

Notes

EXETER COMMUNION CUPS

THE fellowship of Baptists in Exeter like some elderly folk is not sure of the year of its birth. There is clear evidence, however, of a Baptist community in the city for more than three hundred years. The South Street Baptist Church is the natural descendant of the first Meeting, and there are now four other Churches within the city boundaries founded to meet the needs of the population of 78,000.

Exeter has long been a most important town, claiming a history of two thousand years, and it is interesting to allow the imagination to envisage the physical circumstances in which these early Exonian Baptists met for worship. Perhaps they gathered in a humble cob dwelling, or in the timbered house of a city merchant. There is a record suggesting that in 1649 they met in the Refectory of the Deanery. One of the officers of the Parliamentary Army, Captain Paul Hobson, a noted lay-preacher, was a prominent Exeter Baptist in 1654, and in that year the community was sufficiently numerous to require a large hall, which was provided by a Mr. Carew in the vicinity of the Cathedral Close.

It was in 1725 that a Mr. Heath, merchant of the city, gave the land on which the present chapel stands, the church having previously worshipped in Gandy's Lane. It was also in 1725 that John Elston, Junior, a local silversmith, made for the church two silver wine cups. Of exquisite workmanship, they are two-handled, $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. in height, $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter, and the pair weighed fourteen ounces. A further pair to match were made in London in 1764, the maker being unknown. Each of the four cups is engraved "Baptist Meeting, Exon."

Exeter had an Assay Office or Hall in those far-off days, and John Elston, Junior was registered there in 1723. John Elston, Senior, whose mark was entered in 1701 and last noted in 1728 was a very famous silversmith, renowned for much beautiful workmanship. A Guild of Goldsmiths and Silversmiths existed in Exeter long before the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. It is recorded that John de Wewlingworth, a Goldsmith, flourished in the city in the fourteenth century. The Assay Office was eventually closed in 1883.

These Exeter Communion Cups are of intrinsic value, but

they are more than that. They continually remind the local Baptists of their heritage. The first pair of Communion Cups were in hallowed use for two hundred years before giving way to the individual cups. It is not difficult to envisage these historical cups passing from hand to hand at the Table of the Lord during these two centuries, and they are now on special occasions, placed on the Communion Table, when the church members of today listen again, as did those who have gone before, to the words: "This Cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you."

A former South Street Pastor, when referring to those who had served the Church and had joined the Church triumphant said: "Such men were our forefathers; men, real men, Christian men. They laboured, and we have entered into their labours. They suffered; we are free to serve as conscience dictates, catching their spirit, emulating their loyalty to conscience, to truth and to God, transmitting their energy and zeal. Let us prove we are not feebler sons in feebler days." These Communion vessels serve as a link between the Church triumphant and the Church militant.

F. M. SLEEMAN.

AN AUSTRALIAN PIONEER BAPTIST

From London on 27th July, 1834, the barque *George Hibbert* set sail for Port Jackson, carrying 144 female convicts. Among the free passengers on board was the ship's chaplain, a young Baptist pastor, aged twenty-seven, named John Saunders. With his wife he was travelling to a strange land to become pastor of the Baptist community in Sydney, to whom he had been recommended by the B.M.S. to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Rev. J. McKaeg who had conducted the first Baptist services from 1831 to 1833. The *George Hibbert* arrived in Sydney on 1st December, 1834.

John Saunders conducted his first services in the St. James' schoolroom in Elizabeth Street, the premises being made available by the Governor, Sir Richard Bourke. Soon afterward he set about to establish firmly the Baptist faith in the young and growing colony. He was a man with progressive ideas and gifted with leadership and organising ability, and to him must be given the credit for laying the foundations of the Baptist witness in Australia.

With a small but loyal band of Baptist settlers, Saunders lost no time in erecting a church building on a grant of land in Bathurst Street. In the *Sydney Herald*, dated 27th July, 1835, appeared the following:—

The Baptist Quarterly

"BAPTIST CHAPEL

The friends of the Rev. J. Saunders have the pleasure of informing the public that His Excellency the Governor has been pleased to confirm the grant of an allotment in Bathurst St., for the erection of a Baptist Chapel, to the Rev. J. Saunders, and four trustees, upon condition that the building shall be completed within a given time, and the expenditure amount to eight hundred pounds at the least.

As the present place of worship in the Old Court House, has for the last two months, proved inconveniently small, it is important that the erection of a suitable place of worship should be commenced immediately. The trustees, therefore, depending on the liberality of the public, intend to commence the building forthwith, in order that the Chapel may be ready for occupation within six months if possible.

The trust of the Chapel empowers the trustees to receive subscriptions, and to conduct the affairs of the Chapel until they are repaid their outlay, when the whole will be conveyed to trustees, according to the usual form of the Baptist Chapel Trusts in England. The trustees, therefore, beg leave most respectfully to invite the liberal donations of their Christian friends, and the public in general.

Subscriptions will be received at the Bank of New South Wales, and by the following gentlemen:—Mr. C. Nicholson, Jamieson St., Mr. Edward Hunt, Jamieson St., Mr. McDougall, Castlereagh St., Mr. White, Castlereagh St. South, John Dean, Esq., Prince St., Mr. Bourne, 36 Pitt St., and Mr. Tibbey, opposite the Old Burial Ground, George St."

After the advertisement there appear the names of thirty-three subscribers who commenced the fund by contributing the total sum of £177 6s., John Saunders donating £7 10s.

One of the trustees, Mr. C. Nicholson, was a medical doctor. Later he became Sir Charles Nicholson, Australia's first baronet, and was one of the founders of the University of Sydney.

In the *Sydney Herald* of 10th September, 1835, the following advertisement appeared:—

"BAPTIST CHAPEL

TO BUILDERS

Persons willing to contract for the erection of the above Chapel in Bathurst Street, or any branch or branches of the works relating thereto, may see the Plans and Specifications by applying to Mr. Verge, Sussex Street, where Tenders for same will be received until the 18th instant.

N.B.—Approved security will be required for the due performance of the works within a given time, and the Committee will not bind themselves to accept the lowest tender.—September 4th, 1835."

On 26th November, 1835, the foundation stone of the first Baptist Church built in Australia was laid, and within ten months the chapel was opened for public worship—on 23rd September, 1836.

After twelve years of successful pioneering ministry and the opening of Baptist preaching stations in the very out-back of the colony, John Saunders resigned the pastorate of the Bathurst

Street Church owing to ill-health. Prior to returning to his beloved homeland a public meeting was held, presided over by the Attorney-General, Mr. J. A. Plunkett, and attended by religious and civic leaders of the colony. A gift of £300 was presented to Mr. Saunders as a token of appreciation for his services in promoting the spritual, social and intellectual well-being of the colony.

KENNETH PALMER.

PILGRIMAGE

Members of the Doncaster Federation of Baptist Lay Preachers with local Baptist friends of all ages to the number of sixty set out on a historical tour on Saturday, May 17th, through the Isle of Axholme, with the intention of visiting the haunts of the Pilgrim Fathers and early Baptists.

At Austerfield Parish Church (Yorks.) we noted the memorial to William Bradford as the first American to be elected to office by the free choice of his brethren. In the churchyard we read the story of the flight from these parts, in which early Baptists were involved, from Valerian Paget's excellent rendering of Bradford's History of the Plymouth Settlement. At Scrooby Manor House (Notts.) a few miles south, we read Bradford's description of Willam Brewster and of his qualities as a preacher. "He had a singularly good gift of prayer both public and private in ripping up the heart and conscience before God in the humble confession of sin and begging the mercies of God in Christ for the pardon of it." Whereas Brewster is the name now so connected with Scrooby, the persecuting party in 1607 evidently considered the leader of importance to be "Gervase Nevyle of Scrowby." Through the kindness of the Rev. Angelo Raine, the honorary City Archivist of York, the writer had been given the privilege of reading all the entries of the Archbishop's registry of the Court of Ecclesiastical Commission, York, from 1562 onwards. Of the hundreds of indictments prior to that against Nevyle, this indictment by length and vehement emphasis is outstanding. It marks him unmistakeably as the greatest Separatist caught yet. He was the grandson of the High Sheriff of Notts. and a local landowner. It was he who about one year later in Holland in company with John Smyth became Baptist. W. H. Burgess in his work on John Robinson quotes the case of the Ecclesiastical Court against Gervase Nevyle of November 10th, 1607. The quotation only makes one omission of importance at the end, viz., "In the Castle, 22 March, 1607-8."

At Gainsborough Mr. W. H. Brace, the local Quaker and historian, with Mrs. Brace and their son, most graciously

welcomed our party to the Old Hall, so closely associated with the Pilgrim Fathers and John Smyth. It was Mr. Brace who first drew attention to the earliest reference to John Smyth at Gainsborough in the parish register: "Mar. 11, 1603-4. Baptized Chara, daughter of Mr. John Smyth, preacher." We do well to note that a man who could not obtain license to preach but who could and did preach set the balling rolling of the Pilgrim Father movement in the north and of the Baptist movement and, as Mr. Baker had informed me, indirectly of the Quaker movement. Let us beware today of precluding such by artificial barriers. We thought also of John Murton, the Baptist, known—by the Dutch marriage records—to have come from Gainsborough.

Re-crossing the lovely Trent we made our way to Epworth through the fields which still evidence the Anglo-Saxon method of strip farming. We passed Misterton where there had been a Baptist church for centuries and where the first official amalgamation had ever taken place of Particular with General Baptists. We remembered a local preacher of the early eighteen hundreds, Mr. Skidmore, who trudged for many years from Retford to Misterton to conduct the services every Sunday, twelve miles there and twelve back. He tramped some twenty thousand miles to minister to only half-a-dozen. After his day there was a great revival there. He was totally blind. His wife led him every step of the way.

At Epworth Mr. R. W. Tonge, a local preacher for over fifty years, welcomed us at Samuel Wesley's tomb. He showed us the beautiful church register of Baptist churches of Epworth, West Butterwick and Crowle dated 1673. It sheds light on every phase of Baptist life in the Isle of Axholme. This register and that of Coningsby are rivals as the most interesting of old Baptist records in Lincs. With only time for a glance at the Baptist Chapel of 1670, we made for the river Torne and Dipping House Farm. At the periodical dippings there through the centuries literally thousands would line the banks and join in the service. They came in wagons from afar and pitched tents. The ceremony had always been by immersion, as evidenced by Joseph Hooke's writings referring to Epworth in 1701, and indeed by those of earlier opponents. The name "dipper" was the usual term for a Baptist in the district. The 17th century brick farm house was noted where the candidates prepared themselves and the spot where they were baptised into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost—the greatest earthly honour conferred on thinking man. We returned in beautiful evening light and cool to Doncaster and distributed to our six local communities after living for six hours in the past and taking courage for the future.

A. DE M. CHESTERMAN.