

The Lincolnshire Conference

of the New Connexion, 1791-1803.

THE New Connexion of General Baptists organised in 1770, and planned to have two Associations; the Southern, however, soon died out. As its most energetic members were of Methodist extraction, they had previously instituted Conferences, at which standard questions were put, to elicit information and provoke discussion. The first of these was the Midland, dating from about 1750; the second was the Yorkshire, about 1772; the third was the Lincolnshire. The Minutes of the Midland, or Leicestershire, are in the Society's possession, and lengthy extracts have been published in volumes v—vii. The earliest minutes of the Lincolnshire Conference are the subject of the following study: later minute books are in the Society's possession.

Many records of Christian ministries and denominational effort are hidden in MS., books, letters, and paragraphs in old magazines stored up by descendants of contemporary owners, and in many cases unknown and forgotten.

In an old parchment-bound book, eight inches by six inches, of seventy-six pages and eight more stitched, are extant the minutes of an Association of Christian Churches and ministers from June 1791 to March 1803. The book has on and within the cover, Thomas North, Spalding, Lincolnshire, Feb. 2, 1802.

The minutes show the desire for truth, consistent living, New Testament discipline, mutual help, and fraternal union that in all ages has exercised the hearts of those who are actuated by spiritual impulses.

The minutes record forty-five meetings—quarterly, with some omissions. The place of meetings are in this order: Gosberton, Fleet, Boston, Wisbech (St. Peters), Coningsby, Spalding. Then repeated with addition of Bourne, Tyd St. Gyles, March, and Peterborough.

The first page is headed "1791. As General Baptists. For the good of us now (with Gods Blessing) and our Successors, the following is left on Record."

NO. 1.

At a meeting of Ministers houlden at Gosberton, Thursday
June 23. 1791.

Ministers who attended were

Thompson,	Boston	Burgess	Fleet
Freestone	Wisbeach	Ewen	Do.
Rusling	Spalding	Binns	Gosberton
Wright	Do.	With several Church members.	

About 11 o'clock the Meeting was opened with prayer after which Bro. Thompson was appointed Chairman, Bro. Freestone moderator. Bro. Ewen scribe, then the following things were agreed upon. 1. The desine of the Meeting with each other for our mutual Benefit, as Ministers for the advantage of our respective Churches, and for the glory of God.

2 it was unanimously agreed that the meetings be houlden once every Quarter, and that the Midsummer Quarterly meeting be at Cunningsby ~~in~~ order to accommodate our aged Bro Boyes, the other places of meeting to be Boston, Gosberton, Spalding, Fleet or Lutton, Tidd St. Gyles & Wisbeach.

3 Agreed that ye following Questions as the Ground of our proceedings be constantly attended to.

1. What have we heard or know about each other's preaching since our last meeting?
2. What difficulties have we to mention.
3. What can be done more for the advancement of Religion amongst us?

As the meeting will necessarily be attended With some Expence it was conveyed in what method such expence should be defrayed whether ye Church where such meetings is houlden shall pay the whole Expence and so in rotation, or whether each Church shall bear the Expence of its own Ministers attending these meetings? after some Consideration the latter mode was preferred as being most Equitable: and we reccommend it to the Consideration of all our Churches we agree that against our next Quarterly meeting Bro. Burgess procure a Quarter-Book to insert all the Minutes of this and our succeeding meetings of this kind—and also the copies of the minutes of each meeting be forwarded from one to another for the advantage of our Churches Respectively. Agreed that at each Quarterly meeting a sermon shall be preached: and that the nomination of the Preacher be left to the Ministers of that Church where such meeting is to be houlden—and also that such minister be scribe at the meeting houlden at his place or else find a person to officiate in his room And moreover for the sake of order it is agreed that every one who speaks to any Question

shall address himself always to the Chairman at such meetings. A case from Wisbeach immediately connected with the third foundation Question was brought into this meeting—which for want of Time was postponed & to be particularly attended to at our next meeting— Tis agreed that the next Quarterly meeting be holden at Fleet on ye 27 day of September 1791, at which Time Bro. Ingham of Maltby is appointed to preach & in case of failure Bro Wright of Spalding.—

Signed in behalf of the said meeting.

W. Thompson, Chairman.

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Minutes of a Quarterly Meeting of Ministers, holden at Fleet, Wed. Oct. 22,

1796

Ministers present

Briggs	of	Gosberton
Taylor		Boston Moderator
Freeston		Wisbeach Chairman
Smith		Tyd St. Giles
Brn. Binns		Bourn
Rusling		Spalding
Wright		do.
Ewen		Wisbeach
Burgess		Fleet Scribe.

Morning Business.

Br. Taylor opened the meeting with prayer.

The Chairman read over the Minutes of the last Meeting.

Br. Freeston informed the Meeting, that he has admonished the Friends at Peterborough, about the Impropriety of Mr. Friends preaching among them: but the admonition was attended with very little effect, if any, for some time afterwards.

Q. What have we heard or known, of each other as Preachers, and of our Preaching since last Meeting?

The *stated* Labours of one of our Brn. were Spoken of as appearing to give much Satisfaction, and as affording a pleasing prospect of Usefulness:

Some Occasional Sermons, by others, were mentioned, some with approbation, and some rather otherwise.

Q. What difficulties have we to mention?

Some were mentioned, Arising from Temporal Encumbrances, and Family Illness. . . . Others, Arising from ungracious Members; and who appear to have such, even at the *Time* of their Admission. . . . and others, from the Inactivity of members in matters of Church Discipline.

Afternoon Business.

Q. What have any of our Members now present, to Remark concerning us as preachers, and of our preaching?

Only one or two members being present, they declined making any Remark.

Ques. What can be done, more than has been done, to promote Religion among us?

The Friends at Peterboro' having expressed their desire, that Brother Wright of Spalding supply them regularly *every* Lord's Day; and Br. Wright having desired the *Advice* of this meeting on the Subject. . . . We are Unanimously of Opinion, that he would do well to Accede to the wishes of the Friends there, at least that he make a Trial for the ensuing Quarter. And we also at the same time recommend to the friends at Peterbro' that they make it a point of Conscience to Indemnify Him, for such Expenses, & loss of Time, which he must unavoidably incur thereby.

The Peterbro' Friends, having wished to have the Lord's Supper, administered to them: The Subject was taken up; in attending to which, It was observed that, *properly speaking*, there being but 2 only of the old Stock remaining as members of the Church: It appears that the most orderly step that can be taken will be, that those who live there & are members of other Churches (as for instance 2 are of Wisbeach) be Dismissed in a regular way, from their Churches, to the remains of the Peterbro' Church, thereby to increase its number, and form, as it were afresh, a kind of foundation of a Church to whom the Ordinance may be administered, & by whom Church order may be maintained. When such an Union or junction, has taken place, they may then apply to any neighbouring Pastor, whom they think proper, to administer the Lord's Supper among them, untill they be suited with a Pastor of their own,

Were members of Churches to meet together, & to pray for the advancement of the Redeemers Interest at large; & in particular for their own Spiritual Prosperity, and their Ministers' greater usefulness: it is thought, It may prove a mean of encreasing the Interest of religion whereas, they appear too much to leave the whole of the work unto the Minister, without uniting their assistance to his Endeavours.

It is also the opinion of this meeting, that were such Ministers as are at liberty for it, to preach in surrounding Neighbourhoods it would have a considerable Tendency for Spreading the Gospel. The following Question is left till the next Meeting,

"Where are there any Scripture reasons, why an unordained

minister should not administer the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper: or, by what authority, does such an one Baptize?"

The next meeting at Tyd St. Giles's Jan. 3rd 1797.

So in succeeding meetings as the years passed, various matters arose and were carefully discussed and recorded. In April 1795 "Br. Binns of Gosbeston having received an Invitation to remove to Bourn, wishes for the opinion of the meeting."

Questions of Ordination, Laying on of Hands, Use of ecclesiastical titles, the use of "Mr Deacons collection of Hims in preference to Dr. Watts." Straitness in Preaching, and on one occasion some candid and Friendly Animadversion was made upon Defects in Pulpit Action, Grammar, provincial dialect, Division of Subjects, Turgidity or Swollenness of Style, Enunciation, Circumlocution, etc."

The question arose of others than the ministerial delegates being present at the meetings, and it was decided that church members might attend after the morning session. Thenceforth a separate list appears on the Minutes, on one occasion five Sisters being present.

The minutes of the last meeting recorded in the book are as follows.

Minutes of a Quartely Meeting of Ministers & Church Members holden at Boston, Ives, March 8th, 1803.

Br Burgess of Fleet—Chairman	Br Stn Small
Binns—Bowin—Moderator	Church Worker
Jarrom—Wisbeach—Scribe	Boston
Bartol—Spalding	
Taylor—Boston	
Bissil—Gosberton	
Sawor—Boston	

Br Burgess opened the Meeting with Prayer, and read the Minutes of the last Meeting.

Quest 1st. What have we, of any of our Members now present, heard or known of us as Preachers, or of our preaching since last meeting.

Under this Quest it was observed that, the discourses which have been heard by us, have in general, given good satisfaction. It was thought that one of our friends is sometimes rather too long in his discourses, and rather unhappy in the manner in which he places the Emphasis upon some pronouns when in prayer. It was thought that another of our Ministers wd do well in endeavouring to be more lively in the former part of his sermon. It was also thought that in the Discourse delivered at the general Meeting at Fleet, too high an Enconium was passed upon the

Institution of the Fund: the same remark was made, relative to the encomium passed upon Deacons, in the discourse preached at the Ordination of Mr. Anderson to that office at Fleet. Quest 2nd What difficulties have we to Mention?

Some of an experimental nature, were mentioned. The friends complain of the opposition which they experience in their religious course, from the remains of sin. Nothing of a particular Nature was Mentioned by the Brn present. It was observed that, in the present state, it must not be expected, that, we can be free from difficulties.

Quest 3rd. What more can be done to promote religion among us? It was thought, that if we could get our hearts more engaged in the cause of religion we Should be able to do more to promote its prosperity. It was farther observed that, we do consider the importance of religion, and engage more frequently and fervently in prayer.

T. R. HOOPER.

Redhill, Surrey.