

## Ashford in Kent.

THE Baptist church at Ashford claims to have originated in 1653, and Ivimey heard that records of that date showed that in that year members at Wye, Nackholt, and neighbouring places, organized and adopted eleven articles of faith and practice. This was probably due to the evangelistic tours of Henry Denne from Eltisley and Fenstanton, which certainly had good effects at Eythorne and Canterbury. On 25 May, 1653, a letter was sent hence to Cromwell, one of nineteen from Gathered Churches in Kent to nominate for his new Parliament, signed by Ralph Fremley and M. Savory; but these names are not familiar in Baptist circles, and these may be the ancestors of a Pædobaptist church, though most of these churches and members are well known in the General Baptist Association of Kent. Sixteen years later, the vicar reported that the regular teachers of the Baptists here were Benjamin Bowyer and Smallwood.

Information by themselves begins in 1672, when the following licences were taken: Thomas Glover for the house of John Searle, at Wye, John Jarman for the house of Michael Hadlow at Wye, Thomas Jarman for the house of Thomas Heritage at Mersham, Daniel Kingsnoth for the house of Thomas Hills at Charing, Norton Munden for the house of George Wadlow at Wye: in Ashford, the houses of George Hadloe and Agnus Young. And a deed of that date is still in the church archives, their oldest document, showing that they used copyhold stables.

With 1689 liberty was secured, and the church opened a Register Booke. There were four Elders, John Searle senior, Thomas Jarman, George Eless, Henry Longley; two Deacons, Thomas Qusted and John Searle junior, with 26 men and 25 women. The list was kept up, and annotated, so that abundant information is available as to the members. It was soon agreed to supply at Stelling, and at Qusted's house—which may perhaps have been in the direction of Hythe.

Grave doctrinal trouble broke out among the General Baptists soon afterwards. In May, 1700, Longley with Sampson Pearce and Christopher Cooper went to the General Association at White's Alley in London to take a firm Trinitarian stand. They reported that Norton Jarman was unsound and had with-

drawn; and they were supported by the Association. But at that meeting they heard that Benjamin Bowyer had become Calvinist, and was preaching along these lines in the midlands; also that the same change was evident in Buckinghamshire, and at Covent Garden. They evidently took this very seriously, and examined the question, coming to the same conclusion.

In 1700, several churches in Kent divided, and Calvinistic churches were organized. George Ellis of Ashford and Thomas Petter of Sandhurst ordained Thomas Gilham at Smarden; and a Particular Baptist Association was formed, which soon embraced Ashford, Biddenden, Canterbury, Hawkhurst, Rolvenden (or Sandhurst) and Smarden. In May 1706 Ashford entertained the Association, and entered the minutes in the church book. Three troubles had arisen; they could not afford to pay Longley more, so agreed that he was free to go if he wished; the Norton Jarman difficulty was settled by all his friends joining that church at Canterbury which was under Searles Jarman and Samuel Ongley (the Blackfriars, which died as a Unitarian church); on the other hand, the doctrine that God caused men to sin was wrong, and members who on consideration held it, were to be expelled.

Ashford was manifestly the centre, and in 1699 Cooper had helped secure better premises; but monthly meetings were held also at Wye, Nackholt and Mersham, though Lydd was discontinued by 1709. Next year Thomas Franklin of Wye was baptised, who was the senior member when a new roll was opened in 1769. In 1715, Ellis and Longley were still joint pastors. A register of births was opened in 1729 and continued for fifty years. In 1731 Mary Taylor left her property, free and copyhold, to Henry Longley for the use of him and his successors; he enjoyed it till 1732/3, when he closed a fine long pastorate.

This precipitated various changes, Folkestone being involved. The old General Baptist church at Hythe-and-Folkestone had not changed in 1700, but twenty years later a group of Calvinists became uneasy, often travelling to Canterbury for worship. With 1728 they definitely left, and next year John Stace built them a Particular Baptist meeting, where John Howe from Portsmouth ministered. Another prominent member was George Green, and Ashford invited him. The Folkestone church reluctantly gave him leave to go if he wished, and on 2 April, 1735, he was ordained pastor at Ashford; the G.B. custom of joint-elders was not maintained. But as Howe had all Thanet to look after, Green helped at Folkestone.

His pastorate at Ashford saw the work stabilized and centralized by the erection of a new meeting-house, on copyhold land at 2/4 a year. It was opened 14 September, 1746, and was

promptly registered as having a yard and two stables. Next year, Gill of Southwark commended the case to his brethren, and the London benefactors aided in June 1748. When Green went to London to collect, he was evidently advised on some points of organization and management. For in 1753 there was a general overhaul; new trustees took possession by copy of the court roll, they found a debt of £60; the minutes were kept far more fully, and next year deacons were ordained.

Green died in 1761. The erection of a central meeting-house seems to have led, as usual, to the gradual abandonment of the outlying stations, and by further consequence, to the shrinkage and disappearance of local preachers, "ministers." Smarden P. B. helped in the vacancy, and after Rist had asked whether they would choose him as pastor, and had been told no, after Philip Hawkins had also been found wanting, appeal was made to London for advice. Now in March, 1760, the church at College Lane, Northampton, had "called to the ministry" Samuel Brooks, directly after it had called to the pastorate John Collett Ryland. He was invited, approved, received as member by the laying on of hands—a survival from the old G.B. days—and was ordained on 15 May, 1763 by Thomas Burch, who the year before had ordained Copping at Sandhurst.

Now College Lane was an open-membership church, and the advent of Brooks implied a sweetening of doctrine and practice. This was intensified the same year by his fellow member, Thomas Whitehead, coming to Folkestone. A new roll was begun in 1769; it showed not only Franklin of 1710, but John Longley senior, Stephen Austin, and Thomas Knott aged 70, destined to live another 26 years. As there was another Thomas Knott, son of John, born 1740, the old families were still well represented. Two years later, as Brooks had run into debt, the church disowned him. There was a strong leader in the person of Benjamin Harrison, and under his guidance the church chose James Brown as minister, with a view to the pastorate, but did not like the view. Daniel Gillibrand came in 1773, perhaps again on trial; he did sign that year the petition to Parliament for repeal of the persecuting laws, at Ashford. But in 1776 he went to Folkestone, which he served for seven years till he joined the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Giles supplied a short time; it is not clear whether this was the Giles of Lymington, whose son afterwards came to Kent.

In 1777 the church found rest by the coming from Gamlingay of the Rev. Benjamin Morgan with his wife Agnes. He at once drew up a statement of doctrine, adopted by the church. Two years later, the churches of Rotherfield, Rye, Sandhurst, Smarden, Tenterden, and Wivelsfield sent delegates to Ashford,

where Morgan drew up a Circular Letter to notify why the Particular Baptist Association, which had been formed in 1700, was now revised. A new church was soon founded at Battle, and in 1785 Folkestone joined. This is a sign of the new life, pulsing now throughout the country. The progress in Kent has already been sketched, in volume V. at page 327; we may confine ourselves to local events in Ashford.

Morgan seems to have been "of an uncomfortable disposition," as some one told Ivimey. This may be illustrated by the birth-register ending in 1779. Morgan closed his work by 1785, when he was followed by William Brown. He took advantage of a new law, and acquired a government licence to act as registrar for burials, marriages, births and christenings. Of the last he naturally took no cognizance, but he did look back, and record five births in 1757-1766, duly stamping his certificates. This was a new departure, for a Baptist minister to hold an official post. He was succeeded, as pastor and as registrar, by Thomas Cromwell in 1786. Progress was evinced by the house of James Miller at Charing being registered for worship five years later. Then Francis Read followed in 1794 as pastor and registrar; and new trustees were appointed for the premises in St. John's Lane; while the calling out of the militia into camp gave a great opportunity for open-air work, so that forty or fifty were converted. Then "an unpleasant affair" obliged the church to depose and expel him.

Unfortunately a split occurred. William Willey from Dartmouth and Tiverton was called to serve the First church, while Read and his followers formed a Second; this was apparently small, as he was able also to help at Folkestone. The Association met here in 1801, but in its published minutes printed nothing as to local affairs. Perhaps James White, who was then pastor here, continued till he settled at Ipswich in 1810. William Broady was here also in 1801, evidently as the successor of Read at the Second church; and apparently he healed the breach. In 1815 land was given, and a school was erected.

In 1825 James Jackson settled, but he emigrated within two years. James Payne from Ipswich came in 1827, and began to set things in order. In 1829 a Particular Baptist trust was enrolled, giving a remainder to the P.B. Fund in case the church died out. More land was acquired on Marsh Lane next year, and the London Building Fund soon granted £80, so evidently there was a new building.

Progress is shown in another way, for as the Association of 1779 was being troubled, an East Kent Association was formed in 1836, to which Ashford adhered. Then the Bridewell on Marsh Lane was bought and added to the trust. Men came

forward for the ministry, so that Thomas Davis was spared to Bromsgrove and later on W. Clark to Tasmania.

The chapters of the past may be said to close in 1858, when the old burial-ground was officially closed. Its records are preserved from 1844, though eight years earlier the older books were surrendered to the government.

W. T. WHITLEY.

ELIZABETH the daughter of Thomas Wood (an Anna-baptisticall and factious Separatist) and Eleanor his wife (the grave being ready made) was (by the companie that came with the childe) interred and layd into the ground before the minister came: and without praiers, or the righte of christian buriall according to the order of the Church of England on Satterday: 7 May 1642: Stock in Essex. Francis Colman dyed March 3d 1695/6 but was not buried in this pairesh, Thornton in Bucks, because he dyed excommunicate, and was fetch by some Anabapt. brethren to a Burying place of theirs at Stony Stratford. Mary the wife of William Lansbury the younger being dipd and dying a profess'd Anabaptist was interr'd without the office of the Burial Service a little before six o'clock in the evening: Dec 10, 1741: Spratton in Northants. John Lee the Anabaptist teacher was interr'd without the Burial Service: Feb. 10, 1741/2: Spratton in Northants.

JOHN READE (son of John Read an Anabaptist) born Dec. the 19th, 1698, was at his own request baptiz'd this 22d day of April: 1719: Bobbingworth in Essex. Jonathan Hill Physician and Chirurgeon aged 66 bapt Apr. 24th: 1757: Stokesley in Yorks.

J. C. COX, Parish Registers of England.