

Early Days at Worstead.

JAMES PUNTIS, in his *Brief Memoirs of John Rix Blakely*, gives the following account of the origin of the Worstead Church. "It originated in the secession of some of the members of the General Baptist Church then existing at Smallburgh, a village four miles from Worstead. . . . It is evident that the separation took place in a most amicable manner from the occasional notices which occur in the Church Book . . . of a friendly connection with the parent church. . . . There is reason to believe that the persons who seceded were a considerable majority of the Church at Smallburgh, as the number . . . appears to have been about one hundred and twenty."

The original Worstead Church Book, commenced in 1717, was later copied by J. R. Blakely. This second book has entries in it made by James Puntis, so that evidently his information was derived in part from that copy which proved misleading.

There is no known confirmation of the statement concerning the secession from Smallburgh, though it is possibly correct, but the original Church Book shows that the list of 120 names to which James Puntis refers contains those of members received as late as 1740, and the actual number of original members cannot be ascertained, and may possibly have been no more than thirty. Nor is it possible from the Church Book to draw any conclusion as to whether the presumed separation in 1717 was made in a friendly manner or not, as the only point of contact recorded shows that a Worstead Church Meeting was held at Smallburgh nearly sixteen years later.

The first Church Book begins with a statement of Faith, and an account of a Church Meeting on December 4th, 1717. The statement is interesting, and may show some connection with the Smallburgh Church. Three points are enumerated: (1) Personal Election; (2) Final Perseverance of the Saints; and (3) the doctrine of Christ as set forth in Hebrews chapter vi. verses 1 and 2, that is, repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. Thomas Grantham, who founded the General Baptist Churches at Norwich, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, and Smallburgh, laid great stress on the six points of doctrine enumerated in these verses, and probably his influence is indirectly represented in the Worstead statement. It is thought, however, that the Worstead

Church was from the start a Particular Baptist Church, accepting Calvinistic teaching as the General Baptists accepted Arminian teaching, and that the separation from the Smallburgh Church was on account of this doctrinal difference.

Richard Culley's name heads the list of members who subscribed to the articles of faith. On the same day (December 4th, 1717) the book records that "Brother Richard Culley was chosen as Elder over the Church meeting in Worstead by general consent of the whole Church, resolving through grace to serve them in the office of an elder, even till death." Five deacons were appointed, and they, with Richard Culley, were ordained by the laying on of hands. Four other members were chosen deacons "on probation."

Little is known of Richard Culley's ministry. A late entry in the Church Book records the baptism of Isaac Temple in 1830, and this is followed by an account of the baptism of his grandmother in 1727. It states that Mrs. Temple was so ill with a cancer in her breast that the surgeon, Mr. Faircloth of North Walsham, despaired of her recovery. Mr. Culley, seeing her situation, hesitated to baptise her, fearing it might be reported he was the occasion of her death. The surgeon said that there was no hope of her recovery, and told Mr. Culley he would take the responsibility of the action upon himself. Mrs. Temple persisted in her resolution to be baptised, and the ice had to be broken for her. To the great surprise of herself and her friends she recovered of her disorder, and lived three years after she was baptised, and then died of the smallpox.

The first Meeting House was built by Richard Culley, and originally may have been a barn. There exists a copy of an undated "agreement amongst the Brethren at Worstead . . . over which our beloved brother, Richard Culley, is Pastor, concerning building a convenient Meeting House." £45 11s. was promised, including £5 from Richard Culley, and 5s. from his son, John. It is believed that the Meeting House was re-built in 1730, and that this agreement was made just prior to that date; but, if so, Richard Culley did not see its completion, as he died in 1729. The new Meeting House, like its predecessor, was a small, thatched building.

A tombstone in the old burial ground has this inscription: "Here lieth the remains of Sarah, the widow of Samuel Chapman, who departed this life on March 7th, 1760. Aged 45. She was the only daughter of Mr. Richard Culley, who purchased this burying ground and erected the Meeting House, and faithfully preached the gospel therein as long as he lived. His son Titus succeeded him." The meaning of the last statement is uncertain.

In 1732 a number of members, including John Culley, entered into an agreement for the support of the ministry. In the same year Thomas Bennet was received into membership. As he signed the minutes he was probably the second pastor of the Church. He was possibly the Thomas Bennet who was sent into the ministry in 1724 by the Church at Great Ellingham, when John Miller was pastor.

In 1733 one of the Church Meetings was held at Smallburgh. Why, we do not know, but it is evident that any ill-feeling which may have existed when the separation took place in 1717, had passed. Thomas Bennet did not remain long at Worstead, as he is not mentioned after November 1734. Possibly he went on to Birmingham to become the first pastor of the Cannon Street Church which was founded about 1738.

The Worstead Church was destitute of a pastor in 1736, and held it "necessary for a pastor of a sister church to break bread among us."

The year 1737 is noteworthy in the Church's history, for in December of that year both Titus Culley and Edward Trivett were baptised. If Titus Culley exercised any oversight of the Church, as the inscription on his sister's tombstone suggests, it must have been between 1737 and 1742, but we have no information. Possibly he did, as about that time he removed from Swanton Abbot to North Walsham where he would not be far from the Worstead church.

It was *Edward Trivett* who was destined to exercise a truly great ministry. Born in December 1712, he had possibly known the Church from boyhood. The name of Martha Trivett, who may have been his mother, is found on the list of members at the Church's beginning in 1717. On February 10th, 1734-5 he married Sarah Whall in Dilham Church, and settled down in that village, where his eldest son, Robert, was born on Christmas Day, 1735. With his baptism, at the age of twenty-five, Edward Trivett's close association with the Church at Worstead began, and shortly afterwards he must have moved to Worstead, for his second child, Sarah, was born there on October 4th, 1740.

Edward Trivett's ministry probably began early in 1742, as on July 24th of that year he records his first baptism. "This day as helpt by the Lord baptised Mary Watts, being the first time I ever was employed in such work. May God bless my poor labours and small beginning with abundant success to the glory of His own Name, and good of poor souls is what I beg for Christ's sake." A prayer which was wonderfully answered.

The date of Edward Trivett's ordination is unknown, but Simmons, of Beccles, gave the charge to the pastor from Acts xx. 28; and John Stearn, of Norwich, addressed the people from

1 Thessalonians v. 12-13. As John Stearn did not settle in Norwich before 1743, it cannot have been before then.

Reference has been made to the influence of Thomas Grantham. In his view all Churches should be modelled on the lines of the Jerusalem Church, with three orders of ministry—messengers or apostles, elders, and deacons,—and he regarded himself as an apostle to plant and settle new churches. Though Edward Trivett was a very different man from Thomas Grantham, both in character and outlook, yet it would appear that in this regard the mantle of the General Baptist Apostle must have fallen on the Worstead minister, for though nominally an elder, his influence in many churches was far greater than that of Thomas Grantham. Fifty years after his settlement in Worstead a list of Particular Baptist Ministers in the British Isles was published in America. The eleven ministers in Norfolk included Edward Trivett himself, and five whom he had ordained; besides which a number in other counties had also been ordained by him. Several of the churches had been directly founded by his effort.

It is a pity we know so little about this notable ministry. The Church Book records the names of 391 who were baptised or received into the Church—a fine record for 50 years in such an isolated country spot. It also records the names of Deacons, who, after a period of probation, were ordained by the laying on of hands, and a list of those who were sent out to preach the Gospel by Edward Trivett. The list includes the names of *William Cole*—the first minister of the new Church founded at Great Yarmouth by Edward Trivett in 1762. William Cole remained there until 1768, when he went on to Long Buckby in Northamptonshire, and was pastor there until 1794; *Alexander Sparkhall*, who ministered at Ingham from 1764 to 1774, and then took up the work at Great Gransden, in Hunts; *Timothy Keymer*, a woolcomber from Worstead, who was at Great Gransden from 1755 until he died in 1771; *Thomas Purdy*, who married Edward Trivett's eldest daughter, Sarah, and was minister at Rye, in Sussex, from 1765. He was regarded as the leader of the Calvinists in that area, and took a chief part in founding a new Association of Particular Baptist Churches for Kent and Sussex in 1779. He died at Rye in 1817; *Jabez Brown*, who succeeded William Cole at Yarmouth in 1768, and was later at Stowmarket, Suffolk, from 1797 to 1825; *Zenas Trivett*, Edward's youngest son, whose forty year ministry at Langham, Essex, from 1778 to 1819 was the brightest period in the whole chequered history of that Church, which has since become extinct. Zenas Trivett published several booklets, ordained several ministers,—one at least from Langham Church—and was directly concerned in forming other churches. Late in life he returned to the member-

ship at Worstead, and took a great interest in the work at Bacton, being largely responsible for "settling" the Church there; *Robert Gaze* was sent out to preach at the same time as Zenas Trivett, but nothing is known of his later life; *John Webster Morris*, who was at Clipstone, Northamptonshire, in 1785, and was one of the men who founded the Baptist Missionary Society, and served it in its early days. He was the biographer of Robert Hall and Andrew Fuller and devoted the later years of his life to writing and publishing; *Robert Denham*, the minister at East Dereham from 1789 to 1796. This Church had been founded in 1784 largely through the influence of Edward Trivett; *Charles Farmery*, who himself founded the Church at Diss, and whose ministry there lasting from 1788 to 1800, was wonderfully blessed of God. In little over ten years he baptised 287 persons, formed five new churches, certified eleven places for village preaching, and sent seven men into the ministry—a truly remarkable record. The last to be sent out by Edward Trivett was *John Ewing*, who was at Great Ellingham from 1790 to 1805, but *Francis Brown*, whom he had baptised, was sent out by the Church after his death, and became pastor at Hailsham, Sussex, in 1795, and, in addition, *Thomas Smith*, who had been converted through the preaching of Thomas Purdy was ordained by Edward Trivett in 1765 as pastor of a new church at Shelfanger. It will be seen that directly and indirectly Edward Trivett exercised a considerable influence in many churches. It was largely through his effort that the first Norfolk and Suffolk Baptist Association was formed in 1769. The original members were Worstead, Claxton, Shelfanger, and Yarmouth, in Norfolk, and Wattisham and Woolverstone, in Suffolk. Worstead often entertained this Association, and continued for a long time to occupy a leading place in its work. It was not very successful at first, but later did much valuable service for the Churches.

In 1770 Edward Trivett published a book in Norwich, entitled, *Baptists vindicated from some groundless and false charges*.

A note in the *Baptist Record* of 1790, refers to Edward Trivett as "the worthy, laborious, useful, and aged servant of God." He died on June 23rd, 1792, at the age of eighty, having been a member of the Church for 55 years, and pastor for over 50 years. "His labours were eminently successful . . . and he went down to the grave full of days and honours." He was buried in the old Chapel Yard.

Edward Trivett had seven children, and it is noteworthy that members, both of his family, and that of Richard Culley, continued to take a real interest in the Church after the death of their fathers. Zenas Trivett's death on October 4th, 1831, is

recorded in the register with the following remarks: "The last of the family of Edward Trivett. For many years a faithful preacher of the gospel. The last of the Sabbatarians at Worstead." What connection there was between Worstead and Seventh-day Baptists is unknown, but it is interesting that Edward Trivett's successor came from a Seventh-day Baptist Church. This was *James Freeman Beard* from Woodbridge, in Suffolk. After Edward Trivett's death the Revs. Wilks, Kinghorn, and Gibbs, of Norwich, paid occasional visits—the city ministers thus encouraging their brethren in the country. Jabez Brown, of Yarmouth, also exercised a certain oversight of the Church, and received Mr. and Mrs. Beard into membership on October 9th, 1793. Mr. Beard was ordained in April of the following year, when John Hitchcock of Wattisham gave the charge to the pastor from 1 Timothy iv. 16, and Jabez Brown addressed the people from Ephesians ii. 19.

James Freeman Beard conducted his first baptismal service at Worstead on January 8th, 1794. Concerning it he wrote: "This day having obtained help from the Lord, I baptised Frances Ramsdel and Hannah Barber, being the first time I ever administered this ordinance. May the Lord of the harvest accept the first fruits, and send us a plentiful harvest to the glory of His own name, and the present and eternal welfare of precious souls, is the prayer of the most unworthy." His ministry was greatly blessed, and in 1798 the Church reported 188 members to the Association meeting at East Dereham. Owing to distance, the Church withdrew from the Association the next year, but its interest in the work of other churches did not decrease.

One who was greatly influenced by Mr. Beard's ministry was Sophia Cubitt, a daughter of William Cubitt, a farmer of Neatishead, and a half-sister of William Cubitt who started the Baptist work there. She has left us an interesting account of the baptism of her two older sisters, Charlotte and Maria, and herself at Worstead. "On Wednesday, 8th March, 1797, my two sisters and I were baptised in a brook just by the meeting. As it was a fast day, a large congregation were present; and as the church meetings were open to the congregation, we had to speak our experience before a great many people. I heard that a person was converted by hearing one of the experiences that day, praise God." The girl was then about 18 years old. She had probably never before spoken in public, and the congregation would have numbered over 400 persons. Of her sisters' witness Sophia wrote: "Charlotte spoke nicely, and Maria better than I." The value of these open confessions of faith in Christ can be partly estimated by the fact that sixty years later there were some living who remembered Charlotte's testimony, and described it as

astonishing in its fulness and clearness. The account continues : " A large concourse attended our baptism, and a clergyman who lived near, happening to pass at the time, was heard to say, ' Poor deluded young women ! ' But we rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer shame for His name, who said, ' Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' On the Lord's day following, we were received into the Church." Sophia later married Samuel Cooke, whose first wife had been her sister Maria. He was a miller of Stalham, and a Deacon of the Church at Ingham, which Church she joined.

J. F. Beard continued in the pastorate until the year 1811. During his ministry about 127 persons were baptised, and in 1800 the Church sent out *Thomas Gibbs* to preach the gospel. It is not known where he went. Possibly he died young, as a *Thomas Gibbs* died in 1802 at Smallburgh, at the age of twenty-four, having been eleven years a member of the Church. Mr. Beard removed to Ipswich, thence to Scarborough, where he died.

It would appear that two years passed before the vacancy was filled. In 1811 the Registers were signed by John Webster Morris, who was apparently helping the Church during the interim. That same year Joseph Kinghorn, of Norwich, in a letter to John Sutcliff, of Olney, referred to Worstead as a " highly Calvinistic Church with membership 150 (hearers about 400). Salary 60 guineas, and a house with $\frac{3}{4}$ acre of land."

In the year 1813 *Richard Clark*, of Shaldon, in Devonshire, was recognised as Pastor. Mr. Clark had been pastor there for four years, before which he had been in business in Plymouth, and " reaped from it a considerable harvest of this world's good."

His Worstead ordination was on 18th May, 1813, when Johnson of Fakenham gave the charge to the minister from 1 Coriinthians iv. 2, and Mark Wilks, of Norwich, addressed the Church from 1 Thessalonians v. 13. Curiously enough, just as his two immediate predecessors had recorded conducting their first baptisms, at Worstead, so on August 21st, 1814, Richard Clark wrote : " Mary Cushion was baptised,—the first person I ever baptised. Oh Lord, accept the feeble effort of Thy poor unworthy worm, and give me grace that I may be found faithful who am less than the least."

While pastor at Worstead, Mr. Clark did much to consolidate the Baptist work in the neighbourhood. He was a good man and a faithful minister, beloved by young and old alike. Upwards of sixty persons were baptised by him. A Sunday School was started in 1815, and evangelistic work carried on at North Walsham, Worstead, Town, East Ruston, and Dilham. Six Worstead members joined with seven from Neatishead to form a new Church at Ludham in 1821, and six members formed the Church

at Bacton in 1822, among them Samuel Nash, who built the chapel, and *William Baker*, who became the first pastor, having been sent out to preach by Richard Clark in 1817. Two other members later became ministers, *Jeremiah Hubbard*, at Shelfanger, and *John Sadler*, at Ludham.

In 1820 six almshouses were built near the chapel and endowed by Samuel Chapman, of Norwich, who is believed to have been the son of Sarah Chapman, the daughter of Richard Culley, the first pastor.

The East Norfolk Association of Particular Baptist Churches, later the Norfolk Association, was formed during Mr. Clark's ministry. In July 1827, the Worstead Church in a letter from John Bane, of Aylsham, was given "the sketch of a plan for the formation of an Association of Baptist Churches for the more effectual diffusion of religious knowledge in the eastern part of the County of Norfolk." This plan the Church considered sympathetically, but apparently it did not join the Association immediately, though it was in membership when the first Annual Report was published in 1834, and has ever since taken an active part in its work.

Richard Clark's disinterestedness was remarkable. Content to receive but a small salary, he gave generously. In 1829 the old meeting house, which had been in use for nearly a century, and had been twice enlarged, had become dilapidated and unsafe. The Church decided to build a new one. Mr. Clark gave £250. Two friends gave clay, and bricks for the building were made on the site. The total cost was £882 10s. The foundation stone was laid on June 22, 1829, when Zenas Trivett, now seventy-six years of age, preached, and the building was opened for public worship on October 6th, when sermons were preached by James Puntis from Isaiah lx. 7, and Joseph Kinghorn from Colossians ii. 6. As the ordinary congregations came from far and near, a stable, seventy-five feet long, for forty horses, was also built.

Mr. Clark built the school-house which he bequeathed to the Church. He also left £100 which was used for enlarging the vestry and building a schoolroom above it. In 1832, Mr. Clark was forced through ill-health to resign the pastorate, and on Sunday, January 1st, 1834, he attended a Prayer Meeting in the chapel, and spoke from the words: "See that ye fall not out by the way." The following Tuesday he was taken suddenly ill, and in the afternoon died in the arms of Mr. Blakely, his successor. He was sixty-nine years of age, and was buried at the entrance of the old ground.

John Rix Blakely was born in the lap of luxury at Goswold Hall, Thrandeston, near Eye, Suffolk. He was the eldest of a family of six, all of whom, when quite young, went to the Parish

Church to learn passages of scripture and the catechism, which made little impression on John. His parents were of good family, and much respected by dependants and neighbours alike, for their benevolence and kindness. When only eleven years old John became a midshipman on board the *Inflexible*, under Admiral Page, and on his first trip soldiers were taken to Lisbon, and stores to Genoa. On returning home his father thought his health would not stand sea-faring life, and sent him to a school in Ipswich. Later he joined the army and served in Italy, Holland and Ireland. While in the army he lived a reckless, sinful life, but when in Ireland, a friend took him to a Methodist Chapel where he was much impressed, and later during a serious illness was converted. From that time he lived a true and useful life, at first witnessing in the army, and getting himself into trouble for it.

On his father's death in 1810, he gave up his commission and returned home. The next year he and his mother went to live at Knapton, and being near North Walsham, he joined the Congregational Church there, and formed a life-long friendship with the pastor, James Browne.

Mr. Blakely was a great student, and becoming unsettled upon the question of baptism, decided to learn Greek that he might read the New Testament in the original. He went to Norwich and, with the assistance of Joseph Kinghorn, learnt enough, both of Greek and Hebrew, to be able to study the Bible more efficiently. His studies led him to ask Mr. Kinghorn for baptism, and he joined the Church at St. Mary's in April, 1814. On his return home his membership was transferred to Worstead, and in October, 1818, he married Naomi Barcham, daughter of John Barcham, a farmer and valued deacon of the church, and went to live at Worstead.

Mr. Blakely was a schoolmaster, and after his mother's death in April, 1822, was able to give much time to religious work. He taught in the Sunday School, and in the villages spoke to many about spiritual things, at first restricting himself to reading other people's sermons, but later seeking to tell out of a full heart his knowledge of the love of God in Christ Jesus. On September 8th, 1822, the Church, "without a dissenting voice" called him to the work of the ministry. He continued to work in the villages and neighbouring churches with much acceptance, and, Mr. Clark being in poor health, often assisted him by preaching and conducting baptisms. Twenty years after he had left the army he baptised two old soldiers, and his special entries in the Church Book show his continued interest in army life. "1830, July 18th, Isaac Temple of North Walsham . . . between seventy-eight and seventy-nine years of age, had been

near fifty years a hearer of the Word at Worstead, he served as a Marine Soldier on board the *Victory*, Admiral Keppel, was within a cable's length of the *Royal George* when she sunk at her anchors in Portsmouth Harbour." "1830, September 19th, . . . John Burrows, a soldier, who had served some years in the 16th Dragoon in the war in Spain and was severely wounded in a skirmish with the enemy."

In July, 1832, Mr. Blakely was appointed to take the oversight of the Church for a year. At the end of this probation he was unanimously chosen pastor, and ordained on November 5th, 1833, when James Puntis, of Norwich delivered the charge to the minister from 1 Thessalonians ii. 4, and William Spurgeon, of Neatishead, addressed the Church from 1 Thessalonians v. 12-13. His pastorate was very brief. He died on November 19th, 1837, being only forty-eight years of age, and having been seventeen years a member, and four years the pastor of the Church. He was buried by his old friend and first pastor, James Browne, in the graveyard surrounding the chapel where also lie his son, Edward, who died only four months before his father, his wife, Naomi, and his daughter, Jane Blakely Smith. He is commemorated by a tablet in the Church, bearing the words: "Piety, Faithfulness, Liberality, and Zeal, eminently distinguished his character."

MAURICE F. HEWETT.