

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

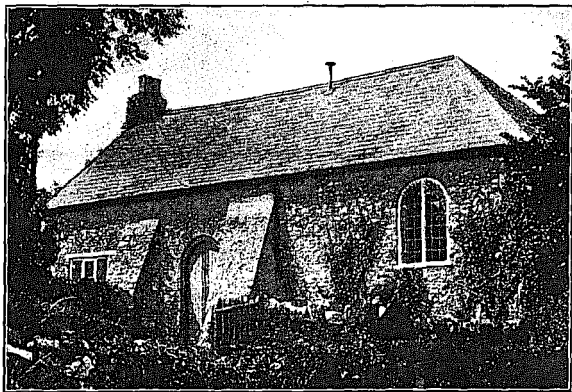
<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tbhs_01.php



LOUGHWOOD IN DALWOOD, BUILT 1655.



LOUGHWOOD CHAPEL, 1915.

Blocks lent by the Church, through the Rev. R. Bastable.

Transactions

of the

Baptist Historical Society.

Loughwood and Honiton, 1650-1800.

ON the borders of Devon and Dorset, up the little rivers Axe and Yarty, a large community of Baptists comes into full light at the end of 1653, the year when Baptists and Fifth-Monarchy men were at the zenith of their political influence, so that it was safe, and it became usual, to keep records of church affairs. Two new books were begun at this time by two groups which separated into distinct churches, known to-day as (1) KILMINGTON & LOUGHWOOD, (2) LYME REGIS. A study of the western group is here presented, based chiefly on its own book, which in a hundred folio pages has entries down to 1795. In that year it was borrowed by Dr. Rippon, whose father had belonged to Up Ottery; but though he kept it for many years he never used it in his Register. The indignant church at last procured another book; and explained the disjointed state of the entries at the beginning which look back even to 1778 by a statement of the doctor's behaviour. Fortunately the original is again in its proper home, but its appearance bears out the charge of another injured church, that the doctor put their books in a barrel, exposed

to the damp. The volume has been cut, has been taken to pieces and put together again in wrong order; but every entry is legible, and nearly all are fully dated. There are many periods of silence, but from many other sources it is possible to fill them in, and to reconstruct the story of the sturdy little community.

The origin is not recorded, and the church deplures that it is impossible to say how, when and where the cause begun. Fortunately the earliest extant church roll gives three names at the head which enable us to divine one of the leading factors. When the parliamentary armies were remodelled, Fairfax sent a detachment which raised the siege of Taunton, and after Naseby he himself came to Langport, Bridgwater, Sherborne and Exeter, crushing the last royalists in the field by March, 1646. In that army were many Baptists, including captain Paul Hobson, who was spreading his views at Exeter and Kingsbridge, as we learn from a letter printed by Edwards in his *Gangraena*. Two other men, John Vernon and William Allen, were officers, and brothers-in-law, and when we find their names on the church roll here, as living in Dalwood, we scent a romance. Glance back to see their antecedents.

Vernon in 1644 wrote "The Young Horseman," an admirable book of drill for the parliamentary cavalry, prefaced by a most pious exhortation. Allen in 1648, though only a trooper, was yet Agent for his regiment, and took a leading part in the army deliberations that resulted in sending Charles for trial. Vernon in 1650 signed a General Epistle to all Baptists Churches, Heart-Bleedings for Professor's Abominations. Next year Allen was Adjutant-General of the cavalry in Ireland. A little later we hear that the two men were staying with their father-in-law near Exeter.

Now when we examine the "names of the members of the Church of Christ at Dalwood usually assembling at Loughwood in Dalwood, Dorsetshire," we find 17 members at Axminster, 15 at Colyton, 14 at Honiton, and 32 others at various hamlets near, besides 22 at Shute and Dalwood. The centre of gravity lay not at any of the three towns, but close to the obscure village where these men lived. The meeting-house too was being erected here, "in a lonely sequestered nook at the back of Shute Hill," a mile and a half from Colyton by a winding lane, and embowered in woods. At this time there was no need for secrecy, and the situation was probably due to the fact that a Dalwood man gave the site. More than that, of six brethren who were approved by the church to exercise their gifts according to the measure of grace, one was of Axminster, James Hitt; two were of Colyton, John Owen and Thomas Payne; three were of Dalwood itself, Vernon, Allen and Robert Doyly. Are we far from the mark if we suppose that Robert had two daughters, who accounted for the others settling here, and that their settlement accounted for the existence of the church?

The Lyme records show that at the end of 1653 there were elaborate negotiations for the group in that town to become a separate church people; the result was an amicable division on 15 December, when about seventy members constituted the eastern church. The Dalwood records show that besides the 92 remaining in full membership there, of whom two were absent in Ireland, forty more had been cast out for sin and disorder. Thus we have evidence of much prosperity, and of a high standard of discipline. As there were five more brethren on trial for gifts, meetings were not only held in Kilmington weekly, till the new house was erected, but also thrice a month at Ottery and at Honiton: and a most vigorous over-

sight was maintained of all absentees, though there was no pastor.

The earliest meeting recorded at length was on 14 February 1653/4. It was decided that church business was to be kept private; that at the close of each address there was to be trying of the doctrine, as enjoined by the apostle; that grievances were not to be brooded over but to be made known and settled at once; that one man, adjudged in the wrong, was to make prompt satisfaction. Some members had been accused by a man at Chard of being witches; a deputation was appointed to see him and make him justify the charge, or else to prosecute him: this was no tame church to allow slanders on her members. Then in response to the letter from Ireland, agreed to meet next Third day for humiliation, and then monthly.

The Irish letter may once have been lent to Rippon; he certainly printed it with its postscript that Brother Vernon can particularly inform as to some matters; it was signed at Waterford on 1 June, 1653. The London churches circulated it generally, with a covering letter from Peter Scutt, 24 July. The Irish Baptists intended to observe the first Wednesday in each month as a day of fasting and prayer. Their plan was approved, a General Meeting of the Western Association was held at Taunton 18-20 September, 1654, to which delegates were sent with a letter; on their return a perfect jeremiad of confession was adopted and entered.

Eight more meetings were held that year, abounding in matters of discipline and devotion. It was decided that Honiton ought not to be organized as a separate church, that five Elders and Overseers should be appointed, with five Deacons, and that the officers might prepare the business for the open church meeting. The building being not finished for lack of funds, a visitation of every member was arranged.

The year 1655 was of unusual interest, though only six meetings are recorded. As George Fox and Henry Jessey came to Honiton, we have two glimpses from very different outside positions. Good correspondence was kept up with sister churches, especially Hatch, Bridgwater and Totnes; and a brother was sent to preach in Dorset. From another General Meeting in Bridgwater, a reply was sent to Ireland, signed for this church. It was also agreed that Thomas Collier of Luppitt should be General Superintendent of the work in the district; but this church hesitated about Laying on of hands for the purpose. From outside sources we know that Allen was arrested in this county because he disapproved of Cromwell becoming Protector; but the church was silent on the subject. Changes were made in the services for the summer; experience meetings began at seven, and the sisters had a separate gathering: the wisdom of this was evident when we find that one called another a "durty beast." Brethren and sisters in distress were helped, £10 being subscribed for one member, and aid being sent for a member of the church at Totnes.

When next year Richard Gill fell into need, letters asking help were sent to the churches at Bovey Tracy, Exeter, Tiverton, Dartmouth, Luppitt, Lyme, Osmington, Chard, Ryden near Hatch, Bridgwater, Wedmore and North Bradley. Another sign of the good organization is in the General Meeting at Wells, 8-11 April, 1656: a reasoned protest was made against saints accepting money from the world, whether as minister to a parish, or Lecturer, or Chaplain. This document was printed in *TRANSACTIONS*, vol. I., page 65. Our church however did not sign; Vernon and Allen were touring Ireland, and some of their friends were doing these very things. Nor did the church sign the Confession issued this year, though Luppitt and

Lyme did. But Hitt went to the meeting at Exeter on 6 October.

In 1657 we find another elaborate time table for Sunday services through the summer. From seven to nine there was to be trial of gifts, prayer and prophecy. From nine to twelve, public exercise, and again from one to three. Then followed a private meeting for members only, to communicate their experience, exercise discipline, and pass judgment on the gifts exercised. It is much to be regretted that while pages are devoted to details of disciplines, there is no instance of a sermon and of the criticisms passed.

Next year regular meetings were instituted on Wednesday, of which full record was kept. It was reiterated that Honiton must remain part of the church; but a lack of rulers showed itself. Again we get welcome light from outside. John Carew, a man of good family who had sat in parliament and had tried Charles, was baptized in February 1658; he had previously been very helpful to the church at Exeter. It was feared by the government that he, Vernon and Allen intended at the Association in Dorchester to bring forward some political schemes: so in May Thurloe sent spies, who were disconcerted to find that only members were admitted. They did hear that Kiffin and other Londoners kept the meeting on safe lines.

When Richard Cromwell became Protector, the same three men planned another meeting at Exeter, which excited fresh alarm. This church sent a letter to that meeting on 30 January, 1658/9, but did not enter a copy in its book.

Great changes came about soon. Allen published a book to show that the situation of 1648 had arisen again, and exhorting the officers to dethrone the new tyrant. Richard resigned, Vernon and Allen were

re-commissioned, and the Rump Parliament was recalled, in the hope that toleration, which had been seriously abridged by Cromwell, could be restored. Efforts were made to obtain popular support for this revolution, and two great meetings of Baptist were convened. The General Baptists of sixteen counties met at Aylesbury, and the Londoners sent a printed paper summoning Particular Baptists to the Angel at Salisbury. To this gathering Dalwood sent Robert Doyly, with instructions to pass a vote of confidence in the new government, and to present a petition, presumably for liberty of conscience. Soon afterwards, Vernon and Allen were sent to Ireland in high command.

The return of Charles ended all this; the Baptist officers were dismissed, and special reports were sent that Vernon and Allen were very dangerous. Carew surrendered to stand his trial for regicide, and was executed; Allen was arrested and only obtained release on 19 June 1661 by promising to leave the country. Lyme was said to be a nest of fanatics.

Meantime Robert Doyly had provided another romantic touch. Abraham Cheare of Plymouth has left a manuscript account, now in Bristol College, how he was sent for to Cornwall, to baptize Captain Langdon on 7 January 1651, and how he dared not as there was a sharp frost and the man was consumptive and very weak. "Brother Muckle was then called upon by Captain Langdon to do his duty," and the result was that many more were baptized. This seems to be connected with the movement round Falmouth, Penryn and Tregavethan, of which many details are known. Now on 14 June 1659, Doyly married Mrs. Ann Langton of "Tragaffan" in Cornwall, whom he may have met at some Association meetings. Perhaps he went down to live there, for the minutes now cease, and the note that the garden plat around the

meeting-house may be used for burial of members, reads like a farewell gift. Cheare supplies us two interesting facts; he was sent to Exeter jail for declining the Oath of Allegiance, and there he met James Hitt, confined for the same reason. There is an optimist ring about the remark in a letter of 17 September 1662, that the meeting at Dalwood was very large and increasing, the Lord being a covert to them. This was indeed true, for though Seth Ward, the bishop of Exeter, undertook a very vindictive search for dissenters under the new conventicle act in 1665, he heard nothing of this place. Vernon had settled in London, where with Glass of Bovey Tracy he was busy conducting meetings every Sunday; his career henceforward though decidedly adventurous, has no bearing on Dalwood; he died in 1667.

When the Conventicle Act expired in 1668, minutes were resumed on 6 November, with a resolution to raise 1/6 weekly for the poor; and among these we now find Thomas Payne. On 10 May next there was a thorough reorganization, and a pastor was chosen for the first time, George Allome, to whom the same payment was made. He was ordained by laying on of hands, with fasting and prayer; two ruling elders and two deacons were appointed also.

Sheldon was angry at the revival of conventicles, and sent orders that year to all bishops to send in returns about them. The new bishop, Anthony Sparrow, did not like the work, and only said of this district:—"Colyton, once in a fortnight or three weeks, sometimes in one house, sometimes in another and in fields and orchards. Ottery St. Mary, a conventicle at uncertain places, few, most of them meane, some constables." The last item quite agrees with what we have heard as to the local strength, and explains the absence of persecution. When the Declaration of Indulgence came out in 1672, Samuel Serle and Peter

Cole took out licences for Baptist worship in their homes at Honiton. But the Declaration was cancelled next year, and the minutes ceased for twenty years.

In 1675 Serle administered a legacy from Christopher Serle of Huxtable in Kent, bequeathed early in 1669; that year we hear through Sheldon of John Searle, a Baptist at Wye in Kent. Samuel bought one of the old bridewells in Honiton; perhaps the rise of dissent had rendered it needless. Three pounds of the rent he paid over to the churchwardens and overseers, to be spent in shoes, stockings, and books to be given to poor children each fifth of November; the rest of the rent he and his fellow-trustees promised to use for other charitable purposes. Thus the Baptists were bold enough to create a permanent trust; and while the Town Council now appoints the trustees, the three pounds are still used for children at the Nonconformist schools.

In 1685, Monmouth landed at Lyme, accompanied by Col. Abraham Holmes, founder of the church at Exeter, and by young William Hewling, grandson of Kiffin. He was joined by Sampson Lark, pastor of the Lyme church; but we cannot be certain that any Dalwood people joined, or suffered like these three for their rebellion. Four years later, William of Orange landed at Torbay, and a pencil note of "1689" against the name of Allen on the church roll enables us to hope that the veteran struck one blow more for freedom.

When the Assembly sat that year in London, his ancient colleagues James Hitt and Thomas Payne, attended from Dalwood. Two years later the church appeared again at the Western Association, then Hitt went to help Plymouth. A tradition of this lingered at Dalwood, though the name had been mis-read or distorted as Flute. Payne was the only representative at London in 1692, but to Bristol four years later,

four were sent. Then from brief minutes we read that a London controversy was echoed here, and settled by the decision that members who wished to sing, might do so. The debt Plymouth owed, was repaid by sending James Murch about 1693, and after five years help at Dalwood and Lyme, he was dismissed to the former on 16 December 1698. Two years later he attended the Association at Bristol in May, and signed the minutes; but he removed to Bampton in 1703. An attempt to get Emanuel Gifford from Bristol failed, and a member once again took the lead, as we learn from Jerom Murch in his account of Honiton, which is invaluable for the next period.

Indeed the heroic period is now over, and during all the eighteenth century we shall see disturbance owing to the rise of a new type of doctrine. While the "Arian Movement" as it has been termed, affected a large part of England, yet it originated in Exeter, and we can study its spread admirably in these two places, Honiton and Dalwood. The Western Association had sought to unite all Baptist churches, whether General as at Tiverton, or Particular as at Exeter; it was a remarkable experiment and deserved better success than it attained. The Confession of 1656 was rather Calvinistic, but in 1691 another was put out, which Crosby classed as General, to be seen as an appendix to his last volume. The truth is acknowledged by the churches, "we are looked upon as a people degenerated from almost all other baptized congregations, at least in our parts of the nation," and they were not content with the revision of the Presbyterian confession, that in 1689 had met such favour from the Baptists at London. A very distinct lead was given away from not only Calvinism but from Athanasianism, at Exeter in 1719 among the Presbyterians, and the Baptist Association soon felt the effects.

Jerom Maynard of Axminster, a large manufacturer, maintained the services at Dalwood for many years, and won several adherents in Colyton about 1707. When he moved to Honiton eight years later, he gathered another congregation in his own house. This prospered so well that in 1721 he devoted himself entirely to the newer cause.

But he was a follower of the new light, and the book at Dalwood is silent as to his ministry, unless some undeciphered short-hand notes to 1722 refer to it. It was in the Association of 1723 that Broadmead followed up a movement of two years earlier, by carrying a resolution that the 1689 confession be adopted; 33 ministers signed a declaration repudiating the views of Arminius and Antinomian doctrine, accepting the Trinity. A scrutiny of this document might show where Maynard stood, and what Dalwood held. Taunton was becoming the Baptist centre of the new views, under Joseph Jefferies, and the meeting there in 1730 was the last united one. In 1733 Loughwood was represented at the Calvinist Association in Bristol, not at the rival meeting in Moreton Hampstead. The few notices in the book in these crucial years relate only to accounts and discipline, and give no indication that the situation was regarded as singular.

Maynard was distinctly flourishing at Honiton, and in 1737, with the help of John Sturch of Crediton, he erected a little meeting-house on Bridge Street, with a baptistery outside. As his business took much of his time, he obtained the help of William Sprague or Sprake, and this man threw in his lot with the Assembly of General Baptists, rapidly moving from Arminianism towards Arianism. In 1753 Sprague was succeeded by Daniel Wheeler, who proved so energetic that when the Baptists of South Carolina asked for a minister, offering £70 yearly, he was sent in

1757, and built up the church at Stono. Maynard was now over eighty years old, another helper was most necessary, so appeal was made to the Assembly which had taken away their minister. Now at Taunton there was a prominent family, which had devoted to the ministry a son, Francis Webb, and had given him an excellent training. He came, and was so brilliantly successful that in a few months he was invited to the church at the Barbican in London, whither he went in 1758, despite the offer of £100 a year to stay.

While Honiton thus flourished, it was far different at Colyton, where the removal of Maynard paralyzed the cause, and it soon dissolved. The Presbyterians built a meeting-house in 1745, and presently invited Joshua Toulmin, a youth of 21, fresh from a London Academy. Within four years he became Baptist, and an awkward situation was ended by the Taunton Baptist minister resigning in his favour. On the death of Maynard in 1762 Toulmin repaid his debt of honour, to Honiton. He found near Taunton a farmer, Philip Adams, pastor of the church at Wedmore. He induced Adams to take up this cause also, and monthly visits were paid till he died in 1780.

The fortunes of the main church at Dalwood are harder to follow at this time, the book being nearly blank, and the entries hard to reconcile. There was a very able man, Isaac Hann, who played a great part in the Association affairs, so that at his death the Association erected a tablet stating that he was "for many years the worthy pastor of this church." He appears first as Association preacher at Exeter in 1734, being then 44 years old, it is reasonable to think that he settled here about that time. Yet only in 1751 do entries show any revival, and there are signs of money quarrels. He paid £30 and took a receipt in full during 1753; next year the deeds of the meeting-house were handed over by Mrs. Rockett, and there

are notes of an endowment of £5 shared with Lyme. Some proceedings of "our dear Minister Isaac Hann" with relation to a mortgage, were approved in April 1757. In December the names of all church members were taken down, and besides Hann there were only six men and 25 women. Hann lived at Popain, three at Honiton, the others mostly at Stockland and Colyton.

This shows that in Honiton there was not only the new meeting of Maynard and Wheeler, but also a Calvinist group. To minister to these there was James Drewett, who had come from Penygarn, as Joshua Thomas tells. He was receiving £25 from Dalwood till 1754, when it was reduced to £20. His work continued till death in 1770.

Hann was therefore being aided by at least one other minister; and this may explain the entry that Mr. Arnot left in February 1756. But when we find that the help of Thomas Bosher was called in, we scent doctrinal trouble. For Bosher, pastor at Milborne Port, was of the new school, and had already been involved in troubles at Up Ottery and Prescott, leading to divisions. Thomas Lewis came at a salary of £20, and the capital stock increased to £100: but he passed on in a year, and though he did good work at Chard, Tiverton, Exeter and elsewhere, something unusual was evidently happening here. In November 1757, Robert Day came over from Wellington and baptized several; and all these things occurred while Hann was still "our dear minister!" We must of course remember that he was nearly seventy years old, but as the list of those he baptized is very short, we may fairly conclude that his talents were not evangelistic, and that even those who would not listen to the new doctrine were justified in wishing for more energy in the ministry.

Now a century earlier, the church had had much

to do with Hatch in Somerset, where Philip Adams was now living. That church also had been rent, and while entries of 1690 are extant, they seem to be in the custody of the new school. A fresh set of records was opened by the Calvinists in 1742, whence we find that on 29 August 1750, the pastor was Samuel Burford. He came to settle in Loughwood on 15 July 1759, and on 27 February 1763, he put in his letter of dismissal from the church at Bickenhall, a hamlet close to Hatch, and was chosen pastor. His family indeed belonged to this district, for Edmund Burford had been minister in Lyme in the seventeenth century; John Burford had been member at Up Ottery, and returned in 1741 from a long pastorate in Falmouth to die at Church Stanton near Hatch.

The circumstances under which Hann retired are obscure. In 1773 Josiah Thompson of London made careful enquiry into all dissenting churches, to see what hope there was of getting support to the proposal of ending the compulsion on dissenting ministers to sign some of the Articles; he noted the attitude of every minister. He says that at Honiton there was no resident Baptist minister, though there was a good parsonage; Adams was coming over monthly. Isaac Hann he says was petitioning; but he was now minister at Up Ottery. James Pyne of Lyme was petitioning. The minister of Loughwood was not; and so his name is not entered. As the present minister of Kilmington knows a letter of Hann from Dalwood to Up Ottery in 1770, there is reason to fear that the old man had an awkward period when he was superseded, with no status in the church he had served so long, before a refuge was found for him near by. Certainly when he died five years later, it was the Association that erected the memorial to him in the Dalwood Chapel.

In 1782 it was necessary to choose a new deacon. Trouble arose, Mrs. Bety Rocket declining to agree

with the others, "Sarah Rocket her daughter when she saw that her mother could not have the government of the church" also retired, and a long controversy was closed only by their excommunication in 1784.

Meantime Burford in turn was ageing at Dalwood, and a helper was found in Samuel Norman, who came from Stogumber in 1786 and was received into full membership 7 January next. Finances proved difficult, and when it was decided that he must rise and fall with the church in her subscriptions, he passed on to Bampton in 1792. Rowles and Arnold helped especially in a neighbouring village, while Burford at the age of 87 still conducted two services each Sunday. A second Richard Gill, baptized in 1788, was appointed to help him, and early in 1798 the venerable pastor resigned in his favour, surviving two years longer, and passing to rest with descendants in the ministry in London and Sabden. Under newer auspices the church awakened to the new missionary spirit, having passed safely through the troubles of the eighteenth century, and presently added to its ancient home at Loughwood, a second at Kilmington.

The church founded at Honiton by Jerom Maynard usually worshipped with the Presbyterians after the death of Adams; but when the pastor there died, they made application to Dr. Caleb Evans of Bristol. He had a student, Stephen Freeman, who under his tuition had become distinctly Unitarian, and a settlement was effected in 1787, James Maynard and John Murch bequeathing £340 in trust. The Bridge Street chapel soon proved too small, for the Presbyterians now deserted their own place, and a large girls' boarding school attended. John Maynard, nephew of the founder, gave more land, and a new building was opened in 1794. Freeman however had resigned four years earlier, and had gone to Enfield, where he opened a school, and was also asked to train for the

General Baptist ministry. He was succeeded at Honiton by a pedobaptist, John Hughes, who lived till 1831, and seems to have dissipated the last remnants of Baptist principle. The church survived till 1861 when the meeting-house was closed. Litigation ended by the sale of the premises for £55 and vesting all the proceeds with trustees of the New Connexion General Baptists.

The Honiton section of the Dalwood church was bereft of its minister in 1770. At the same time the old Presbyterian church broke up, owing to the bad conduct of a young minister. The Calvinists left the old meeting, bringing away with them the books dating from 1696, and they certified a room for worship in 1771; with them apparently joined the Calvinistic Baptists, and new books were begun, with Mr. Stevens from Great Marlow as minister. Before the century closed, the united church had a meeting-house on High Street, a burial ground, and an endowment. But it was premature for Baptists and Pedobaptists to be thus wedded. In 1812 the Baptists withdrew from the partnership, foregoing all claim to property and books, and presently had another chapel, also near High Street. Only after that separation did the "new Protestant Dissenting meeting-house" of 1800 take the title of Independent. The Baptists date their origin as a church from 1817, but this sketch will show that there is a real thread of continuity, and that they equally with "Kilmington and Loughwood" inherit the traditions of the "Church of Christ at Dalwood" which has a recorded history of more than 261 years.

W. T. WHITLEY.