

The Signatories of the Orthodox Confession of 1679

(Continued. To be concluded next issue)

29. CLEMENT HUNT, yeoman of Dinton, elder of the church of Cuddington or Ford and Messenger in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, succeeded Thomas Monk as the leader of the militantly orthodox wing of the General Baptists. Hunt belonged to a family well known in Dinton since 1560 or earlier, and was probably the son of Clement Hunt and Mary King (d. 1684), who, however, were still Paedobaptists in 1644. The Cuddington church was probably founded a year or two later.⁵⁰ Francis Hunt, born in 1660, was perhaps son of the older, not the younger Clement: if so, the latter is first mentioned in 1669, when he was preaching to twenty or thirty very indigent people in the house or yard of William Bate (No. 18). In 1687 he served as constable of Upton, a hamlet of Dinton. In 1688, when the extant Ford record begins, he was preaching at Wendover, Thame, Bledlow, Kingston Blount and Long Crendon. On 24th July, 1689, the church met at Princes Risborough to decide whether to accept the terms offered by the Toleration Act. It was resolved that "wee doe not, nor cannot Approve of and subscribe to the Articles menconed in the said Act . . . (yet notwithstanding) It is further Agreed that something be done by vs in order for the obeyting the Exemptions made and granted in the Act aforesaid Provided wee may Evade such subscription & approbation of the said Articles." Hunt pointed out that Quakers were not required to subscribe the Articles, and that Baptists could take advantage of the escape clause (1 Wm. & Mary, c. 18 s.13). Strictly speaking, this provision was available only to those who scrupled the taking of any oath whatever; some General Baptists held this view, and in 1675 the Amersham church had for a short time refused to have communion with those who took an oath, but the local Lollard tradition was not opposed to judicial oaths and Article 48 of the Orthodox Confession had expressly asserted their lawfulness. Nevertheless Hunt persisted, and at the Midsummer Sessions was accordingly entered as a Quaker, a mistake which is not rectified in the excellent Calendar to the Sessions Records published by the Clerk of the Peace. Jony, Ransome and Wild ignored the church agreement and subscribed the Articles; so did Headach and Clarke "meerly by surprize and through vnadvisedness." Hunt as elder asked the offending brethren not to come to the Lord's Table but permitted them to preach elsewhere. Some rigorists argued that Hunt had incurred the imputation of sin by allowing this, but the church upheld his action and asked William Reeve of Rempstone, Messenger in Nottinghamshire, to visit the offenders. Finally on 24th April, 1690 at an Assembly of the Five Churches, held at Bierton with Reeve presiding, the parties on both sides declared themselves sorry and troubled, and sought to heal the breach by praying jointly to Almighty God and forgiving one another. It may be added that in 1702 Hunt abjured the Pretender without scruple, and that in 1715 his church synod agreed that the ministers' charge in taking the oaths on the accession of George I should be borne by the church.

Since the death of Thomas Monk there had been no regular Messenger in Buckinghamshire, and by 1690 it had become clear that Hunt was taking

the lead; other churches often sent for him, and his own church set up a committee (Headach, Bate and Gosse junior) to regulate his journeys.

For some years the Bucks. and Herts. churches had not been represented at the General Assembly. In 1691 letters were exchanged, and next year Wing, Winslow, Berkhamsted and Barnet sent representatives. Clement Hunt held aloof, although this meant that his own position as acting Messenger could not be confirmed. His suspicions were justified; it soon became clear that Caffyn and his friends controlled the Assembly. In 1696 the Bucks. churches seceded, together with others in London, Essex and Cambridgeshire, and formed a new General Association, in which Hunt's leadership was undisputed. Three representatives of the old Assembly who met him on 17th June, 1698 reported that he "was pleased to speak very Slighting & Reproachfull of the Genall Assembly and said he had Endeavoured the Breaking the said Assembly these fifteen years & thanked God he had done it. And also added that he had more peace in what he had done in breaking the Same than in anything he had done in his life time." Hunt's efforts to attract "those Churches who are of ye same faith with vs that are yet in communion with them" proved highly successful. At first the only leader who was willing to break with Caffyn was John Lacy of Godmanchester and Wilbraham, Messenger in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire, but he was soon joined by the venerable Benjamin Morley, who after forty years' service as Messenger had settled at Winslow, and by Dr. William Russell; it was presumably they who ordained Hunt as Messenger. At the meetings in June, 1702, Joseph Hooke of Hackenby, whose election as Messenger had been almost the last act of the General Assembly before its disruption, brought over the Lincolnshire churches. He had recently defended the Orthodox Confession in his *Necessary Apology*, and was asked to revise the Brief Confession. The General Association endorsed Hunt's strict rule against mixed marriages, condemned both Calvinist and Pelagian dissidents in Bucks., and resolved to set up a school of universal learning in London to bring up persons (who by the grace of God should be soberly inclined) to the work of the ministry. In 1704 the old General Assembly capitulated. Both sides signed six articles, the first two of which set forth the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. For the first time the Caffynite churches explicitly repudiated Hofmann's heresy. "The only begotten Son of God . . . did in fulness of time take to himself of our Nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary of whome in respect of the Flesh he was made and so is true God and true Man our Emmanuel." Unorthodox preaching was to be suppressed, but silent disagreement was not to be penalised. With this Hunt might well have been content; he had isolated Caffyn as effectively as Caffyn had isolated him twelve years before. But next year the orthodox leaders overreached themselves. The reunited Assembly resolved that subscription to the new articles should be a condition of admission. The Kent churches at once withdrew and accused the orthodox majority of bad faith. In 1709 a mediating party tried to secure agreement on a new "Expedient," entirely in the words of Scripture, but Hunt and Joseph Hooke, who was facing serious dissension in Lincolnshire, declared that a stronger barrier was needed against Arian, Socinian and Anthropomorphite heretics. Thereafter the breach was complete; the Caffynite churches formed a new General Assembly, and no further negotiations took place until Caffyn and Hunt were dead.

Clement Hunt had some private means, but not enough to pay for his constant journeys. For example, in 1704 the General Association sent him to sit with the Messenger in Cambridgeshire to hear and determine a matter between one Clark and the church at Ely. Hunt was thus partly dependent on freewill offerings, which were often many months in arrear. Each church, and apparently each local meeting, was asked to raise its quota. On 7th April, 1703, the Cuddington-Ford scribe noted: "It doth

Appear yt this Church is behind of what was Allotted to them to pay to Br Hunt 6-7-11 beside $\frac{1}{2}$ A year Dve at St. Thomas Last of which $\frac{1}{2}$ years paymt br: Hvnt hath Recd 9s. 0d." The church merely resolved "yt Br Hunts Arrears be taken further care of ye next Churchmeeting." The meeting at Kingston Blount placed its subscriptions at Hunt's personal disposal. In 1708 five leading members lent the church money to bring its payments up to date; part of this remained outstanding in 1714. Sometimes the deacons made up the amount due. It was characteristic of the General Baptists that they discharged one member's debts and provided straw for another to thatch his house, and yet grudged their pastors an adequate maintenance.

Hunt's relations with his own church were sometimes strained. In 1693 the Hunt and Franklin families were involved in a dispute; they would not go to law before unbelievers, and the matters were accordingly "put to a Reference . . . & writings Are to be made & the Indentvrs to be given In." Meanwhile Henry Franklin and his wife charged Hunt with drunkenness and lying, and later with violating the award made between them. The church held that Franklin had himself departed from the award by seeking after other proceedings, and asked Reeve as Messenger to admonish all parties to submit to the church's determination. Hunt regarded this as a reflection on his own conduct, and at the next meeting the church resolved that their vote had no such intention. Franklin was suspended and then excluded (subject to his right of appeal) "in Like nature as was that person spoken of 1 Cor. 5" for reviling his elder and pastor "with Invectives from his penn altogether vnbecoming a wise & good man & much more a Christian," even after he had admitted that his original charges were groundless. Later the Franklins submitted, desired the church's prayers and were received into communion again. In 1695 Hunt was reconciled with John Tripp, after a dispute which may have arisen from Tripp's diverting part of the freewill offerings from the Messenger's fund to other purposes.

Although the Buckinghamshire churches were at one in their belief concerning the attributes of God and the person of Christ, they differed widely on the doctrines of grace. In 1697 the church at High Wycombe was distracted by a Calvinist faction instigated by Benjamin Keach, against whose disruptive activities the General Association protested to the Particular Baptist leaders. On 6th March, 1700, Hunt and others drew up a paper condemning three propositions: that Christ did not die equally for all mankind; that although all men are required to repent, all have not power to do so; and that the motions, operations and inducements of the Holy Spirit are not tendered to all. These opinions were to be borne with, but were not to be preached. Hunt would admit no compromise on what were later called the "three universals": God loves all men, Christ died for all men, the Holy Spirit strives with all men. The General Association endorsed Hunt's action, and at a subsequent day of prayer and fasting, he prayed that God would take away the cloudiness of the minds of all Christians and enlighten them in the faith of universal redemption. Thereupon Edward Hoare withdrew, and when asked whether he could still hold communion with the church he refused to answer. John Coker went further and said to Hunt: "You are no elder of mine, nor never shall be, nor I will never more have communion with you." Some of Hunt's subsequent comments (he was in the habit of annotating the church book) show how much this remark hurt him. Coker, Hoare and Thomas Norris soon set up a separate meeting at Princes Risborough. The church resolved that no elder or member should preach doctrines contrary to the Fifty Articles, but the dissidents contended that the Orthodox Confession itself supported their teaching. At the General Association in May, 1700, it was reported by a Nottingham elder that Benjamin Boyer was preaching Calvinism in

Leicestershire, claiming that his doctrine was that of Thomas Monk and the "fifty stars of the first magnitude" who had subscribed the Confession. The General Association declared this a slander on Monk and advised Boyer's church at Wymeswold to read the Confession for themselves. In Bucks., Robert Wade argued strongly for liberty to sit under Hoare's ministry. On 15th April, 1702, Hunt was asked to expose Hoare's fallacies, but secessions continued and in September Hunt was "desired" and Tripp "appointed" to inform members of their errors. The present church at Princes Risborough was the direct result of this movement, and the earliest Particular Baptist church at Chesham, which later called Norris to its pastorate, probably arose in the same way.⁵¹ Some General Baptists, however, reacted from Calvinism into Pelagianism; the resulting dissensions are outlined below in the note on Henry Goss, junior (No. 42).

By 1703 Clement Hunt had moved to a house at the West End of Westlington in Dinton, which he then registered for worship. As his property was rated at only £8 (reduced to £6 in 1711, after certain landowners had secured a new assessment) he seems to have retired from farming. In 1707 Joseph Hooke, at Clement Hunt's invitation, ordained John Cripps elder in and over the church of Cuddington, but Hunt continued to assist whenever he was not away on visitation. He preached at Princes Risborough, Kingston, Cuddington, Ford, Upton, Bigstrop,⁵² Coombe, Cadsden and Loosley Row, but most frequently at home in Westlington. There the church met to observe national fasts and to give thanks for Marlborough's victories.

In 1710 Hunt went to Wycombe to have discourse with Mary Veary, who was keeping company with John Ball, a loose and vain man, who made a song of her, as Hunt sadly noted in the church book. Later he and Cripps directed her concerning her communion. The matter was delicate, as Hunt was also involved in a difference with his old friend and kinsman John Veary⁵³ "in things of yea and nay"; this was satisfactorily settled and Veary died penitent, but John Begent then accused Hunt of defrauding Veary. The church decided that Hunt and Veary "both did feare God and that neither of them did designe any Evill." Begent lost his temper, compared the church to Billingsgate and then said that if he had lied they might pass it by if they would, "which we Cannot Call true Repentance, because there wanted Contricion." The church at Haddenham invited Begent to preach, although his own church had silenced him. Begent's wife renewed the charges against Hunt, and the church advised him to prosecute her. He declined to do so, and in 1717 Begent sought a reconciliation, acknowledged his errors, desired prayers for the pardon of his sins and was commended to the church at Haddenham under the care of Edward Hoare (not to be confused with Edward Hoare of Risborough, who had died in 1711).

Although Hunt's health was declining, he continued to maintain strict church discipline and to visit backsliders. Drunkenness, mixed marriage and absence from Communion were the most prevalent sins. In a minute of 5th August, 1716, he is called Father Hunt, an unprecedented form of address among General Baptists, though it had often been used by the Lollards. About this time the historic meeting-house at Ford was opened, and on 1st September, 1718, a day of fasting and prayer was held there, with five special intentions:

first that the Lord will Bee pleased to Raise vp more faithful ministers and those which hee hath Raised moore willing and Able

secondly that God would bee pleased to make all the members of Christ Church willing in their places to Improve their spirituall and Temporall talents To support the Cause of God

Thirdly that the Lord would be pleased to Continue the day of peace and Liberty wee now Enjoy

forthly that the Lord will be pleased to Give our sister Clarke peace and Ease her of all her Troubles and strengthen her faith in the Lord Jesus

fifthly that the Lord will be pleased to Crown all our Endeavours with his Blessing.

In 1719 Hunt opened a new meeting at Towersey, then in Bucks., now in Oxfordshire. His health was failing rapidly; his last sermon at Ford was on 31st January, 1720, and he was buried at Dinton on 13th June. His death marks the beginning of a steady decline of the Baptist cause in and around Buckinghamshire, which a succession of able and devoted Messengers seemed powerless to arrest. Strangely enough, when the revival came in 1785 it started with a few pious people assembled at Dinton Castle, in Hunt's old village.⁵⁴

Clement Hunt's son of the same name was "grievously plunged in sin and disorder" in 1693, and we hear no more of him. Another son, Samuel, died the same year. John Hunt, a farmer,⁵⁵ who seems to have shared the family's irascibility to the full, was ordained deacon by Hooke in 1707, quarrelled repeatedly with his son John and is last mentioned in 1739. Rebecca Hunt, first named in 1743, may be the Mrs. Hunt who subscribed to Ford, c. 1750-67.

It is curiously difficult to form a clear impression of Clement Hunt's character. He took a high view of his office as a successor of the Apostles, reacted vigorously when the authority of Messengers or elders was questioned, and insisted, following Grantham and the Council of Carthage, that the appointment of elders and deacons was subject to the Messenger's approval of their qualifications. Hunt made enemies with singular facility, and even in his own churches commanded respect rather than affection until his last years, when he mellowed considerably. On questions of doctrine he was quite uncompromising, and the whole Baptist denomination owes more to his intransigence than has yet been acknowledged. He alone among the orthodox General Baptist leaders never sought an arrangement with Caffyn. But for his firm stand, the General Baptists would probably have gone the way of the English Presbyterians, and the growth of the New Connexion would scarcely have been possible. Without Clement Hunt we might not have had John Clifford.

30. JOHN MOUNTEGUE, junior, yeoman of Waddesdon, was preaching there in 1669 at the homes of John Mountague and William Alley, and at North Marston at John Hartnoll's house. In 1666 John Mountague and Will. Ally witnessed the will of Abigail, widow of John Delafield; there was a long-standing friendship between the three families.⁵⁶ John Mountague served as juror in 1679 and 1687, subscribed the Articles in 1689 and signed the Berton agreement to heal the dissension which that action caused. The only later mentions in the Ford records are that in 1718 Mr. Mountague charged Abraham Ransome with borrowing a coat and not returning it, and that Ann Montague or Mountacute was excluded temporarily in 1695 for marrying an unbaptized person and permanently in 1703 for turning Calvinist.

31. WILLIAM SMART of Oakley and later of Walton in Aylesbury, husbandman, attended the 1660 Assembly and signed its Brief Confession, in which too much was sacrificed to brevity. He and his widowed mother were presented in 1662 as sectaries who did not pay their Easter offerings, but the apparitor certified that Smart was already in Aylesbury gaol. In 1669 he was preaching with Stephen Dagnall to the "middle and meaner sort of people" at Wingrave. Soon after signing the Orthodox Confession he

was indicted for putting a dunghill in the highway, and five years later for absence from the parish church for a month; at the next Sessions, the qualifying period was reduced to three weeks. In October, 1688, he preached at Wendover: when Toleration was secured he made the usual subscriptions and was a party to the Bierton reconciliation. At the 1693 General Assembly he led the attack on Matthew Caffyn and secured a condemnation of his Hofmannite views, but failed to convince the Assembly that Caffyn actually held these beliefs.

32. RICHARD GOODCHILD, yeoman of Kimblewick, registered his farm for worship as soon as the law allowed. As it was near the Baptist centre of gravity in the Vale, the Cuddington-Ford church was already accustomed to meet there both for worship and for business. The Whitsun meetings at Kimblewick were apparently an old church custom, rather like the Good Friday meetings at Chenies today, and all other local meetings were suspended in order to allow the whole of the widely scattered congregation to assemble. Richard Goodchild, who was chief constable of the Three Hundreds of Aylesbury in 1691, was a generous host, but took little other part in church affairs. He was responsible for collecting the freewill offerings in the Vale during 1701-02, was deputed to admonish Joseph Delafield in 1710 and was "Representative to Ailesbury" in 1711; Richard Goodchild, junior, was representative in 1710. On 2nd April, 1712, Clement Hunt and four Goodchilds (Richard, Joseph, William and John) were asked to write out the church's charges against John Begent. The result was a truly tremendous indictment, citing over forty passages of Scripture. William and Richard Goodchild were preaching at Coombe in 1712, but after Ford Chapel was built in 1716 the family soon drops out of the story. It was probably better that the church should acquire its own premises than that it should remain dependent on the goodwill of a few members; but, as in many other country districts, there was a definite loss of influence and decline in membership when the meeting-house replaced the hospitality of the farmhouse.

33. JEFFERY WILD was a carpenter of Cats Dean (now Cadsden) near Monks Risborough, probably of the family of Arthur Wild of Ellesborough, excommunicated in 1662. The meeting at Scrubwood, 800 feet up behind Coombe Hill, was committed to his care by the church of Cuddington on 24th July, 1689. Contrary to the church agreement of that date, he subscribed the Articles prescribed by the Toleration Act. In April, 1693, Deacon John Tripp of Meadle was asked to "take care of Bro: Wild in his sickness & administer Reliefe as is necessary." Next February he was fully recovered, and preached at Darvill's Hill near Speen, Wycombe, "Missenden Berry" (Bury Farm, Missenden?) and Coombe. During the next twenty years Wild is often mentioned in the Ford church book, supplying out-stations (Kingston Blount, Missenden, Coombe, Westlington), collecting money in the Chilterns according to the Association agreement and admonishing recalcitrant members. When Edward Hoare and his erroneous company seceded in 1701 Wild worked hard to restore the position in Risborough. Among the seceders whom he sought to reclaim by exhortations in public and private were two with the improbable names of Elizidamer and Betteris Clark. The church directed in 1711 that Wild's house at Cadsden should be registered; thereafter it was a regular preaching station, which members in the Chilterns were expected to attend. Wild himself was voted four shillings a quarter. On the accession of George I, an event which the Dissenters regarded as a providential deliverance from renewed persecution, there was a memorable gathering at Cadsden to give thanks. The church

could now safely implement its earlier decision to buy land and build a meeting-house, but even when this was done the members in the Chilterns were directed carefully to attend the breaking of bread at Cadsden every two months. In 1720 John Goodchild was seeking subscriptions for the support of this meeting, and about 1725 it was moved to "Ascot" (qu. Askett or Alscot?); no doubt the Chiltern members were becoming fewer. Wild himself is last mentioned by name in 1712.

34. ROBERT FELLOW, a farmer of Bletchley, was one of sixteen separatists in that parish in 1663; he then had two children unbaptized. He was charged with absence from church at fifteen Sessions between Easter, 1683 and the end of 1686. All these proceedings were taken on presentments by the parish constables; a year later, under the Indulgence, he was constable of Bletchley himself. At the Epiphany 1688-9 Sessions, held at Aylesbury during the confusion of the Interregnum, Robert Fellowe and John Chapman of Bletchley were bound over in £20 to appear and answer charges by John Littleheale of Edmonton. The proceedings are unexplained; at the Midsummer Sessions Fellow appeared and swore allegiance to William and Mary, and his recognisance was discharged. He represented the church of Wing at the General Assembly in 1692 and the General Association in 1699. His house was registered for worship in 1693; he served as juror in 1696, was again sworn in as constable in 1699 and is last mentioned in 1702.

35. WILLIAM DAVIS is elusive. He may be William, the son of Thomas Davies, who in 1662 obstinately refused to come to Dorton parish church. One William Davis was licensed at Trumpington under the 1672-3 Indulgence; it may be noticed, however, that no other signatory of the Orthodox Confession accepted a licence from Charles II. Another, or the same, William Davis represented Rainham in Essex at the General Association, 1699-1704. In 1691 one Mr. Davis, a Dissenting minister, was active at Olney, where, according to the Vicar, he presumed to inveigh against the Established Church, to hold unseasonable meetings at night and to administer unlawful oaths to his proselytes "to oblige them not to depart from their Principles."

NOTES

⁵⁰ Stephen Dagnall was active in the district in 1646. Henry Larimore (see No. 26) was no doubt a Baptist by 1648, for his son, aged twenty in 1668, had not been christened. The church at Wendover, which is descended from Cuddington, dates itself 1649. The date 1716 given for Ford in the *Baptist Handbook* refers only to the present building.

⁵¹ The late Mr. A. E. Webb informed me that this was Dr. Whitley's opinion. For Risborough, cf. J. Owen, *Brief Account of the Baptist Church at Princes Risborough* (1863), citing J. Collett, *Christ's Counsel to Troubled Hearts* (1713).

⁵² A farm near Westlington, but in Haddenham parish.

⁵³ Born 1636; son of John Veary and Rose Hunt, who married 1628. One of sixteen "anabaptists" in Cuddington parish in 1662.

⁵⁴ Peter Tyler, *A Brief History of the Churches constituting the Bucks. Association* (circular letter of the Association, 1844; 2nd edition, 1894; edited by James Saunders and dedicated to the churches at Dinton and Ford.)

⁵⁵ His lands, including Headache's Mead and Dossett's, were rated at £118, increased to £123 10s. in 1711.

⁵⁶ C. O. Moreton, *Waddesdon and Over Winchendon* (1929), p. 189.