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Early Baptists in Leicestershire and Rutland

(I) ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: SAMUEL OATES IN RUTLAND, 1647-1648

BAPTIST preaching and meetings are first recorded in Rutland early in 1647, and were pioneered by Samuel Oates. Contemporary records survive in the Leicestershire Record Office, New Walk, Leicester, in letters written or received by Rutland's High Sheriff of the time, Abel Barker of Hambleton Hall; and in the House of Lords Record Office in petitions from parish ministers in and around Rutland presented to the House of Lords.¹

(i) *Letter from Abel Barker to Sir Thomas Hartopp, March 1646/7.*²

"For his much honoured Freind s^r Thomas Hartopp,
Knight at Leicester these p^sent.

Worthy s^r

I have beene much importuned by the ministers of this county for the apprehendinge of one Samuel Oates (a weaver as they say) who preacheth constantly in this countrey, & yesterday I Rec.^d a lre from some of them for that purpose, w^{ch} I have herewth sent you, & y^e declaracon of the house of Comons, requestinge that you would be pleased to doe me the favour to acquaint the Judges therewth & know w^t their pleasure is shalbe done therein, or whether they will please to issue a warrant for the conveneing him, before them at the assizes at Okeham. . . .

Hambleton 19^{mo}
Martij 1646 /

s^r
yo^r gratefull freind & serv^t
A Barker "

(ii) *Letter from Robert Horsman of Stretton-on-the-Street, Rutland, to the village constables, October 1647.*³

"Rutland. To the Constables of Stretton

These are to will and require you in his Ma^{ties} and his Parliaments Names to take into your Custody the body of Samuel Oates, and to deliver him into the hands of Abell Barker Esqr the high Sheriff of the County of Rutland, to take Security for his appearance at a certaine day (to bee appointed by him the sayde high Sheriff) to answear to such Articles as shall then bee layde unto his charge touching his gathering together of unlawfull, and disorderly assemblies and dispensing of un-sounde doctrine unto the people, whereof faile you not at your

perills: Given under my hand and seale this sixth day of Octob.^r 1647.

Robt: Horsman ”

(iii) *Letter from Robert Horsman to Abel Barker, October 1647.*⁴

“S^r

Having bin long greived in my soule to see our poor Country beecome soe obnoxious to men of extravagant opinions, and unbridede spiritts and Touns to vent them, to the seducing of others, and too long forborne (as my Conscience upbraydes mee) in performing that Duty that every sounde Christian Professor (in this kingdome) ought to looke unto (by vertue of his solemne Covenant) for the discovering and bringing to just Censure, Such as take liberty (against lawfull Authority) to disperse Heterodox Doctrines unto the People [*rest of sentence deleted*]. At the last that we might wade us in his Triumph (with others) this noveelist Samuel Oates, a person (commonly) noted for a dangerous schismaticke comming to Stretton, and into a Tene-ment of mine, very presumptuously, and against fore-warnings that hee should refraine to intrude amongst my neighbours to assemble people together to preach unto, as iustly fearing hee might pervert others of my Tenants (as hee hath don some allready) to distast the sound Truth, and to alienate there mindes from there faithfull Teachers, as Hee (and others of his sect) have don both here, and in other Townes; I could not but upon his obstinacy to persist to act soe illegall and dangerous a Practise but apprehend him (as a Disturber of the Peace of the State and Church, and a particular annoyance to o^r County) and send him to yourself as the Cheife Officer for executing such Acts as make for the safety, and weale thereof, to bee by your meanes (on the Countyes beehalf) either presented beefore the Parlia-ment, or other wayes disposed of as you in your better Judge-ment shall thinke meete: And soe s^r not doubting of your care, and sympathy wth mee in these matters, I present you wth my service, and am unfinedly

Stretton Oct:
6th 1647.

Your frende, and servant
Robt Horsman ”

(iv) *Letter from Robert Horsman to Abel Barker, October 1647.*⁵

“S^r

As I have thus far don my duty on the beehalf of the Church to deliver this Disturber thereof into your hands, soe for the satisfaction of our orthodox Ministers, and Professors unto whom hee hath given scandale by his false Doctrine, & disorderly practices, it is desired that you would bee pleased to secure him soe that hee may bee ready to appeare at a day and place to bee appointed by y^rself either the next weeke or the weeke following that, to answeare unto such complaints, and charges as shall

bee objected against him: Persons of his spirit cannot bee suffered without bringing much Guilt & Divine wrath upon a Church & State: Hee is a malevolent Depraver of our Church, and I beelieve will bee proved allsoe an Adversary to Magisteriall Governement, and (to say noe more) such men are not to bee slightly past over by you and mee, to have there voage at ther pleasure but should bee stayed, and stopt from proceeding any farther: I write not this soe much for y^r incitation, as to declare my owne sense, and discharge my Conscience in soe weighty a busines; soe desiring to bee certified of your purpose and appointment heerein, I rest

S^r

Stretton Oct.
8th 1647.

Your loving frende to serve you
Robt. Horsman

S^r I think it is requisite that some secure place bee appointed least there should bee any Disturbance to hinder proceedings.”

- (v) *Petition to Parliament from parish ministers in Rutland and adjacent parts of Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, December 1647.*⁸

“To the Hon: ble the Lords and Commons assembled
in Parliament

The humble Petition of sundry of y^e Ministers of y^e
Countie of Rutland & y^e Parts adiacent

Humbly sheweth

That yo^r Petition^{rs} being assured of the sincere intentions and reall indeavo^{rs} of the Hon: ble Houses to promote the reformatiō of Religion, & y^e extirpation of Poperie, Heresie & Schisme according to the Solomne Covenant, & to bring to condigne punishm^t all such as shall indeavo^r y^e Contrarie, as appears by an Ordinance of Both Houses of y^e 26 of Aprill 1645. And by a Declaraciō of y^e House of Comons for y^e apprehending of Offenders in that kinde of y^e 31 Decemb^r. 1646, And the expression of their deepe sense of Gods Dishonor in y^e spreading of such blasphemies & Heresies as tend to the subversion of the faith wth profession to improove the utmost of their indeavo^{rs} that nothing be done agst the truth but for the Truith as in y^e Ordinance for the Fast of Feby. y^e 4. Ann: 1646.

Upon Consideracon whereof, we yo^r Pet^{rs} are imboldned in pursuance of the said Coven^t, & in discharge of o^r dutie to God & the State, to repr^esent unto the Ho: ble Houses the perilous Condiōn wherein o^r Countrie now stands, by reason of div^{rs} erroneous & seducing spirits lately crept in amongst us, Succeeding one another in their wicked practices, Namely one Wike, Lambe, & especiallie one Samwell Oates, now setling himself

amongst us, a Weaver by Trade, & a professed & knowne Anabaptist, who pretends to have his Authoritie from God & not from man: One that hath bene arraigned for the death of a woman Rebaptized by him, for w^{ch} and other his grosse misdemeano^{rs} he stands bound to the good behavio^r. And having bene driven out of other Countries by the hand of Justice is bold to thrust himself into this Countie of Rutland going up and downe from Towne to Towne Preaching and Rebaptizing verie manie and drawing a Concourse of people after him, Appointing his publike meetings weeklie in Barnes & Stables & such unfitt & unseemely places, Sometimes also breaking into Churches, & thrusting himself into o^r Pulpits. And vents most false & Hereticall Doctrine of Arminianisme, Antinomianisme, Anabaptisme, Sosinianisme, & Divers tenents tending to that Atheisme (some perticulars whereof we do exhibite in the Articles annexed hereunto) whereby he drawes disciples after him, not onelie to prey upon their Estates for his Belly's sake, but poisons their Soules wth his w^{ck} Errors: filling the Countie with divers sects and Schismes, withdrawing them from their owne Ministers into mutinous assemblies, weeklie and almost dailie, and perverting wholl ffamilies, working divisions even betweene nearest Relations, w^{ch} tends not onelie to an apparent Schisme, & seperacōn, but to a generall Mutiny through the County, & parts Adiacent of Lincolne, North-hampton, & Leicester Shires bordering upon us. He having of late also dispersed and indeavored to promote that Seditious paper, called the Agreement of the People: which he hath by himself or his Agents brought or sent to severall Townes in the Countie. All w^{ch} if not timelie prevented will in all likelihood raise a great Combustion amongst us speedilie, The rather because he is now labouring to settle himself & his ffamilie amongst us, to our fffurther disturbance.

In due consideracōn whereof we humblie Pray y^e Hon: ble House, to cause the said Samwell Oates to be forthwth apprehended & Comitted to safe Custody, according to the afores^d Declaration, And speedily to suppress all such mutinous meetings & Concourse of People, occasioned by him. And if it seeme good to yo^r wisdomes to ease yo^r selves of the trouble, & us of the Charge & burden of bringing up manie witnesses to London, To grant out a Comission to some Justices & Gentlemen of the Countrie, and pts Adiacent (such as are not tainted wth thes errors, nor have Countenanced such practises) to examine witnesses, & to returne their Examinacōns to yo^r Honors; Or w^t other course yo^r wisdomes shall appoint in Justice, so as we may be freed ffrom this Disturbance for the present, & secured from the like for the ffuture.

And we shall hartily Pray &c.

John Barry Minister of Cotsmore

W^m Holden, minist^r of Casterton magna.
 Josias Beacham, minister of Seaton
 Samwell Craddock, minist^r of Thistleton
 Kenh: Cheseldine Minist^r of Deene
 Tho: Johnson, Minister of Tinwell.
 W^m Shallcrosse, minist^r of Glaston
 Edward Spinke, minist^r of Castor.
 John Ludlam minist^r of Barnack
 John Rowell minist^r of litle Casterton
 Henry ffeild minist^r of Uffington
 Jonathan Holled minist^r of Easton
 Tho: Perkins minist^r of Burly
 Edw: Browne minist^r of Alhallowes in Stamford.
 John Bucklie minist^r of Stretton
 Edw: Skulthrope minist^r of Riall.
 Laur: Hungerford minist of Hambleton
 Alexan: Worger. minist of Brasborough
 Daniell Caldecot, minist of Sutton.”

“ Articles against Samuell Oates annexed and
 exhibited wth y^e Peticōn to y^e Hon: ^{ble}. Houses.

Imp^{rs}. The said Samuell Oates being a weaver by Trade haveing
 not lawfull Calling to the ministry, takes upon him to preach
 and administ^r y^e Sacram^{ts}. and being a knowne and professed
 Anabaptist, hath Rebaptized very many in y^e Countye of Rutland,
 still contineuing to seduce more and more to his wicked Errors,
 and drawing y^e people into ffaccōns and sepacōns, preaching in
 Barnes and stables and sever^eall Houses, venting many Erronious
 Doctrines, contrary to y^e Doctrine and faith received and
 beleived in y^e Church of England

As namely,

- 1 That Christ dyed for all and ev^{ry} man, pverting scrip-
 tures to y^t end, as Esai: 55.1 Gen 4.7.
- 2 That Eleccōn is out of foreseene fayth, & y^t ev^{ry} man
 hath power to beleeve.
- 3 That y^e Church of England is noe true Church.
- 4 That y^e Minist^{rs} of y^e s^d Church are Anti Christian
 preists, periured psons. &c.
- 5 That y^e baptizing of Infants is a marke of y^e Beast, and
 a Cozening of Children.
- 6 That y^e old Testam^t is nul'd, and they y^t preach it or
 alleadg it, are Moses disciples, not Chts.
- 7 That there is noe Saboath to bee observed, but all dayes
 are alike.
- 8 That any man may preach & administer y^e Sacram^{ts} as
 well as a Minist^r.
- 9 That y^e soule of man was Created mortall, & dyes or
 sleeps wth y^e body.

- 10 That y^e settling of Religion by a Law is Idolatry & supersticon.
- 11 Hee makes people beleeve, y^t his Baptisme hath cured men of y^e Gout. & othe^r diseases.
- 21y Hee y^e said Oates is a man evill & scandalous in his life, & guilty of many Misdemean³
- 1 Hee hath bin openly Arraigned at y^e Assizes at Chelmsford in Essex for y^e death of a woman.
 - 2 Hee stands bound to y^e good behavio^r for divers his misdemeano^s.
 - 3 Hee Carryeth women about wth him from place to place, being absent frō y^r families and husbands 2 or 3 weekes together, ployning from y^m to mayntaine him.
 - 4 Hee dipps women naked, & in y^e night, fitt for workes of darkenes.
 - 5 Hee sleights & vilifyes the Authority of Parliam^t.
 - 6 Hee makes mutinyes in y^e Country, & give out most dangerous words by himselfe or his Agents of y^e cutting of their throats y^t are opposite to him in his opinions.
 - 7 Hee hath lately bin a great disperser and pmoter of y^t seditious paper Called y^e Agreem^t of y^e people, bringing or sending it to divers places through the Countrie.
 - 8 Hee hath p^rvailed wth people to thrust out some good minist^{rs}. put into liveings by y^e Parliam^t, and to bring in others put out by sequestracon.
 - 9 Hee most bitterly railles against Minist^{rs}. for their maintenance, and yet most basely goes begging about from one to one in their meetings, wth his hatt open under his arme to receive their Almes, by w^{ch} meanes hee robbes many of his poore deluded followers for his owne Belly.
 - 10 Hee hath at severall tymes broken into Churches, wth his mutinous Companie following him, in affront to yc Ministers of those places, & there vented his wicked Errors in Opposition unto them, even to some of their faces by way of Preaching.”

(vi) *Orders of the House of Lords, December 1647 and January 1647/8.*⁷

“ 31 Dec. 1647.

Whereas Samuell Oates was attached, by Order of this House, and brought to *London*, but is since escaped :

It is ORDERED, That the Sheriffs of the Counties of *North'ton, Lyncolne, Rutland, and Leycester*, shall attach the Body of the said *Sam. Oates*, if he come into their respective Jurisdictions, and send him up before the Lords in Parliament, to answer the Charge exhibited against him to this House.”

“ 22 Jan. 1647/8.

ORDERED, That *Samuell Oates*, against whom there are Articles depending in this House, shall be bound in a Bond of Two Hundred Pounds himself, with two good Sureties in One Hundred Pounds apiece, to the Gentleman Usher of this House, that he shall appear in Person at the next Assizes for the County of *Rutland*, to answer such Complaints as shall be made against him there; and that the Articles in this House against him shall be remitted to the Persons that brought them, who are to prosecute the said *Oates* at the Assizes.”

(vii) *Petition to the House of Lords from parish ministers in Rutland and adjacent areas, May 1648.*⁸

“ To the Right Ho:^{ble} the House of Lords
assembled in parliament

The humble Petition of the Ministers of the County
of Rutland, & the Parts adiacent

Sheweth

That, whereas yo^r Lo^{pps} Petition^{rs} did formerlie exhibite to yo^r Ho:^{rs} a Petition with Articles annexed against one *Samuell Oates* weaver, a knowen & professed Anabaptist, for preaching divers blasphemous & Erronious doctrines; Seducing & Rebaptizing very many in our Countie, and for sondrie other ffoule misdemeno^s. Whereupon yo^r Lo^{pps} were pleased to cause his Person to be Attached by a pticular Messenger, and after an escape made by him, being againe Apprehended, was by your Ho:^{rs} Order bound over upon Recognisance to appeare before the Judge of Assises for the Countie of Rutland, to answere such Articles as should be exhibited against him: w^{ch} Order tooke no effect by reason yo^r Pet:^{rs} had not timely knowledg of it, whereby they might have examined their Articles & produced their witnesses against the said *Oates*: neither did the said *Oates* put in any record of yo^r Lo:^{pps} order into Court, nor make any Legall appearance, so as the Judg might Legallie proceed ag^t him. Whereby it came to passe that nothing was done in the Cause. Whereupon the said *Oates* taking himself wholly acquitted & discharged with much more audacious boldnes proceeds, to prosecute his wicked designe then formerlie he had done, by more frequet gathering of Mutinous assemblies, Venting his blasphemous Errors, Seducing and deluding the people, and Triumphant over the Ministers whom he and all his followers ordinaryly call by the name of Scribes and Pharisies, AntiChristis Preiste, Persequuto^s of the Trinity &c, labouring in all places to bring them into Comon hatred and Contempt: Yea not onelie Contemning ministry, but also outfacing Maigracy, Yea, uttering most sedicious and Treasonable speeches against Monarchy it self. To the high dishonor of God, the great

incouragm^t of rebellion and mutiny, and the wofull distraction of all the Godly and well affected People of the Countrie.

For remedy against all w^{ch} mischeivous and distructive Practises yo^r Pet^{rs} do againe addresse themselves to yo^r Lo^{pps} wisdom and Justice, humbly submitting and adhering to yo^r Ho^{rs} further orders and direction for the suppressing of the said Samweill Oates in his w^{ck} designes: And the dissolving of the Scismaticail and mutinous meetings of his deluded followers, so as the Countie may be freed of this disturbance for the present; and secured from the like for the future.

And yo^r Pet^{rs} shall pray, &c.

John: Barry:

Josiah Beacham

in the name of the rest.”

NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Mr. John Conant, of Lyndon Hall, Rutland, for permission to publish four of the Barker letters (documents i, ii, iii and iv); to the Clerk of the Records at the House of Lords Record Office for permission to publish documents v, vi and vii; and to the staffs of the Leicestershire Record Office and of the House of Lords Record Office for their help.

² Leics. Record Office, DE.730/4, “Private Letter Book of Abel afterwards Sir Abel Barker Bart 1642-1665 ob 1679”, p. 61.

³ Leics. Record Office, DE.730/3, “Barker MSS. 1544-1743”, p. 46.

⁴ Leics. Record Office, DE.730/1, “Barker MSS. Letters to Abel Barker, High Sheriff of Rutland”, p. 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶ House of Lords Record Office. Main Papers, House of Lords, 11 December 1647.

⁷ *Journal of the House of Lords*, vol. IX, pp. 619, 673.

⁸ H. L. R. O. Main Papers, House of Lords, 15 May 1648.

ALAN BETTERIDGE.

(To be continued)

ANNUAL MEETING 1974

Our next Annual General Meeting will be held at 4.0 p.m. on Wednesday, 1st May, 1974. Contrary to earlier expectations, we shall again be meeting in the Institute Room of Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, London. Members requiring tea are reminded to apply for a ticket, sending s.a.e. to the Rev. B. W. Amey at the B.M.S., 93, Gloucester Place, London W1H 4AA. The cost is 15p and a remittance must be sent with the application. Our speaker this year will be one of our own distinguished members. Dr. Marjorie Reeves has chosen as her theme “Joachim of Fiore and some Protestant Radicals”. Please book the date in your diary now.