

Leeds Baptists of the Eighteenth Century.

SINCE the writing of the history of the early years of the Baptist Church in Leeds, new particulars have come to light which, if they provide no sensational discoveries, yet give us additional glimpses of our origins we are glad to have.¹

I. JOHN MOORE AND THE HARDCASTLES.

One question which has never been explained satisfactorily is whether the seed of John Moore's preaching at Great Woodhouse and other neighbouring parts of Leeds early in the eighteenth century fell on stony ground, as it appears. Two of the very lengthy discourses which make up his published work were in fact addresses delivered in 1703 and 1719² to audiences in the village mentioned, which was then, and long remained, in the ecclesiastical parish of Leeds. Dr. Whitley has already noted³ how surprising it really is that no permanent cause had been established in Leeds following the labours not of Moore only but of his master Mitchel as well. Between the date of Moore's preaching in these parts and the first baptisms in Leeds there stretches a gap of from thirty to forty years. Did his seed then really fall on stony ground? Or on the other hand, were those discussions which resulted in the first Leeds baptisms of 1760 the spontaneous results of an individual reading of the New Testament, or were they the very late harvest of his sowing? Or is the revival due, after all, as seems most likely, to the influence of Methodism, especially to the preaching of Whitefield? Perhaps we shall never know for certain. But it is well to remember one Baptist name which bridges the gap: that is, Thomas Hardcastle the second, who lived at Woodhouse⁴ in the 'twenties (was that why Moore went there?) and who was still there in the 'forties, when he resigned his Eldership at Rawdon because of the unmanageable distance. Indeed, it was

¹ Notes supplementary to articles in the *Baptist Quarterly*, N.S., VI. and IX.

² See my notes on John Moore and Alice Rawson, *ibid.*, April, 1939, N.S., IX., 377.

³ *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, IV., 45.

⁴ *Baptist Quarterly*, N.S., VI., 73. Booth, *op. cit.*, 78.

there also that he, presumably, died in June, 1767.⁵ The identification of the various Baptist Hardcastles, all named Thomas, presents a pretty puzzle to the historian; an attempt to unravel the tangled skein of their relationships was made by Philip Booth in his *History of Gildersome and the Booth Family*,⁶ where four generations are enumerated in addition to the famous ejected minister (died 1678) who is reckoned first of the line. However it may be, the important fact for the present purpose is that there certainly was one Baptist Thomas Hardcastle or another in Woodhouse, Leeds, from 1726 at the latest until the end of the century. Their importance for Rawdon and Gildersome is well known; is it so very unlikely that laymen of such eminence should count for something in the place of their home and business?

II. THE FIRST BAPTISMS, 1760.

In an article⁷ describing the acquisition by the Unitarian College of a series of forty-one manuscript diaries kept by Joseph Ryder (1695-1768) of Leeds, Dr. McLachlan quotes the valuable testimony of an eye-witness of the first baptisms in Leeds. Ryder was principally a worshipper with the Unitarians at Mill Hill, and maintained a great interest in sermons, theological controversy and funerals: he had something to say about the decay of the old dissent in Leeds in the middle of the century, especially at Call Lane Chapel, and he distrusted the Methodists no less than the Baptists. Under the date of April 23rd, 1760, he wrote:—

“This day four or five persons were baptised in the river Aire by Mr. Crabtree, a Baptist minister of Bradford, which drew great multitudes of spectators, it being a transaction unknown at Leeds to the greatest part of the inhabitants if not to all. And in the evening he preached

⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, no. 726, June 16th, 1767. Thoresby Society, vol. XXXIII. (Miscellanea), p. 198. “On Thursday last died Mr. Thomas Hardcastle, drysalter, at Woodhouse near this town.” It was not everyone who got his name into the infrequent and expensive provincial newspapers. That this was Thomas the second is not, of course, positive: it may well be Thomas the third, such is the Hardcastle family jig-saw.

⁶ Privately printed, 1920, p. 83. Also, at pp. 78-9, e.g., are notes of deeds of 1726 and 1784, signed by “Thomas Hardcastle” among others.

⁷ *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.*, IV. (1927-30), pp. 248-67. The existence of the diaries had long been known: J. Horsfall Turner mentioned them fifty years ago in one of his numerous publications. In 1925 they were presented to the Unitarian College by Mr. Edgar Lupton, of Leeds.

in a chamber taken for the purpose at or near the bottom of Marsh Lane. Sects and parties we have now in great numbers, and every one perhaps think themselves to be right. What may be the issue of all is known only to God."

It seems hardly possible that this date can be incorrect, and if correct, then the account of the same ceremony in a Baptist source needs a slight emendation. In his Memoirs⁸ of William Crabtree, Isaac Mann gave that very date of April 23rd 1760 as the day when a group of enquirers at Leeds addressed a letter to Crabtree asking for his guidance; and then, "soon after," continues the account, four or five persons were baptised and "received into full communion with the church at Bradford; these were followed by six more . . ." That a scholar of Mann's reputation should make such a mistake is not easily understandable, unless "soon after" is intended to refer not to days or weeks, but to hours. To add to the confusion, in Fawcett's diary,⁹ under May 25th of that year, there is the entry: "This day six persons were added to our number, five of whom came from Leeds"; presumably this is a reference to the second batch.

The bottom of Marsh Lane referred to lies under the shadow of the Parish Church of St. Peter, just beyond one of the four ancient "bars" of the old town. The scene of the baptisms of the earliest Leeds Calvinistic Baptists near by has always been associated with Nether Mills, and from his dye-yard on the bank of the river Aire at Crown Point, Mr. Herbert Waddington (holder of a name honoured now for a century in the annals of the Leeds church) is proud to point out the supposed actual spot where those hardy disciples were found to proclaim their witness unafraid.

Now under the same date of 1760, another item of great interest can be recorded as showing the ferment of opinion which had been reached in Leeds by that date. In the year 1760 Joshua Wood¹⁰ was ordained Baptist pastor at Halifax. He had been born at Leeds in 1734, of a father who by trade was a corn merchant in the town and who by religion was a Presbyterian. On leaving school at the age of fourteen, Joshua (who had proved himself a boy of talent) was taken into the business. About three years later, influenced no doubt by his mother, he joined the Methodists at Leeds, but it was not long before he left that

⁸ Printed at Bradford in 1815, p. 36.

⁹ In *An Account . . .* (&c.), 1818, p. 57.

¹⁰ Particulars from the obituary notice by his personal friend Fawcett, in Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register* for 1794-7, p. 223 (obituary for 1794). Reprinted in full in Percy Stock's (anonymous) *Foundations*, chapter 20.

society, having come under the influence of Whitefield's Calvinistic teachings. He was encouraged to preach, and the pulpit being more to his taste than the counting house, he left the family business and moved for a year to Bradford. On his return to Leeds he was admitted a member and a preacher of the Independent Church, then under the care of Edwards; he remained "in that capacity and relationship" until 1760, and also kept a school here. The chronology of this vital period is tantalisingly obscure. He had moved to Wakefield before this date, and it was while there that he became convinced of the necessity of believers' baptism by immersion. He applied to Hartley of Haworth and Crabtree of Bradford; all three met at Fawcett's house, and Wood's "apologia" to them culminated in his baptism the same day. "He had an honourable dismissal from the church at Leeds signed by Mr. Edwards and others."

Now according to Mann,¹¹ it was out of Edwards' church that there came the first Leeds Baptists, who approached Crabtree in 1760. May we see in Wood a "lost leader"? In 1760 he went to Halifax and remained there ten years, and after further calls finally settled in Yorkshire once again at Salendine Nook, where he died in September, 1794. It is as a forgotten pioneer in Leeds that we now salute him.

III. REV. THOMAS LANGDON.

In the 'nineties a young man of no very great distinction at the time visited Langdon at Leeds; he had, however, a future of some renown before him, and his name was John Foster. In his *Life and Correspondence*¹² may be found one or two letters of his written in most friendly and jocular tone to Langdon.

Although they refer to a period just beyond the limits set by the title of this article, two items which concern Langdon and his Church are worthy of a brief note. The first is the great interest which was taken by men of all classes and creeds in the town in the Serampore missionaries and their work; much may be read about the activities in Leeds on behalf of these far-away Baptist missionaries in the *Life*¹³ of William Hey, a surgeon whose eminence in his profession was equalled by his zeal for all good works. The second is the fact that early in the new century, Dr. J. D. Heaton,¹⁴ to whom as pioneer the University of Leeds

¹¹ *loc. cit.*

¹² Edited by John Ryland. 2nd ed., 2 vols., 1848.

¹³ By J. Pearson. 1822, Part II., pp. 180, 194, etc. 2nd ed., 1823, 2 vols. in 1, has different pagination.

¹⁴ (1817-1880). *Memoir* by (Sir) T. Wemyss Reid. 1883, pp. 52-3, 57.

owes an incalculable debt, went as a very small boy to the school kept by Langdon. At the age of five he was sent, together with his sister, to this school "kept in the house in which Mr. Langdon at that time lived, a commodious brick building now (1883) used as the Cloth Hall Tavern, and situated in Infirmary Street, just opposite the Coloured Cloth Hall Yard. This district of Leeds was then regarded as a fashionable suburb; King Street, which almost adjoins Infirmary Street, being looked upon as the furthest limit of the town. Gardens and detached villa residences then occupied nearly the whole of the space westward of Park Square, and the district beyond, which is now crowded with dwelling-houses and manufactories, was then the open country. Twice a day the two children walked to Mr. Langdon's school from their father's house in Briggate, their route being through the narrow and tortuous thoroughfare of Boar Lane. . . ." When about nine he was transferred to the school kept by Langdon's son, his sister going elsewhere; "Dr. Heaton himself admitted in after years that his progress in learning was not very rapid, and he bitterly deplored the fact that his father would not allow him to learn French." Presumably he stayed here until his admission at the Leeds Grammar School in 1830,¹⁵ brutality displacing civility. His father was no fool, and it is a great tribute to the Langdons that he considered their schooling good enough for his son; Heaton's bookshop in Briggate has been styled "a real intellectual centre for the city" and "probably the nearest approximation in Leeds at that time to a University."¹⁶

IV. EBENEZER.

The records of the second Leeds Baptist Church, i.e. Ebenezer, are, as has already been pointed out, curiously sparse.¹⁷ However, it was a pleasure as well as a surprise to come upon a pen-and-ink sketch of the building in what, on second thoughts, should have been an obvious source to consult in view of Ebenezer's historical importance to Methodism; that is, *A New History of Methodism* (1909).¹⁸ The chapel must have been a

¹⁵ Leeds Grammar School admission books, from 1820 to 1900. Edited and annotated by Edmund Wilson. 1906 [actually 1908], p. 35. Another issue in the publications of the Thoresby Society, vol. XIV.

¹⁶ By Professor A. J. Grant on "The development of thought in Leeds," in the *General Handbook*, prepared for the Leeds Meeting of the British Association, 1929, p. 144.

¹⁷ *Baptist Quarterly*, N.S., IX., 125-7.

¹⁸ Edited by W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, and G. Eayrs. Vol. I., p. 506, plate 29.

typical meeting-house of square, slightly oblong shape, a little more pretentious in appearance, perhaps, than the unimposing Stone Chapel which served Langdon's congregation for forty-five years, yet plain and no doubt neat at first. It had an upper and a lower series of tall window-frames, three at the front and three at the sides, and a substantial enclosing wall with corner gate completes the simple picture of a structure which presents a study in straight lines.

Out of Ebenezer, as will be seen later, there came the man who ministered at Bramley Zion late in 1798, but whether this was Rigby or Furley is not certain. A clue to the date of the erection of the building (which is not known) may possibly be found in the date (1785) of the commencement of the registers of births and burials which are now deposited at Somerset House; here at any rate is a *terminus ad quem*.

V. GREATER LEEDS.

It should also be noted that the term Leeds has not remained constant down the years; in common with all large cities, Leeds has put forth its tentacles upon small neighbouring townships and drawn them in, especially in very recent times. Following the Leeds Corporation Act of 1924, the ancient township of Bramley, for example, became part of Leeds, although, on the other hand, it was in 1863 that its very ancient chapelry had become an independent parish separated from Leeds. This brief explanation is the more necessary in that Bramley, which is now within the boundaries of the city of Leeds, possesses a Baptist church with a longer corporate history in fact than the "first Leeds Baptist church" whose story has already been given in full.¹⁹ If, therefore, merely the present boundaries of Leeds are taken into account, the title of "first Leeds Baptist church" given to South Parade is a misnomer, for Bramley Zion dates from 1777 and South Parade from 1779, but a proper historical or evolutionary perspective must be preserved, for it is clear that at the time of its foundation South Parade had no rival in Leeds. Again, if the process of expansion goes on, it may be that Gildersome or Rawdon itself will find themselves one day in Leeds (*pace* Bradford) and then the *reductio ad absurdum* of the claim will have been reached.

The Baptist church at Bramley is said to have been formed in 1766,²⁰ but this can hardly be more than a rough guide to the date of its ultimate origin. The cause owes its foundation to

¹⁹ *Baptist Quarterly*, N.S., VI., 72ff., 116ff., 166ff.

²⁰ *Baptist Magazine*, XIX., 139.

one Joseph Askwith,²¹ a striking character and a product of his age. After twenty years' service in the army he returned to his "native" Bramley, we are told, and being there brought to a knowledge of the Christian gospel he lost no time in preaching wherever he could—for nine years, it is said, in a barn—until about 1775 some evidence of the success of his efforts is found in the fact that an interested patron having erected a room in the village, a lease of it was granted to Askwith and his friends for fifty years. But about this time also, Askwith became convinced of the validity of believers' baptism by immersion, and so, as the Gildersome church book records, he submitted himself to baptism on January 2nd, 1777 and was received into full communion there on the fifth of the same month. From two further entries it becomes clear when the Bramley church was in fact established. First, the record of his baptism continues: "He preaches to a congregation which he has gathered at Bramley, but intends remaining with us till they settle in a church state." Then, on April 22nd, 1777, "we resigned him to the church at Bramley, and he is become a member in full with them." In the meantime Askwith has himself made two baptisms on January 27th and March 24th. From that time until his death, on March 16th, 1795, he continued pastor of the little flock, a selfless and devoted friend to them, seeking no reward except to serve his Master always.

He was followed by a Mr. Rigby who stayed "about three years." After him, "for two years," came Thomas Furney; it is to him presumably that Thomas Stutterd, of Salendine Nook, referred when he said of Bramley, in his survey of the Yorkshire Baptist churches, that it was "supplied by a young man from Leeds. He was raised from Ebenezer chapel."²² This was at the end of November, 1798. But the period had become by now one of depression; it was not until the arrival of Joseph Trickett that an era of prosperity began.

²¹ *Memorials of the Baptist Church at Bramley* [By Abraham Ashworth], 1864. Various Asquiths or Askwiths are recorded in the Bramley registers (published by the Thoresby Society) but no Joseph whose dates are suitable. There was a Joshua, son of Joseph Asquith, born January 7th, 1733, at Bramley (Thoresby Soc., XXIII. (1916), p. 80). At Hunslet, on the other side of the river Aire, was born (or baptised, the entries are not clear) on October 13th, 1717, a Joseph, son of John Asquith (Thoresby Soc., XIII., p. 252 (Leeds parish church); 391 (Hunslet chapelry); duplicate entries.) This latter date suits admirably, but Hunslet is not Bramley, Askwith's "native" village, if Ashworth (*op. cit.*) is correct. Askwith's death is recorded in the *Leeds Mercury* of Saturday, April 4th, 1795; it is there asserted that he was "Baptist minister of that place upwards of twenty years. His remains were interred in his own Chapel at Bramley."

²² Stock, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

VI. APPENDIX.

The registers of these old Baptist churches are now preserved in Somerset House; as given by J. H. Turner's *Yorkshire County Magazine*,²³ the catalogue reads:—

Bramley, the Lane Chapel, 1779, Minister, William Colcroft. Births, 1783-1803; 1803-1818; Births "and namings," 1818-24; Births, 1825-1837. Deaths, 1823-37.

Leeds, South Parade, 1779, Minister, Eustace Giles. Births, 1785-1837.

Leeds, Ebenezer Chapel (Baptist, sold in May, 1797), Ministers, William Price and H. H. Williams. Births, 1785-1797. Burials, 1786-1794.

FRANK BECKWITH.

²³ II. (1892), pp. 12, 83-4. Lists supplied by a Daniel Hipwell, of London: taken, no doubt (by inference from the names of the ministers given) from the Blue Book of 1841, giving county lists of non-parochial registers.

ST. MARY'S, NORWICH. We sympathise deeply with Dr. Gilbert Laws and his church in the destruction of their beautiful sanctuary. Fire broke out on Sunday, 10th September, some time after morning service, and, as was the case with the Metropolitan Tabernacle forty-one years ago, the walls alone were left standing. St. Mary's is one of our most historic churches, dating back 270 years to the heroic days of persecution. Ministers whose names are outstanding in Baptist history have filled its pulpit—Joseph Kinghorn, William Brock, George Gould, John Howard Shakespeare, Thomas Phillips—while laymen, equally distinguished in their several walks, have served on its diaconate—George White, Harry Pearce Gould, and others, call up affectionate remembrance.

We rejoice to know from our member, Mr. C. B. Jewson, whose historical researches have so enriched our pages, that it has been "unanimously decided to rebuild as near as may be possible to the building that has been destroyed." *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.* (Haggai ii. 9.)