

# St. Mary's, Norwich.

(Continued from page 236.)

## IV.

### THE CHURCH TAKES ROOT, 1743-1788.

THE year 1743 saw the beginning of the ministry of the Rev. John Stearne, one of the key ministries of the Church. From its foundation, the fellowship had been dependent on the hospitality of well-to-do members or the insecure tenure of hired premises for its meetings, wandering from Bradford's house to Tuke's house, from the Granary to the rooms in St. Michael's. Now it was to take root in its own soil.

Deacon Watts and one of his fellow members set out

“as messengers to the Church at Soham in Cambridgeshire to treat with the Brithern about Mr. Stern's coming to us.”

Their negotiations were successful. On their return, the Church laid out £1 “for fitting up a study for Mr. Stearne to log his books.” Under this new leadership, an old brick and flint house opposite the venerable parish church of St. Mary Coslany was purchased and converted into a Meeting House. Seven trustees were appointed in 1744, and in the following year the Meeting House was opened by Mr. Dunkhorn, pastor of Great Ellingham, whose expenses—2/-, “for his horse's journey”—were defrayed by the Church. This acquisition of property was a bold step for a handful of obscure people who could only afford to pay their minister £30 per annum. To meet the expense they had to use Jane Williams' legacy of £50 arranging an annual gathering to meet the interest due from the Church to the poor. Although John Stearne was minister of the Church and one of the original trustees of its property, his membership was not transferred from Soham until 1746, and he was not ordained pastor until September of that year. St. Mary's has been notable for the many laymen who have identified themselves with the life of the Church and found the chief expression of their personality in her service. One such was William Lindoe, who was the first to be baptized in the new Meeting House and later became a Deacon of the Church. His notebook remains among the Church's papers and shows his admiration for old Deacon Watts and John Stearne. From his record we learn that three ministers assisted at this ordination—the Rev. George Simson of Cambridge, who preached to the congregation, the Rev. Mr. Simmons of Beccles, who

preached to Mr. Stearne, and the Rev. Mr. Dunkhorn of Great Ellingham.

Deacon William Watts died in 1748, after faithfully serving the Church for more than twenty years in this office. William Lindoe recorded a resolution of W. Watts found among his writings :

“ We should not omit the lest duty or comit the lest sin to gain the greatest good and I due purpose in the strength of God to follow this rule unto my life's end.”

His colleague James Fuller took over the Church accounts and was also appointed to read the Psalm at services.

The vitality of the Church was increasing. Besides their new Meeting House they were using the house of Deacon Fuller in the adjoining parish of St. Michael's for meetings. Nevertheless, their thoughts still turned inwards to the preservation of the purity of their fellowship rather than outwards to the needs of the world, and there was no intercourse with other denominations. The current attitude is illustrated by a minute of 1754,

- “ 1. That the members ought at particular times at Church meetings to be examined about their frames and manner of living, whether they walk comfortably or not and whether they don't allow themselves in known evils or in the omission of known duties.
2. That it is an evil in any to absent themselves from public worship on the forenoons of Lord's days, or from Lectures, or Church-meetings without some lawful impediment.
3. That it is unlawful for any so to attend upon the meetings of the Methodists, or to join in any worship which is contrary to the doctrines and ordinances of our Lord Jesus, as that without partiality it may be construed to be giving countenance to them.
4. That it is an evil in any to go Tap houses unless they have a lawful call.”

John Stearne passed away in 1755. William Lindoe wrote this tribute to his memory.

“ As a minister he was well quald. by the Holy Gost for that important service, a workman that needd not to be ashamed, rightly deviding the word of truth, and haveing the glory of God and good of souls much at heart, in the affairs of life he was remarkably prudent allwais ready to communicate to any that applyd for advice in matters spirituall or temporal, being well qualified to give advice in either respects. He was a harty friend, a courteous neighbour, an indulgent husband, a tender father, lived exemplarily and dyed comfortably.”

The carved stone tablets commemorating John Stearne and his wife Susannah are the oldest on the walls of St. Mary's.

No adequate means had yet been found to recruit and train a ministry for the denomination, and the difficulties of travel made it hard for a Church to obtain a suitable pastoral settlement or even satisfactory pulpit supplies. St. Mary's looked for talent among her own members and appointed Benjamin Hunt

"To Exercise his Gifte at ye Table on those Lord's days when we had no Minister."

The pulpit was apparently reserved for ministerial use. This arrangement lasted a year, when it was decided that Brother Hunt's gift did not tend to the edifying of the body.

Negotiations were now started with the Church at Cambridge for the transference of their minister, the Rev. George Simson, A.M., who came to Norwich in 1758. Benjamin Hunt and his friends disapproved of the call. Eleven of them withdrew from the Church as a result. Simson was a graduate of Aberdeen. He has been described as a complete scholar and a good preacher, a thorough protestant dissenter, a rigid baptist, of a violent temper, a lord in his church, a tyrant in his family and a libertine in his life. The Church at Cambridge had declined almost to nothing under his ministry. His three years in Norwich had a similar effect and ended by him telling the Church,

"in a very calm sperit that he pirsevd<sup>d</sup> his Ministry had not bin Bless<sup>d</sup> of late, and that the Church had for some time bin in a poor dwindling way: and that he wase ready to think some other pirson might be of Grater use to the Church and he therefore gave us warning that he purposed to Lave us at Ladyday next."

In 1762 Samuel Fisher was invited from Nottingham

"to Prach amongst us in a Constant way for one year and proposed to raise him Forty pound for the year to render his life as comfortabil as they could."

Samuel Fisher's ministry approved itself to the Church and after due consideration, prayer and fasting, he was ordained pastor, the Church engaging to pray constantly for the success of his labours. For ten years and more this ministry seems to have been an unqualified success. The Church increased in numbers and among those baptized by Mr. Fisher were Joseph Wilkin, a wealthy farmer of Bowthorpe, William Newson, John Meadows Wood and Joseph H. Dowsing, all substantial tradesmen of Norwich, all of whom later served on the diaconate. Church activities increased and candles had to be purchased for

evening lectures. In 1773 regular monthly Church meetings were instituted and a Poor Fund inaugurated. All seemed to be going well when the Church was humiliated by the rumour of a gross moral lapse on the part of her pastor. The brethren investigated the matter and found Fisher guilty. The Church book records

“The method proposed by the Church on this awful occasion of separating their Pastor &c. was as follows:—

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Prayer              | 2. Chapter read 1. Cor. 5th.                              |
| 3. Open the business   | 4. Read Mr. Fisher's letter to ye Church.                 |
| 5. Prayer              | 6. Read the 101 Psalm and 2nd and 3rd Ch. of Revelations. |
| 7. Concluded in prayer |   |

Once more began the painful process of seeking a pastor. The Rev. John Lloyd came from Leiston for a short time, but his ministry was not approved. On leaving St. Mary's he raised a new Church in Norwich and drew some of the members away with him. After this, public worship was carried on by

“reading the Old and New Testament, singing, Prayer &c.”

Later some members of the Church were permitted to “exercise their abilities in public” but the results were unfortunate—“We at last found by experience the more Speakers the more Evils.”

Having now been more than three years without a pastor, the Church sought the advice of neighbouring ministers. The Rev. William Richards, of Lynn, suggested that they should apply to the Rev. Caleb Evans, tutor of the Academy at Bristol to know if he could recommend a minister. “By a Great Majority”, it was decided to follow this advice. The application was met by a kind and affectionate answer and as a result, Mr. Rees David came to Norwich in October, 1777. The new ministry was enthusiastically accepted by the majority of the Church, but a few, prejudiced from the first against the innovation of securing a minister from an Academy, withdrew from the fellowship. A more liberal spirit was abroad, and the Church actually granted an open transfer to one of their number who declared that while there was no people he wished to be connected with in preference to them, he regarded the things advanced in public by their minister as inconsistent with Truth.

Rees David was formally ordained in May, 1779 in the presence of a crowded audience. Several ministers of different denominations attended. The charge was given by the Rev. Robert Robinson of Cambridge and the Rev. Edward Trivett of Worstead preached to the people. There were now only 31

members as against 59 in the brightest days of Samuel Fisher's ministry, but the quality of the leadership had improved and its outlook broadened. Despite dark clouds on the political horizon, the Church looked forward with hope. The year 1779 saw eleven baptisms besides additions by transfer. The Nonconformist conscience was awaking to public affairs. Rees David had the temerity to preach political sermons and to champion the cause of liberty.

In February, 1781, the government proclaimed a Fast Day on account of the War in America. On the preceding Sabbath, Rees David announced that he would preach on the evening appointed on "The Hypocritical Fast with its design and consequences." His sermon caused a great stir in the city and he was induced to publish it. Taking for his text "Proclaim a Fast and set Naboth on high . . . then carry him out and stone him", he likens the colonists to Naboth and Lord North and his lieutenants to his false accusers, while carefully excluding any member of the Royal House from the part of Jezebel. The war, he says, is contrary to justice and sound policy. We have put the Americans to the necessity of manufacturing for themselves and so lost the advantage of their trade. This city was once very respectable. Before the war, its poor lived better than many freeholders do. Their children could often find themselves from seven years of age. Now trade is so dwindled that men of probity and once of great property find it hard to live. The poor suffer exceedingly. Thousands are out of employ. *They are obliged to fast* several times a week for want of food and to walk about like idle persons. No tongue can describe their wretched situation. God is just and if we are wrong, will make us smart for every drop of innocent blood shed.

He again preached and published on the Fast Day of 1782, "The Fear of God the only Preservative from Temporal and Eternal Ruin." We are evidently doing wickedly, he says. We neglect the worship of God, break the Sabbath and take His name in vain. Drunkenness and falsehood, debauchery and excess, oppression and theft and every species of murder prevail. What can discover our cruelty and impiety more than converting places of worship into playhouses, burning libraries and whole towns with many of their inhabitants? Is it possible to act more barbarously than by engaging Indian savages to scalp and destroy the most inoffensive part of the people? Corruption so prevails among us that freedom of election is almost destroyed. Brave men determined to oppose ministerial influence are disturbed and insulted in their peaceable habitations and injured in their trade. We provoke God by "fasting" without cutting off our sins. The National Debt is more than 200 millions, taxes increase

continually, trade is almost ruined. Once we were the terror, now we are the contempt of Europe.

The opinions of David and his friends prevailed, and the war ended in the following year.

David's salary, which was £50/8/- in 1778, was increased to £100 by 1783—an increase which doubtless reflects a reduction in the value of money as well as the esteem in which he was held by his congregation.

In 1782, three new deacons were elected and ordained by prayer and laying on of hands of the pastor and existing diaconate. One was Thomas Hawkins whom David had baptized only three years before. He was outstanding in his faithfulness to the Church, serving for many years as Treasurer and what would now be called Church Secretary, and continuing in the diaconate till his death, fifty-nine years later.

The congregations were growing, and in 1783 it was found necessary to build on to the Meeting House. The result of this addition was a disproportionately wide rectangle. A large, carved oak pulpit stood in the centre of one of the long sides, before it the Table pew with the baptistry beneath. The galleries extended to within twelve to fifteen feet of the pulpit, terminating on either side with a huge pew capable of holding a score of people.

Repressive legislation against Nonconformists still remained in force. The Test Act compelled Communion in the Church of England as a qualification for offices under the Crown. In 1786, a member of the Church, Jonathon Turner, who had resigned from the diaconate some years earlier after failure in business, was excluded from the Church for

“submitting to the Test Act by receiving the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England in order to qualify himself for a place under his Majesty.”

The Church expressed its disapprobation of this practice on the grounds that it was inconsistent with dissenting principles, giving people an unfavourable idea of dissenters; because to take the Lord's Supper in any (even a Baptist) church for such a purpose, is to pervert the express design of the ordinance, and is therefore an infringement of the authority of the King of Saints; and because trifling with sacred things is a sure way to hardening the heart, often leading to temporal and eternal ruin.

During David's pastorate we first hear of a Church Choir, when the Church began to receive interest on the legacy of William Chamberlayne, who left to the fellowship £1,600 in 3% Consols. One third of the income was to be applied to the support of the minister, half to be distributed to the poor of the

congregation on the anniversary of the benefactor's death, and the remainder

"to be applied by the deacons in instructing the youths of the congregation in sacred music and in buying them music and psalm or hymn books."

A singing master's salary was paid thereafter.

Rees David died in 1788, lamented by all his people. He is commemorated at St. Mary's by a handsome marble tablet bearing the inscription,

"He was a faithful and laborious minister of the gospel, a firm and upright man, a true and constant friend."

He had raised the Church to a position of influence in Norwich and laid the foundations on which his successor was to raise it to a position of influence in the denomination.

CHARLES B. JEWSON.

*(To be continued.)*

## Some Norwich Notes.

[Dr. W. T. Whitley has supplied the following notes arising out of Mr. Jewson's careful and painstaking research.]

### I.

THE Mumford family was not only Baptist, but leaned to the observance of the Seventh-day. Stephen left Tewkesbury in the reign of Charles II, and from Rhode Island corresponded with members in England. In 1708, a Mumford whose Christian name is not known, a member of the new church at Colchester, desired to be one of its "ministers" or lay preachers. On September 2nd it declined to authorize him, so next February he was dismissed, apparently to the Seventh-day church founded there before 1660 by Thomas Tillam.

Edward Mumford was a member of Horsley Down, where Keach had needed to combat the principle of observing the

seventh day. On July 29th, 1714, he became pastor at Whitchurch in Hants., where he was succeeded seven years later by John Grant from Broughton. From 1723 to 1727 the church at Warwick had a Mumford as pastor. Now Mr. Jewson shows that Edward Mumford supplied at Norwich, was ordained two years later, and died in 1737. It is worth noting that within four years that church was helped by Benjamin Stennett, of Ingham, which church had always been flavoured with Seventh-day principles. Since the Pulham church also was aware of them, there is room to investigate any connection with Woodbridge, in Suffolk, rather a stronghold. Also to see whether Norwich had any trouble of that kind.

## II.

Nathanael Wyles from Norwich had a good record as pastor. Keach founded many churches, including one which met in Shakespeare's Walk, Shadwell, where he and his son lived. Wyles took charge of it, was one who took the Association Oath to support William on the death of Mary, and in 1698 published some sermons as *Comfort for Believers*. While in 1709 Benjamin Gandar was preaching here, it is possible that Wyles continued until the premises were converted into the Dissenters' Charity School, 1713, after which their use on Sunday was secondary. Meanwhile, the village of Terling, in Essex, had had a Baptist church ever since the days of Samuel Oates and the trial for murder because a woman died a month after her baptism, and John Ward had two hundred hearers in 1715. On his death that year, Wyles followed. He did not sever ties with London, for five years later he preached the funeral sermon for J. Jeffreys; and even in 1736 he was present at the new Fraternal, now known as the Baptist Board. In 1740 he published at Colchester *The Faith of the Weakest Believer*, and next year, *The Leper's Faith*; in 1742, *Eighteen Hymns*. Six years later, again at Colchester, *Hints by a Dying Pastor to his People*.

## III.

John Miller, in 1718, published at Norwich *A short dialogue between a Baptist and a Quaker*, which filled thirty-six pages; a copy is in the Friends' Library at Endsleigh Gardens. It called forth replies by Barret and by Samuel Willett, who mentions also at Pulham the Seventh-day Baptist Rutland. Miller was pastor at Great Ellingham, 1722-1733, May 31st. Harmer says he was living at Pulham about 1730. A church at Bildeston and Battsford had combined Independents and Baptists from perhaps 1713, as Mr. Klaiber has shown. Miller transformed

it into a Particular Baptist church on July 1st, 1737, when sixteen men and thirteen women covenanted together. Next year he was ordained its pastor by four Independent ministers; the Baptist church at Colchester had no pastor then, nor had the church at Norwich. Indeed, Miller was called thither in 1738, and Mr. Jewson now tells that he died next year. The church at Bildeston, however, took no notice of this till, in 1745, it recorded that "by the Sovereign providence of God, they had been in time past deprived by death of their late pastor, Mr. John Miller".

## Reviews.

*The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions.* Edited by H. Wheeler Robinson, M.A., D.D. (Oxford University Press, 12s. 6d. net.)

There has been brought together here in handy and attractive form, much valuable and interesting information about the history of the Bible, and in particular, about the ancestry of our English versions. The nine chapters are by scholars of the front rank, and they write for the reader of general education as well as for the student. The result is a volume which should give wide satisfaction, and should find a place all its own among the many books about the Bible. The claims of the brief introduction rightly err on the side of modesty; these pages make at many points fresh contribution of their own to the study of the subject.

Dr. Wheeler Robinson, the Editor, contributes the chapter on the Hebrew Bible, and the important closing essay on the Bible as the Word of God. Dr. W. F. Howard writes on the Greek Bible, that is, the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament. The Syriac Bible, parts of which are of considerable importance for the determination of the original text of Scripture, is dealt with by Dr. Theodore H. Robinson. The Rev. H. F. D. Sparks tells the story of the widely used and influential Latin Bible, and Sir William Craigie writes on the Anglo-Saxon, Middle English and Wyclifite versions. There follow two lengthy and informative chapters by Mr. J. Isaacs, the one on