

Baptisms at Whittlesford, Cambs, 1760

(A NOTE)

MR. J. MAYNARD, a correspondent to the March, 1960 issue of the *East Anglian Magazine*, quotes an account of a baptismal service held at Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire, in the year 1760. The account was found by Mr. Maynard in a manuscript book written by his aunt about 1880, but it seems that the original document from which the account was taken is no longer extant. Through the kindness of Mr. Maynard and the editor of the *East Anglian Magazine*, the extract from the 1880 book is here reproduced :

An old manuscript in my possession gives an interesting account of a public baptism in the river at Whittlesford in 1760; 48 persons were baptized near Whittlesford Mill, which was owned by Mr. Ebenezer Hollick, lord of the manor, and himself a baptist.

On a fine May morning about 1,500 people assembled together and at 10.30 Dr. Andrew Gifford, fellow of the Society of Antiquarians and teacher of the baptist congregation in Eagle Street, London, ascended a movable pulpit.

All heads were uncovered and there was a profound silence. After the address, the administrator (who that day was a nephew of the Doctor) came to the riverside accompanied by several baptist ministers and deacons and the persons to be baptized.

The men came first, two by two, without hats and dressed as usual except that, instead of coats, they each had on a long white baize gown, tied round with a sash at the waist; such as had no hair wore white linen caps. The women followed the men, two by two, all dressed neat and clean, their long gowns being of white linen.

It is said that the garments had knobs of lead at the bottom to make them sink. Each had a long silk cloak hanging loosely over her shoulders and a broad ribbon tied over her gown beneath her chest and a hat on her head.

For about 10 minutes the administrator stood expounding *Acts*, Ch. 9, vv. 26 to 39 and then, taking one of the men by

the hand, led him into the water. When he came to sufficient depth he stopped and, placing himself on the left side of the man, he put his right hand between his shoulders, gathering into it a little of the gown to hold. His left hand fingers he thrust under the sash before and the man putting his two thumbs into that hand, he locked all together by closing his hand, and then saying, "I baptize thee, etc." he gently leaned him backward and dipped him once.

As soon as he raised him a person in a boat took hold of the man's hand, wiped his face and he was led into the house and assisted to dress. After the men, the women were baptized, a female friend taking off their hats at the riverside.

In a personal letter Mr. Maynard states that an account, identical with the one above, is contained in a second book which he has, but this account is prefaced with :

Copy from the memoirs of the life and writings of Rev. Robt. Robinson late Minister of the dissenting congregation in St. Andrews Parish Cambridge; Mr. Robinson for several years baptized publicly at Whittlesford in the river adjoining the house of Ebenezer Hollick Esq a wealthy and respectable member of his society.

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