

The Old Minute Book of Bourne Baptist Church

THE Baptist Church at Bourne in Lincolnshire, a small town of five thousand inhabitants, is very proud of its long history, for it claims to have been founded in 1645, probably by soldiers from Cromwell's army. The church is equally proud of its old minute book, which contains a continuous record of the church business from 1702 to 1891. The book is 15½ inches long by 6 inches wide and 1½ inches thick. It contains about 300 pages, of which about a quarter are blank.

On the first page of the book there is the heading "A Booke of Church Affairs belonging to the Church of Baptised Believers in Bourne, &c.—1702." The first entry is a copy of a letter addressed to the Quaker meeting in Bourne (there is no Quaker meeting there now) warning them of a certain Edward Walker, who lodged in the house of John Burrows and became "kinder than ordinary to Mary his wife." As they had forsaken the meetings of the Baptists and joined themselves to the people called Quakers, "therefore we give notice to them and to others that we have dealt with them, according to gospell rules, for their pernicious principals and disorderly and scandalous practices, and we do Disown and Reject them and count them unworthy of Christian Communion, till they give satisfaction in such things as are or may be objected against them. In the mean while we pray for them that they may be delivered from their mistakes, and be converted and saved." The letter is dated feeb 7th, 1702/3.

Perhaps the most interesting historical entry is a memorandum on page 7, dated the 12th day of the 4th month (vulgo June) 1720. It reads as follows:—Joseph Hooke was ordained (with Tho. Lawson) Pastor of the Church meeting in Bourn, Hackonby, Spalding and the Park adjacent, in Lincolnshire, Sept 7, 1687, with the consent of the said Church, by Fasting & Prayer, with Laying on of Hands, by Thomas Grantham, then Messenger of the Baptized Churches in Lincolnshire.

The said Messenger of our Churches departed this Life, much lamented at Norwich, the 17 day of the 11 month (vulgo Jan) Anno Dom. 1691-2.

And Tho. Lawson (joint Elder with the said Joseph Hooke) departed this life at Spalding about the middle of September, 1695.

Afterward, that is Sept 6, 1696 the said Joseph Hooke was ordained Messenger of the Baptized Churches in Lincolnshire at

the earnest request of the said churches with the Approbation of the General Assembly in London (before that Assembly was divided about Mr. Caffin's Doctrine) with Fasting and Prayer and Laying on of Hands, at Spalding, by Mr. Francis Stanley, Messenger of the Baptized Churches in Northamptonshire. By Ordination he hath ever since stood equally related, as a General Pastor, to all the Churches that own him in his office.

NOTE.—The Day of this Ordination was appointed by an Association in Lincoln and all the Churches related thereunto, by a joint Agreement, kept a solemn fast on that day to implore the blessing of God upon the said Ordination. And Mr. Stanley preached an excellent sermon at Spalding that Day, to a good congregation, from 2 Cor. 11, 28—And after that proceeded to Ordination, as aforesaid.

Be it also remembered that the said Mr. Stanley departed this life at his dwelling house in East Haddon, in Northamptonshire, in the Spring, 1697.

NOTE.—Almost all the members that belonged to Bourne and Hackonby when Joseph Hooke was ordained their pastor, are deceased.

A further historical note is found much later in the book, on page 80, on the occasion of the laying of the first stone of the new chapel on May 6th, 1835. It is headed "A brief Memorial of the rise and Progress of the G.B. Church, Bourn, Lincolnshire. The early history of the General Baptists at Bourn & its vicinity is buried in obscurity. The church in this Town was originally connected with the church of the same faith at Spalding till near the close of the seventeenth century. Taylor's *History of the English General Baptists* contains traces of this body of Christians at Spalding in 1646, at Thurlby Langtoft and Narborough in 1653 and at Stainford and Bytham in 1656. The records of the Spalding Church contain 'An account of the officers and members pertaining to the church of Christ in Spalding, Bourn & Hackonby and the parts adjacent, taken the 31st day of the 6th month, 1688'."

Most of the book is concerned with the lists of church members and also particulars of people who were struck off the church roll for various reasons. Thus in 1720 we read: "Robert Callis of Stenfield, baptized about the year 1688 and seemed zealous and fervent in spirit for a while. Afterward he grew loose in his conversation and was withdrawn from after he had been tenderly dealt withall and admonished for

1. Going to dancing and such profane exercises
2. For disobedience to his mother
3. Contempt of Church authority.

Since which he has wholly disregarded his Profession, and joined himself with the National Church, and lives a life agreeable

with ye works. Oh ! yt he might be convinced & recovered and his soul saved."

In 1796 " John Allan withdrew himself upon this account, i.e. the Church desired to have some conversation with him respecting his going to fiddle at a Christing and other Places of Mirth. But he refused to have his conduct examined, and so left his place with us, and has done what he can to hurt the cause by speaking disrespectfully of us, may the Lord grant him repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

In April, 1794, a Mr. James Porter, late pastor of the General Baptist Church at Dover, was received as pastor of this Church. On May 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th, he baptized 14 new members, and on May 24th it was decided to send a letter to the General Assembly in Worship Street, London, in order to join the same and to be considered as a branch of the Assembly. No more is said of Mr. Porter, but at the other end of the book, is to be found the following note: " Mr. Porter came from Dover to Bourne and we had good hopes that he would have been a very useful minister among us, but he turned out a very bad man. He was under necessity to leave the Town in the night for fear of the mob. Drunkenness and Sodomy were laid to his charge. He had only been with us about a Quarter of a year. His conduct has stabled our Cause and God only knows what ye consequence will be. He would have baptized any person without any regard to character. The mischief done here is wore than his own conduct—may a Merciful God help us in our present state." Now that 150 years have passed, one wonders whether the charges brought against him were true, and whether the Town was justified in its condemnation.

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The Art and Craft of Lay Preaching (8d.) by Nathaniel Micklem gives wise practical guidance on the conduct of worship, preparation of sermons and other relevant matters. *Faith and the Life Eternal* (8d.) by John Huxtable, *As Thy Days* (1s.) by S. Maurice Watts and *The Love of the Father* (1s.) by H. F. Lovell Cocks each reproduce talks by eminent Congregational ministers in the "Lift up your Hearts" series of the B.B.C. [All Independent Press].