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Baptist Churches in the Bedford Area

(Concluded)

SANDY BAPTIST

Dr. John Brown says that in 1676 Sandy had 600 inhabitants and twenty-two Nonconformist members. These were, apparently, members at Bedford and worshipped at Blunham. In 1756 John Berridge began to preach the gospel at Everton, near Sandy, and John Skilleter, of Sandy, with his wife and sons, were among the converts. Berridge died in 1793, and the Skilleter family joined Blunham Baptist in 1794, Jeremy Skilleter building a small chapel there in 1797. In 1826 or 1827 some withdrew and built a chapel for High Calvinistic preaching, but were not able to pay for the building. John Foster of Biggleswade bought it, and Sandy Baptist used it for evening services instead of Jeremy Skilleter's smaller building. In 1854 a third chapel was built on the site of the second at a cost of about £800 of which William Skilleter gave £400. In 1858 C. H. Spurgeon preached twice in the open air, and the collections cleared the debt. A fourth chapel, to seat 450, was opened in 1888, and a new schoolroom in 1929, and the 1854 building was sold. In 1864, William Skilleter presented a manse for the Pastor's residence.

SHARNBROOK OLD BAPTIST

The church was formed in 1719, and the Church Book begins then, with a Covenant. The church declared for Open Membership: "if any Person have Light into Baptism they shall have it administered unto them. And if not that Light, to receive them as Saints." There was to be no sprinkling of infants, and they would hold Communion with all when they judged faithful. In 1808 they declared themselves Strict Baptists, and resolved to admit no member in future who did not see the importance of that institution which is so clearly set forth in the Word of God. In 1818 they had a Calvinistic Declaration of Faith and Practice, Close Communion. The splendid chapel was enlarged in 1865; it is probable that the figures 1786 which appear above the pulpit give the date of the original building. Bethlehem chapel was the result of a secession, but the churches were re-united in 1904. The Church Book says nothing about the local celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the B.M.S. in 1842. It was a district meeting held in a meadow at Sharnbrook, with Mr. J. H. Tritton as chairman and Rev. John Aldis among the speakers. The attendance was reckoned at 5,500, including about 1,000 scholars from the Sunday Schools of North Bedfordshire.

SHARNBROOK BETHLEHEM CHAPEL

The Church Book begins in March, 1833, with a statement regarding the general departure from the simplicity of the Gospel, as shown by the fact that Original Sin, Particular Redemption, Predestination to Eternal Life, Eternal Union, Eternal Justification and Final Perseverance were seldom preached. Meetings began in 1827, and the church was formed in March, 1833, with a Calvinistic Declaration of Faith and a long Church Covenant. That church was dissolved in July, 1835, and a new church formed in the following month; no reason is given, but the new church had new deacons. The chapel was opened in 1844. The Church Book ends in September, 1904, with the reception of a new member. The members went back to Sharnbrook Old Baptist Chapel.

SHEFFORD UNION CHURCH

Dr. John Brown, of Bunyan Meeting, says that ministers of churches of the Beds. Union took it in turns in 1798 to preach once a month at Shefford, then destitute of the Gospel. In 1814 a temporary chapel was opened. Mr. W. H. Whitbread gave land and in 1825 the present chapel was opened. In 1829, an Open Communion church was formed. The Trust Deed said that the minister was to be elected by the majority of the men and women who were members; any mortgage to be in accordance with the votes of the major part of the men members. Likewise any sale of chapel and ground and the election of further trustees was to be by the votes of the major part of the men. In 1881, Samuel Whitbread gave adjoining land for erection of a Manse and extension of burial ground, and in 1929 an anonymous donor paid for further land. A farmer named Inskip, of Shefford Hardwick, a Methodist, was one of the founders of the church, but when the Methodists came to Shefford he joined them. The old Church Books have disappeared. The present book begins in January, 1886, and the most interesting item in it is of a notable revival in 1905 under the ministry of the Rev. S. Acton Fox, when over 100 persons professed conversion and seventy-four joined the church. Unfortunately there were dissensions a few years later. Stondon Baptist Chapel was for a time part of Shefford's work, having been started by them, but it is now under the care of Tilehouse Street, Hitchin.

SOUTHILL PARTICULAR BAPTIST

This church was formed on June 23, 1693, as an Independent cause, with the help of the church at Rowell (Rothwell). Thomas Kellingworth was Pastor from 1693 until 1721, during which time 230 members were received. During the pastorate of Joseph King, 1776-1785, it was Baptist, Open Communion, but during the

long pastorate of John Warburton, 1846-1892, it was re-formed as a Strict Baptist church.

STEVINGTON BAPTIST

The church at Stevington or Steventon was formed in 1655, and evidently had some early connection with Bunyan Meeting which in 1656 gave permission to seven of their members to break bread there. Stephen Hawthorne "the godly yeoman of Turvey," was Pastor in 1655. He attended the General Assembly of Baptists in London in 1689 and 1692, resigned his pastorate in 1692, died in 1705, and was buried in the farmyard where the first Meeting House stood. G. H. Orchard, Pastor from 1832 to 1843, says: "He must have known Bunyan, but no allusion is ever made to his name even in those letters sent to Bedford church. There is no evidence that Bunyan preached at Stevington, although tradition says he preached in the old Meeting House at Pavenham. This silence about Bunyan arose from his opposing close communion, which Hawthorne and Negus strictly observed." The next pastor was Daniel Negus, deacon in 1673, assistant in 1691, and sole Pastor in 1692. During persecution they met at night in lanes and woods: "the females screened their minister's head from the damps of night with their aprons." But their regular meeting place was a barn for which they paid ten shillings per annum. In 1691 they had members at Rushden, Blisworth, Northampton, Wollaston, Olney, Newport Pagnell, Bedford, Cotton End, Ridgmont and Aylesbury. They did not hold meetings at all these places, but they held Church Meetings at some of them, and deacons were appointed to visit members quarterly in distant districts. They had some members at Pavenham, two miles away, and a baptismal service there in 1693 is recorded. In that year, Mr. Greenwood and others formed a church at Carlton and left the Stevington church, to the displeasure of its Elders. Their Northampton members formed a separate church about 1700 which built a chapel on the Green. In 1733 a new minister at College Lane made an attempt to convert his church to Strict membership, but the majority disagreed. Thereupon the minister and the minority, taking the Church Book with them, joined the church on the Green, but that church gradually dwindled and the chapel was sold, and the Church Book came back to College Lane. In 1713 the Stevington Church decided that it was right and proper to sing at the Lord's Table; but evidently this was limited to the Lord's Table, for in 1751 when a Pastor stipulated for hymn singing, a number of the old members left. In 1718 the old barn was judged to be too small, and they decided to have a new Meeting House. One man gave the land, members and friends gave time, material or money, and a

Roman Catholic helped by hauling the stones. The chapel was opened in 1721, free of debt, and tradition says that the balance in hand was enough to provide a manse. In 1831 a baptistry was made in the Court at the back of the chapel, but some friends still preferred to be baptised in the Ouse. The present baptistry is in the chapel. In 1832 a new manse was built. Mr. Roberson of Turvey, gave £150 on condition that £2 be given every year, for ever, to poor members, and that his letter be read to the church annually. The church decided that the pastor, living free of rent, should provide the £2 (his stipend was £40). This did not please everybody. In 1852 a lady gave £50 so that the Pastor should be relieved of this burden. At first none but baptised persons were admitted to the Lord's Table; but in 1711 the church decided to appoint Simon Hearcock as Pastor, and made the following entries in the Church Book regarding him and his wife: "That after waiting and due care to instruct the persons into the duty of baptism, and they do continue dark as to the duty; yet to receive them into this Church of Christ provided that they walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ. Members of other churches that walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ to have communion with this church." Apparently Hearcock was a disappointment for when he died in 1716 church matters were in confusion and at a low ebb. He had been inactive, and there was no trace of regularity, learning, discipline or eminent piety during his ministry. In 1836 the church referred to the 1711 decision and to prevent any disunion in views, any contention about Officers of the church or Pastor to preside, "decided that in future no person whatsoever be allowed to administer any ordinance or have fellowship or break bread in the Lord's Supper, who has not attended to and obeyed the initiatory ordinance of baptism by immersion." In 1840 the church noted that some of their members had very improperly sought fellowship with Independent churches and those Baptist churches which allow Open Communion, which the church could not approve. Two months later they decided, "That any member of our church who shall marry a person not in communion with some Christian Society shall forfeit all fellowship and privileges of our church until he or she shall have publicly acknowledged the error before the church. Note; we do not hold the Establishment to be a Christian Society." In view of the last sentence it is refreshing to note that in 1860 Anglicans, Baptists and Primitive Methodists had held some well-attended united prayer meetings. In 1869 it was unanimously resolved that consistent members of other Christian churches be admitted to the Lord's Table as heretofore. In 1870 a ballot showed twenty-eight votes for Open Communion and two for Strict, but there was some dissatisfaction because a woman

member had canvassed for votes for Open. Four months later another ballot showed four for Open Communion and eleven for Strict. In 1921 a resolution was moved that in future the church be empowered to receive into fellowship believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and Baptists at heart who for some particular and conscientious reason have not been immersed, and that any statute or minute to the contrary now appearing in the Church Book be rescinded. At the following Church Meeting this was postponed indefinitely. The present position is that the membership is Baptist, and Communion is open to members and adherents of other Christian churches.

THURLEIGH BAPTIST

In 1808 a house was opened at Thurleigh for the preaching of the Gospel. About 1826 William Crockford, formerly a deacon at Keysoe and for some time Pastor at Gidding, came to live in the village and took charge of the work. In 1827, a chapel was built; Mr. Crockford gave £15 and worked as a carpenter in its erection, and continued his ministry until he died in 1836. Samuel Wells became the minister in October, 1836, and the church was formed on October 5th, 1837, with four members. By the end of 1838 the membership was fifteen, and Mr. Wells became Pastor on January 2nd, 1839, and continued until his death in 1860. The first Church Book begins with a Calvinistic Church Covenant, then a list of those who were members in 1861, and a record until the end of 1900. Then came the minutes, beginning October, 1840, when the church decided to form a missionary society to help the B.M.S. In 1841, the chapel was enlarged at a cost of £160. They raised £130 of that in 1841, but as 1842 was the B.M.S. Jubilee they decided to make no attempt to raise money that year for their own building fund. In 1849 the chapel was again enlarged; the present building was erected in 1888. In 1861, Mrs. Harvey, a Wesleyan, wished to sit with them at the Lord's Table. After hearing her experience the church agreed unanimously, but as she was unbaptised she was to have no vote. Evidently she profited by the ministry, for she was baptised in 1866. On November 28th, 1862, three candidates were proposed, but it was stated that the parents of two of these objected. One of them was baptised without any formal consent from her parents. But the case of Harriet Farrer was more difficult. Her father held a farm on lease from the Vicar, one condition being that he and his family should attend the Parish Church; he therefore refused permission for her to be baptised. On February 2nd, 1860, Harriet asked for baptism, saying that she could wait no longer, and the Church Book says

that one of the members provided her with clothes and she was baptised on March 1st in spite of home opposition, bearing in mind the words of Christ: "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." On November 27th, 1863, it was reported that her sister, Mary Ann Farrer, who had been an enquirer for a year, had been turned out of doors by her father for refusing to attend the Established Church; and the record proceeds: "Having failed since then in securing a place after which she had been seeking, and not knowing what her future movements might be nor where her lot might be cast, she applied through the Pastor that messengers might be appointed to see her in his house immediately, and that she might be permitted at once to come forward to speak her experience in order to be baptised on the next sabbath. Request acceded to unanimously. Two prayers were offered during absence of messengers. Candidate then attended and related experience. The Church unanimously admitted her for baptism. Much feeling evinced.

"November 29th, 1863. The Pastor asked whether he should give his lecture next Tuesday upon 'Our reasons for dissenting from the Established Church and practising believers' baptism,' seeing that such lecture might interfere with the worldly prospects, peace, and comfort of several individuals. Resolved that truth be maintained and consequences risked.

"At 5 p.m., Mary Ann Farrer was baptised in the presence of a large company. Much impression appeared to be made. The Pastor preached afterwards on 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.'" Harriet Farrer died in 1913; Mary Ann died in 1944 at the age of ninety-nine. Soon after her baptism she had become cook at the Vicarage, and she came to chapel every Sunday. George Chandler was Pastor from 1866 to 1902. He died in 1903 and was buried in Thurleigh Churchyard, and the Vicar objected to the proposed wording on the tombstone that he had served as Pastor of the Baptist Church. He wanted the word Chapel instead. When it was pointed out to him that "Church" meant the Society and "Chapel" the building, he referred the question to his Bishop, and the church asked the Baptist Union to take up their case. The inscription on the stone reads "Pastor of the Baptist Church." The church has never been large, but it has shown a sturdy Baptist spirit.

WILDEN BAPTIST

This church claims 1806 as its foundation, but its old Church Book is lost. It is known that Solomon Hawkins was Pastor and was succeeded by his son, Jabez Hawkins, who had a small farm at Begwary and journeyed across every Sunday from 1845 to 1857. His successor, Mr. Ganton, baptised sixteen young men

and women one Sunday in an open-air baptistry, the water being brought in buckets from the brook a hundred yards away.

WOOTTON BAPTIST

This church was formed on September 28th, 1826, and met for ten years at a school in the village. The chapel was built in 1836, with room for 150 people. The Church Covenant is Calvinistic, with Strict membership. The membership still consists of baptised persons, and they practise Open Communion. The Church Book begins in 1839. It tells of one old man who was not received because his doctor said that he must not be baptised; but it does not say whether they gave him the same consideration as one old woman whom they admitted to occasional attendance at the Lord's Supper. They permitted one man to be baptised, but to remain a Methodist. In 1861 they made a new rule allowing women as well as men to vote at the election of a Pastor. In 1922 it was proposed to group Wootton with Cranfield, but they decided to keep on as before.

A Statement of Faith, 1822

The Rev. John Holloway's Confession of Faith given by him at the time of his Ordination to the Pastoral Office over this Church. [This was the Church at Cotton End, near Bedford, and the Confession is in their Church Book, June 6th, 1822.]

I believe in the one only living and true God, the self-existent, independent, all-sufficient, immutable and eternal I Am, the great first cause and the last end of all creatures and things. That He is holy, just and good in His nature, infinite in His wisdom, omnipotent in His power and unbounded in His presence. The Lord the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands and forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. That in this one incomprehensible Jehovah there are three persons, three in name and office, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yet but one in nature, equality, purpose and eternity.

I believe that the Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God. That they contain a complete revelation of his mind and will to man, and are a perfect rule to his people, in doctrine, experience, worship and practice. That they were given to man by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have been preserved entire by Divine Providence to the present time, and by the same power will be continued in a state of perfection to the Church to the end of the world.

I believe that the Almighty, according to the account given in the Sacred Scriptures, created the heavens and the earth, angels and men, with all the other creatures and things that exist. That He created them by the word of His power, and all very good. That He is the great and inexhaustible fountain of life, vegetable, animal, angelical, spiritual and eternal life all proceeding from himself. That He created the human body out of the dust of the earth and breathed into it the breath of life and man became a living soul, in his Maker's image, wise, holy, and happy.

I believe that God entered into a covenant of works with Adam as His creature, and as being the head and representative of all his posterity. That it was in the power of man as he proceeded from the hands of his Creator in a state of innocency, to have kept the law, or conditions of the covenant given him in Paradise. That the Lord Jehovah was strictly righteous in the Test of obedience He gave to man, he being then perfectly free and holy, and that He was legally just in sanctioning the breach of it with threatenings of death, and the fulfilment of it with promises of life.

I believe that Adam as the head of the human race, wilfully and deliberately broke the covenant or law of works, and that in so doing he disobeyed the holy commands and rebelled against the just authority of God his Maker, fell from his original purity, and involved himself and all mankind in sin, death, and misery as the ruins of his fall. That man as a fallen creature is totally depraved in all the powers and passions of his soul. Therefore, that all the sons and daughters of our first parents are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, and their hearts desperately wicked and deceitful above all things past finding out. That, left to themselves, all the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts would be only evil, and that continually. That by sin man is in himself both helpless and hopeless: for the corrupt fountain of a depraved nature can never send forth pure streams, nor the imperfect works of a guilty creature constitute a righteousness to justify his soul in the sight of a holy God. That by his original corruptions he is under the dominion of sin, and in a state of captivity to Satan; and by his actual transgression exposed to the curse of a violated law, the justice of an offended Deity, and the misery of an eternal hell.

I believe that God has not, though in strict justice He might have, left the whole race of sinners in this helpless, hopeless and miserable condition. But that He has so loved the world of mankind as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. That He has set His saving love upon those of them whom He will take to Heaven. And as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has entered with a covenant of grace and peace with Him the great Mediator on their behalf. A covenant that is everlasting in its date, well ordered in its plan, sure in its accomplishment and containing all them and all their salvation in its blessings.

I believe in the true and proper Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And because in the Scriptures of truth, He is called by the names, is said to possess the perfection, to have done the works, and to receive the glory of the Almighty and Eternal Jehovah. And that as the unspeakable gift of His Father's love and the effect of His own, agreeable to His covenant engagements as the Son of God, He came into our world, was made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem His people who were under the law. Also that by His perfect obedience and cursed death He performed the conditions of the covenant, fulfilled the law, satisfied justice, bore the punishment of sin, conquered Satan, destroyed death, and became the all-sufficient Saviour of souls.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person in the sacred Trinity. That He inspired the word of Revelation, discovers the perfections of the Father, and manifests and applies the work of the Son. That as the Spirit of life, of wisdom, of truth, of grace, of power, of consolation, etc., he quickens, enlightens, regenerates, converts, sanctifies, establishes, comforts and preserves all the people of God.

I believe in the doctrines of grace, viz. personal election, particular redemption, imputed righteousness, free justification, progressive sanctification, final perseverance, and eternal glorification. I also believe that though the child of God is redeemed from the curse of the law and delivered from it as a covenant of works, he is under it to Christ as the rule of his conduct.

And that the preceptive part of the word containing commands, exhortations, cautions, reproofs, admonitions, etc., is as much to be attended to in its proper place as the promissory part. That doctrine and experience, precept and promise, duty and privilege, holiness and happiness, Christ as a pattern and Christ as a Saviour, are never to be separated.

I believe that God by various means, but in general by His word and the instrumentality of His ministers and the agency of His Spirit, convinces, converts, and calls sinners to Himself; and thus brings them out of darkness into His marvellous light, out of the world into the Church, from Sinai to Sion, from self to Christ, from sin to holiness, in a word from hell's dark door to heaven. I believe that no man can possess an evidence that he is interested in the love of the Father, and the atonement of the Son, or enjoy the comfort of the Spirit, and be blessed with a meetness for heaven, but as he is taught by the grace of God to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present evil world.

I believe that it is the duty of all the members of the mystical body of Christ to unite themselves together in visible church-fellowship. That all the objects of His love and the purchase of His blood, as they become the subjects of His grace, among all denominations of Christians in every part of the world, constitute the universal catholic Church of Christ. But that a regularly organised Church is a company of gracious and holy men and women, uniting themselves together by a voluntary agreement, according to the directions of the word and in subjection to Christ as their Head, with their proper officers of Pastor and Deacons, for the public worship of God, the administration of holy ordinances and each other's edification.

I believe that Christ has appointed and ordained that there should be a holy gifted and standing ministry in His Church down to the end of time. That He calls, qualifies, and sends forth to labour in His vineyard whomsoever He pleases. That He appoints them their places, fits them for their work, succeeds them in their ministry, and secures their support. And that it is by these means and instruments (through the influence of His Spirit and grace) that He fulfils His purpose, spreads His Gospel, edifies His Church, completes the salvation of His chosen and glorifies His name.

I believe that our Lord as king in Sion, has instituted and ordained two Christian ordinances in His Church, to be attended to by all its members, viz. Baptism and the Supper. That it is the baptism of believers by immersion; because it is a public profession of repentance and faith in Christ's name, from principles of love and obedience to Him as their Saviour, and as the mode represents their death to sin and resurrection to holiness. That the sacred Supper is frequently to be administered to the members of the Church in the elements of bread and wine as lively figures of the broken body and flowing blood of Christ. His body broken and blood shed for the salvation of their souls, and received by faith for their spiritual nourishment and growth.

I believe where God begins the good work He will carry it on by the ministry of His word, the ordinances of His house, and the supplies of His grace, till the day of Jesus Christ. And that He will do this in opposition to all the corruptions of nature, the temptations of Satan, the persecution of the world, and the difficulties of the way, until He has brought the happy subjects of it to death and glory.

I believe that as the Lord Jesus took on Him the nature of man, and died the death of the Cross; so He was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures, triumphing over death and the grave. That His rising again with the same body is both the pledge and the pattern of the resurrection of the identical bodies of His people. That as He ascended up into heaven and is set down at the right hand of the Father, ever living to make intercession for all them that came unto God by Him,

so He will come again the second time without sin to the everlasting salvation of His Church, and will cause the resurrection of the dead both of the just and the unjust.

I believe that God has appointed a day, the great day of general judgement, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man Jesus Christ, whom He hath ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead, and whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead.

I believe that Christ, the righteous Judge will reward every man according as his works and character shall be. That He will call the righteous, His own people, to Himself, place them on His right hand, and say to them before the assembled universe, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world," and they shall go away into life eternal and be for ever with the Lord, perfectly holy and completely happy. But to the wicked forced to His left hand, He will say before God His Father, angels, devils and saints: "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," and these shall go away into everlasting punishment where there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Here, Sir, I conclude this imperfect statement of my faith, resting on your candour and that of my brother ministers and Christian friends, and also intreating an interest in all your prayers, that myself, the church, and the whole congregation may not only profess to believe, but possess and enjoy the graces doctrines and blessings of the Gospel of Christ. And that my brethren and Fathers in the ministry present, every soul in this large assembly, all the members of the Church at Cotton End, and every individual in the congregation that may attend here, may be saved from the misery of the wicked and obtain the everlasting life of the righteous is and shall be the prayer of your friend and servant in our common Lord.—Amen.

GEORGE E. PAGE.

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The first part of volume 1 of the "International Review of Biblical Studies" is edited by Dr. F. Stier, Professor of Old Testament in the Catholic Theological Faculty at Tübingen University, with the assistance of other members of the University Staff and associated scholars and students. No less than 1,391 articles from 393 periodicals are listed, almost none earlier than 1949, and published in more than twenty countries. The references are classified according to subject matter—text, interpretation, translation, theology, history, archaeology, etc.—and frequently a summary of the article is given, usually in German. More summaries are promised for the next issue in the autumn of this year, and also an index, which will add to the convenience of what promises to be a most useful addition to our knowledge of current publications on Biblical Studies.

G. FARR.