

## A Public Library and Baptistery in the Barbican, 1694.

**F**IFTEEN interesting manuscripts have been deposited in Doctor Williams' Library, by authority of the General Assembly of General Baptists.

(1) One of them is the minute-book of the General Association of General Baptists, 1696-1704, with an alphabetical list of 440 members at White's Alley in 1695. This has been described, and the Association minutes printed, for our Society in 1909. Nine other volumes relate to Kent, Surrey, and Sussex General Baptists, and five to the premises at Paul's Alley, Barbican. These deserve a short account.

(2) In 1711, James Richardson of the Ax-and-Bottle Yard, Southwark, member of the Fair Street church in Horselydown, entered up minutes of the Kent General Baptist Association from 1708, and presented the book to the Association, of which he, a layman, was Messenger—an office revived now as General Superintendent. The book was used at intervals till 1760, and some of its information has afforded material for notes in our 1909 edition of the Assembly minutes.

(3) In 1717 the churches in East Kent began a similar folio minute-book, of which the following account is given by the Rev. Walter H. Burgess. The entries of the East Kent Association in this book

extend to 11 October 1734, and then for some reason the book was unused for 34 years. In 1768 the Association for the whole county of Kent began to make use of the blank pages of this volume, and entered its proceedings therein down to the meeting held at Canterbury, on 11 May 1819, when Brother G. Smallfield was chairman and Brothers Samuel Love and William Burgess, were moderators. The book being then nearly full and somewhat the worse for wear it was resolved:—

“The Old Association Book to be deposited in the hands of Bro<sup>r</sup> John Farren, and a new Book to be provided against the ensuing Association.”

This old volume is in a dilapidated condition lacking covers and with many pages loose, but the contents are intact and perfectly legible. It contains the autograph signatures of many leading Kentish General Baptists. Much information is available as to Hythe, Dover, Deal, Sandwich, Thanet and Canterbury. So much is available as to Eythorne that a separate article has been written by Mr. Burgess.

(4) Further information about the East Kent Association may be gathered from another volume with entries from July 1780 till April 1787.

(5) Yet another volume contains records of these East Kent churches from 1798 till 1809. This last is of interest in that in 1842 it was in the possession of a deacon at Dover, William Peirce, whose ancestors had figured at the Association and Assembly since 1700. His daughter Priscilla, Mrs. Fordham, a great benefactress of the Assembly, bequeathed this volume to that body in 1857.

Sampson Peirce spelt his name thus when signing in 1783, though the secretary entered it Pearce.

The same spelling was used by the Assembly in 1865 for Priscilla, but while the secretary long continued this form, the treasurer in 1869 introduced the spelling Pierce, which has since been adopted in the official title of her charity.

(6) Association life was resumed in 1832, when London grouped with the Kentish and Southern churches. A book was then started which contains minutes of the London and Southern General Baptist Association till 1845.

(7) A seventh volume is of more local interest, dealing with the very ancient church at Canterbury, which in 1653 sent a letter to Cromwell, was visited by Caton and Stubs next year, and also by Henry Denne from Fenstanton. Their Elder, Samuel Ongly who died between May and October 1719, Messenger of the Association, bequeathed money with which they bought and fitted up the refectory of the Black Friars, dating from 1236. During the Eldership of Samuel Ongly and Searles Jarman they began, on Nov 11 1711, the minute-book in question, which continued in use ten years. When on 3 February 1837, the then minister, F. B. Barton, B.A., forwarded to Somerset House the original registers of births 1780-1836, and of burials 1785-1836, a transcript of them was made into this volume.

(8) Another volume also belongs to this church, but is in such extremely bad condition that it has not been closely examined. It may be added that worship having been discontinued, the premises were sold a few years ago, for far less than Ongley bequeathed; the quaint place with its abundant memorials of famous Baptists, is no longer in Baptist custody. Fortunately, we have transcripts of many of the tombstones.

(9) A further volume is the cash-book of the deacons at Tunbridge Wells, 1679-1744. It should

be compared with the church minutes 1671-1802, now in the British Museum, Add. 36709.

The Rev. Walter H. Burgess supplies the following description and illustrative extracts from the account book.

“A small octavo vellum-covered pocket book, which cost one shilling. It has a flap and brass clasp. On the fly-leaf is a pencil note in the handwriting of W. H. Black, F.S.A. thus:—

‘The Deacons Book  
of the Tunbridge Wells  
G. B. Congregation  
See Church Book of’

The book has been used from both ends. It is neatly lettered on the back:—

‘Tunbridge Wells Deacons Book 1697-1744.’

The earlier entries I take to be in the handwriting of George Borer, then William Ashdowne kept the book and after him Matthias Copper and David Chapman alternately for ten years. These two were ordained ‘deacons’ on ‘June ye 26 1734.’

The book opens thus:—

‘Here follows an account of ye Deacons distribution of ye Contrebuton monny by them Colected in ye Church from ye first day of ye 4<sup>th</sup> month 1697.’ [June 1st 1697]

Turning to the other end of the book we have the heading:—

‘Of ye colections & Contrabutions of ye Church gathered by ye Deacons from the 2 day of ye 4th Month in ye year 1697.’

The entries of collections run on with great regularity to 1744. Here is an example:—

1697. Colected at our meeting at Bro. Bluger  
ye 22<sup>nd</sup> of 6 mon. ... .. I 13 2

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It is unusual to state the place of meeting. Most of the entries give only date and amount noting also the sum given at 'Breaking of Bread.' The notes of payment are full of interest. They are mainly small sums to the sick and needy, but there are payments for horse hire, for making graves and coffins, for entertainment of Messengers, for postage and on at least one 'Brief,' and for licensing the houses where meetings were held. *e.g.*

1699	for a letter from Smarden ... ..	o	o	6
Jn <sup>r</sup> 9	[Jan 9 1699-1700] in answer to Bro. [Matthew] Caffyns charge for charges in entertaining him and to Bro Benge ... ..	o	11	o
1701	Ap. Rb: ffrancks for making a grave for Sister Jeffery ... ..	o	1	o
1704	to Broth. Benge for Loss of tyme in vissitting ... ..	o	o	7
1717.	Decemb. 29 pd about the Licences for Bror Chapmans & Bro <sup>r</sup> John Martens houses ... ..	o	3	6
1720	pd Wm Ashdownes horse hier to seven oks ... ..	o	2	6
1722	May 27 - Bro <sup>r</sup> Stones Coffen ... ..	o	7	o

These accounts together with the Church Book of this congregation, now in the British Museum, give a clear picture of the life and activities of an old General Baptist Church."—Walter H. Burgess.

(10) Mr. Burgess has also studied a tenth volume, the minutes of Turner's Hill, from 1727 for more than a century. An article on this will appear in the next *Transactions* of the Unitarian Historical Society, of which Mr. Burgess is Hon. Secretary.

(11) The other series of books relates to the extensive premises between Paul's Alley, and Barbican. There was a very strong Baptist church headed in 1656 by John Gosnold, reported in 1669 as preaching

at the Musick house in Gun Alley, in Little Moorfields, who in 1672 took out a licence to preach in Little Moorfields at Richard Horton's house. In 1678 he was succeeded by Thomas Plant, who in 1683 was reported as preaching at the Old Play House near Red Cross Street. This is the first time we come clearly on the track of the premises in question, though Taylor's rather indefinite language might imply to hasty readers that the Barbican block had from the beginning been the home of Gosnold's church. Plant's death in 1693 closed that chapter, and the books now in Gordon Square supply first-hand material for the next.

Now that liberty seemed secured, the Assembly of Particular Baptists had put it on record that ministers and students for the ministry ought to study Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. An obvious means to this end was a library, and as the Barbican premises were very large, this was housed here. A list of books, donors, borrowers, accounts, from 1694 to 1715, is in the eleventh volume. In 1709 the use of this library was granted to the Society for Encouraging the Ministry, which met at the Norwich Coffee-house. Eight years later, that Society largely augmented the library, and it was then made available for all members of subscribing churches. It deserves attention that this Baptist Library was at work before Doctor Williams even made his will in 1711, bequeathing his own library for public uses. His trustees began their meetings in 1716, and only in 1729 did they actually open in Red Cross Street. In 1737 the Baptist church at Trowbridge founded a library for training young Baptist ministers, and the library at Barbican was thereupon sorted so that suitable books could be sent to Thomas Lucas the Trowbridge tutor. After that, no more is heard of this earliest venture at a public theological library for dissenters. Possibly some of

its volumes might yet be identified at the Conigre Chapel, Trowbridge, or in Gordon Square, London.

(12) A twelfth volume deals with another co-operative institution on the same large premises, a Baptistery. Baptisms had been administered at first in the river Lea near the Old Ford. In 1705 a special building was erected in Fair Street, Horsleydown, towards which the church at Barbican sent a subscription; but two years later the church voted to use the place in Goodman's Fields. With the death of queen Anne, dissenters felt it opportune to make many advances. Thomas and John Hollis of the great Pinners' Hall church, who took the lead in so many enterprises, made a generous offer to the Barbican church, which was accepted. The immediate landlord sold the remainder of his lease, and the church resumed possession of some part of the premises which had been let off. A stone tank was then placed in front of the pulpit, with a marble kerb and ornamental iron rail; a stairway led up under the pulpit through folding doors to three large wainscotted vestries; a spring on the premises with well and pump provided the water necessary, and a very elaborate outfit of clothes and other necessaries was provided. The Hollis brothers, who had found £363 out of the £500 expended, were appointed trustees and managers; they issued certificates to approved ministers to use the place, at a fee of two shillings per candidate. A book was provided to record everything connected with the Baptistery, and readers may now see a series of entries down to 1789. At first the name of every candidate was entered, and Mary Page, daughter of Sir Gregory Page, heads the list as baptized on 19 October 1716 by Joseph Maisters of "Joyners Hall," the Pinners' Hall afternoon church. The last name of a candidate was number 171, recorded 1 September 1720; after that only, the numbers of them and the names

of the ministers are entered. Inventory and accounts are in other parts of the book. Some extracts were printed by George Eyre Evans in his *Antiquarian Notes*.

We turn now to the church itself which met at Barbican. After the death of Plant in 1693 there had been a reorganization when his church was strengthened by absorbing the Turners' Hall church with its minister Richard Allen. On 18 March 1705-6 he joined the Particular Baptist Association with the consent of the church, which hitherto had carefully kept the balance between Calvinists and Arminians; this balance was redressed by calling John Gale to be his helper on 21 April. In 1712 Isaac Lamb's Particular Baptist church quitted Virginia Street (which was re-let to a General Baptist church), and amalgamated with the Barbican church. In 1717 Joseph Burroughs, son of one of the deacons from Virginia Street, was ordained co-pastor with Gale, Allen having died in February. A new church roll was then drawn up. Two years later came the great debates at Salters' Hall, when both Gale and Burroughs voted not to sign any declaration as to the Trinity. Therefore when the church offered that year to join the Particular Baptist Fund, founded 1717, it was refused. This led to trouble also with a lessee who wished to leave and join a P.B. church but would not hand over the lease of the premises. Gale died in 1724, and two years later Burroughs baptized and associated with himself James Foster from Trowbridge, in whose time the church reached the zenith of its reputation. With 1726 he drafted the plan of an Education Fund, open to all; in practice it has become known as the General Baptist Fund, and still does good work. Isaac Kimber was soon associated as a third minister. This chapter of history closed with the death of Burroughs in 1737, the filling

of the second minute-book by 16 September 1739, and the prospect of the lease expiring in February, 1740-1.

(13) A new list of members was therefore prepared, and this is the thirteenth volume now before us: it was kept up to date for some years.

(14) Alongside it should be studied the fourteenth, which is the minute-book. It shows how Foster went in 1748 to the great Pinners' Hall church where the Hollis family worshipped, and how Burroughs took no associate, but let one service drop. Only in 1757 did Francis Webb come to help, and Burroughs died in 1761. Webb resigned in 1766 and went to Poole, being succeeded by Daniel Noble the Seventh-Day pastor at Mill Yard. With 1768 the once great church disbanded, and the minute-book ends with the record of 5 June in that year.

(15) But Daniel Noble had on 8 May accepted the pastorate of the Glass-house church, and this church took over the remainder of the Barbican lease with the members of the late church. This was not an unusual way of preserving endowments, as can be exemplified in many cases. The Glass-house church had a remnant of a lease of the premises in Glass-house yard, which was an asset carefully guarded. It needed a new minute-book in 1772, and this is the fifteenth volume now accessible. As the current lease of Barbican was running out, Glass-house united with three other churches to build a new place on Worship Street, which was put in trust during 1784. The owners of Barbican evidently allowed it to be still used for baptisms till 1789, and then all Baptist associations with it ended.

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1660, May 2.

"The rabble in London demolished the Anabaptists' church."—*Diary of John Townsend, Worcester.*