surname and place permits one, if no more, to wonder whether in coming to Carlton Mrs. Fillingham was in some sense returning home. On her daughter's

birth certificate in 1829 Samuel Wood's residence is entered as Newark. She possessed a book given her by Jane Newman, the wife of the Carlton Baptist minister. His successor, William Robinson, wrote (20 January 1838) in her own album as well as, later, in her daughter's. Her daughter's guardians, Mr. Woolley and Mr. Anderson, were both of Collingham (just over the border in Nottinghamshire) and were perhaps members of the Baptist church there, with which, from 1879 the Carlton church was associated. Certainly she left a tradition of responsibility for the Baptist chapel.

When her daughter married Charles Williams, their membership was with the Independent church at Newland, Lincoln, to morning service at which they drove the ten miles in a waggonette. Charles was, after all, an Independent minister's eldest son. But they also supported the Baptist chapel at Carlton. The only mural inscription in it besides the one in memory of the deacon George West recorded the death in infancy once again, of two children, their two eldest. It read:

In memory of
the beloved children of
Charles and Mary P. Williams;
Charles Frederick
died August 6th 1851
aged seven months
and
George Fillingham
died September 16th 1852
aged five months.
They died, for Adam sinned.
They live, for Jesus died.[13]

When William Robinson left Carlton for Redbourn in 1849, Charles Williams' father, now living in retirement in St. John's Wood, London, after service with the Religious Tract Society, was again concerned in finding the church a new pastor. In a letter written at Carlton on 19 April 1856 by J. Day,[14] newly arrived from London ("This will be the third night of sleeping in my little dwelling—before my bedroom window is an orchard in bloom and how fragrant in a morning is its perfume"), kind regards are sent to the old gentleman and his wife, with much news about their son and daughter-in-law and eldest surviving grandchild (my maternal grandmother, then not quite two). Mrs. W(illiams) "has more than once retied my handkerchief and arranged my Albert tie and when she apologised for her interference I told her my orders from St. Johns Wood were to cast myself upon her goodness and let her do with me as seemed good in her sight. At this they all laughed." "I had no opportunity of getting a pair of spectacles . . . Last Lords day I tried a pair that belonged to Mrs W's Grandpapa but they did not suit my sight and I was obliged to curtail part of a chapter". The following extracts from the letter give an ingenuous account of the village and of pastoral activity.

The chapel is very easy to speak in—the population small and I fear I shall have too little to do unless I can break up new ground. I look forwards to the winter as my best harvest time for then you catch the good folks at home—now they are all abroad. The people seem all well off—their cottages clean a whacking loaf of bread and lump of butter on the table and no ragged clothes no beggars, no abject poverty yet even among some of the regular hearers there is much superstition. . . .

Yesterday I had a long visitation of the sick. It took me from dinner time until 7 in the evening. Many of the people are old, infirm and need much visitation—some are on a dying bed. Some of the church people too have sent for me as Mr. Willoughby is from home. Several of these are in an awful state of unpreparedness for heaven. One old man said "I dont care how soon I die". When asked if he was fully prepared for a better world he said "aye I'm as good as other people". He has a bad leg through a recent hurt and when advised to give it rest he said "Who is to do my work I'se no time to rest". One churchwoman seemed deeply affected by conversation and prayer and expressed a strong wish to be visited again. Several accidents too have occurred this week that has confined some to their habitations.

In 1867 Mr. and Mrs. Williams and their family left Carlton for Salisbury, taking with them a double daguerreotype of the Baptist chapel (now in my possession) as well as others of their home and garden. The family's nurse, who had never been to Lincoln or seen a train, though the line ran not far off, said to my grandmother, who was now 13: "Goodbye, my dear! I shall never see you again! Be they black people where you're going to live?"

NOTES

[1] Since 1946, when it was entered as having six members, the church has disappeared from the *Baptist Handbook*. Even in the 1860s it had only fifteen members. Its date of formation is entered as 1788.

[2] The Norton Disney parish register records the marriage of William Andrews and Elizabeth West on 8th May 1810.

[3] *Congregational Year Book*, 1887, p. 250.

[4] *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, vol. V, pp. 313, 320.

[5] G. H. Peters, *New Light on an Old Town* (1951), p. 29; see also p. 50 for reproductions of photographs in my possession of Charles Williams and his wife in old age.

[6] *Baptist Magazine*, vol. XI (1819), p. 215, where Carlton is entered as in Nottinghamshire.

[7] J. T. Godfrey and James Ward, *History of Friar Lane Baptist Church, Nottingham* (1903), p. 258.

[8] *Evangelical Magazine* (1823), p. 470; Robert Hall of Leicester also took part in this service.

[9] Dr. Williams's Library, New College MSS., 302/2.

[10] *Evangelical Magazine* (1855), p. 2.

[11] *Congregational Year Book*, 1855, p. 235.

[12] Their Christian names are preserved, but their surname is altered to Wilson. The unnamed cousin who "alas" never grew to womanhood, and

whose epitaph was "Faultless before the throne", was Lucy West Smeeton, mentioned above. Efforts to identify the magazine have not succeeded.

[13] "She lives, for Jesus died" is similarly inscribed on the tombstone at Sibbertoft of Edith, daughter of William George Smeeton, who died in 1868, aged seven months.

[14] I have found no trace of Day in Baptist or Congregational records: perhaps he was only a supply, and did not go on into the ordained ministry. The *Baptist Manual* gives Silas B. Stenson (a cousin of John Clifford) as pastor during 1854-6, and the *Baptist Handbook* gives a Coles as pastor in 1863, W. W. Willis 1868-70, and J. Sargent 1872-9. The church's later history comes tangentially into the unpublished Nottingham M.Phil. 1967 thesis by F. M. W. Harrison, "The Life and Thought of the Baptists of Nottinghamshire, with special reference to the period 1770-1914" (copy in the Library at Baptist Church House; for access to this and to other Baptist sources I wish to thank the Rev. Geoffrey Rusling).

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Reviews

Education for Ministry: Bristol Baptist College, 1679-1979. By Norman Moon. Bristol: the College, 1979. 150 pp. £3.00 (plus postage extra).

There are some subjects which are for ever being discussed in the Church, and are never, apparently, settled. Baptism, the Lord's Supper and ordination are among these. No doubt it is as well that we can never say, on such important matters, "this is the final truth", but it is sometimes a little wearisome for those who have been engaged in such discussions for several decades to hear the same points coming up again that they have heard made so often—and frequently presented as if they had just come freshly minted from an inspired mind. But times change, and new light occasionally dawns.

Closely allied to the perennial subject of ordination is that of the right way to train those who have offered themselves for it. Here also it is being said once again, "How much better it would be if we did it without taking the students away from ordinary church life", and, "Why is the training so academic and so unpractical?" And even, "Ought we to be spending so much money on so few people when the Churches are so short of money?"

Many such questions and comments, and others which suggest that things should be left exactly as they are, seem to be based on inadequate or outdated knowledge of what actually happens in a College community. Norman Moon's careful, comprehensive and quietly affectionate history of Bristol Baptist College, published on the occasion of its tercentenary, comes at a very good time, not only for the College, but for all of us in many Churches who are occupied, or vitally interested, in ministerial education. Readers of it will discover what has been tried and what has succeeded, what has lasted and what has been of only temporary value, what is at all times basic and what needs to be varied as conditions change, in an institution which has