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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

The Baptists of Reading

1652-1715

WHEN, in 1891, C. A. Davis published his history of the congregation now meeting at King's Road, Reading¹ he had apparently no suspicion that the earliest pages of its first Churchbook contained the records of a General Baptist Church. This was because Joseph Ivimey, upon whose sketchy account² of the congregation's early days Davis uncritically relied, was also unaware of the true situation. Consequently Davis quite unwittingly confused the early section of his story by attempting to read the records of the General Baptists as if they were Particulars.

Oddly enough, however, a document which Davis himself quoted suggested the real truth of the matter. This was the trust deed³ of the meeting-house given to the church in 1692 by one of its members, a feltmaker named James Roberts. This described the church as⁴ "The Congregation of Baptists in Reading whoe hold the Universall Love of God to all Men in sending his Sonne into the World for the Redemption of all Mankind." Such a description, of course, could never be applied to a congregation of Particular Baptists⁵ and, since the trustees named in the deed⁶ were also mentioned in the early pages of the Churchbook, there can be no doubt that it was to this congregation that the deed referred.

The story of the Reading Baptists' early years was made even more interesting when, during 1695, the General Baptists made the first tentative moves towards an eventual union with the Particulars. Ever afterwards the united congregation sought fellowship with the Calvinists. It now seems certain also that it was to this union that Benjamin Stinton referred in 1717 when he asserted that⁸ "Some societies consist of two churches united, who, before their union, one were truly termed *generals*, and the other *particulars*. But upon the principle of charity, and for the sake of the public good, agreed, to throw away these marks of distinction and to walk together in love, as for instance, the church at *Reading*." It is most unfortunate that the records of the only other provincial congregation mentioned as having taken a similar step by Stinton, that at Coventry, are not now extant for this period.

In view of this somewhat involved situation it is necessary to treat the history of the two congregations separately until their union in the late 1690's. The history of the united congregation can then be traced, not without difficulty due to the fragmentary nature of the source materials, until the settlement of Jonathon Davis in 1715.

The General Baptist Congregation from 1656.

The first page of the Churchbook was headed "the Booke of Records for the Church at Reading in the Countie of Berks began in the yeare of our lord god: 1656." On the following page its purpose was further explained as "A Booke of Remembrance toe kepe in Memmory the things of god that are acted among those that have taken upon them ye profession of his Name so yt they may Be able to giue an account off all things yt are accted in there generation." After some shorthand notes relating to the years 1678-1680 and two further blank leaves the next entry, in different handwriting, was a lengthy and important account of some arrangements made for the ordering of the congregation's life dated "the last of the eyght moneth." No year was given. However, since the entry after that was made in December 1660 (the tenth month as the calendar was still normally calculated) and in the same handwriting, these decisions can be tentatively dated as recorded in October (the eighth month) 1660. The shorthand notes giving, apparently, names of members were presumably inserted by some nameless, and somewhat careless, scribe out of chronological order.

The arrangements made were the following: five brethren, John Masson, James Maynard, William Lamden, John Shipway and Ambrose Freeman, were appointed "ouerseers". Their responsibility was to heal any rifts which might begin to appear in the fellowship, to appoint visitors for the members "in the seuerall quarters of the towne", to arrange for preachers both in the town and for the countryside, to care for the congregation's finances and to preside over churchmeetings and "debates in the Congregation". Furthermore, whilst the overseers were to have general pastoral responsibility they were to be able to call upon the assistance of "any of the preachers" and of the visitors. These latter were appointed, and their names recorded,⁹ at the same time. A registrar also, was elected, one "brother Westwood", and it was decided that he should "obsarue what members shall from time to time absent them selues from the assemblings of the Church at there usial owers one the first dayes; that is to say at eyght in the morning and one in the afternone in the winter: and in the somer time at seven in the morning and in the afternone as aboue said." It would be his duty to give the names of absentees with insufficient excuse to the overseers. Finally it was recognised and recorded that all the members had a pastoral responsibility for each other in addition to the burden assumed by the overseers.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from these arrangements made towards the end of 1660. First, they reflect no apparent influence at all from either the General Baptist *Confession* of 1651¹⁰ or that published in London in March 1660¹¹ and this, with the complete absence of other evidence suggesting wider links, may be taken to suggest that, at its beginning, this congregation was rather isolated. Secondly, it seems reasonable to assume that its foundation dates

from some while before the commencement of the Churchbook in 1656.¹² Thirdly, it also seems reasonable to assume that a congregation requiring five overseers and six visitors and which had, in addition, preachers active in the neighbouring villages, may well have been quite sizeable.

The next entry in the Churchbook was made, as has already been noted, in December 1660. This, and another made in the same month, probably mention the only member about whom anything much is yet known from outside sources in the early years. On 2 December 1660 "brother Roberts and brother Maynard" were dispatched to inform one John Atwater that he had been excommunicated. The other entry noted that the sum of eleven shillings and six pence remained "of the collection in brother Robarts his handes dec. 10th 1660." "Brother Roberts" was, in all probability, Daniel Roberts, the father¹³ of that James Roberts who, in 1692, was to give the meetinghouse to the church.

The earliest mention of Daniel which has been traced was by Christopher Fowler in 1655¹⁴ in the course of his pamphlet war with John Pordage of Bradfield¹⁵ and others over the latter's alleged irregularities of faith and conduct. Roberts had appeared as a witness in Pordage's defence and Fowler, who described him as a feltmaker,¹⁶ sought to undermine his testimony with a thumbnail sketch of Roberts's spiritual autobiography:¹⁷ "this person was first a separatist, then a preacher *de se*, then a dipper, and a breaker of bread, then an *Anti-Sabbatarian* . . . then an Arminian . . . now, a simple compounded¹⁸ Anabaptist." If this catalogue be taken at face value, and to do so seems entirely reasonable, Roberts was one of those few who moved from the Particular Baptist position to that of the Generals. Incidentally Fowler here authenticates the existence of *one* General Baptist in the district a year before the Churchbook opens.

No further information about Roberts, after the reference in 1660 which suggested that he had been acting in some way as treasurer to the congregation, has been found until 1672. As will be seen¹⁹ the Berkshire Baptists early felt the weight of persecution after the Restoration and it is hardly surprising that the church records between 1660 and 1678 were blank. In 1672, however, a licence was granted to him under the Declaration of Indulgence as²⁰ "Daniell Roberts of Reding in Berksh. to be a Anab. Teache. Sept. 5th and his house there allsoe." Evidently at this time he was the congregation's leader. Meanwhile Jeremiah Ives, the well-known General Baptist evangelist and controversialist, was granted a licence the same day and was also described as "of Reding."²¹

At all events, some two years later a letter from Roberts to Ives was printed at the close of a writing published by another General Baptist leader, William Russell, which was entitled *Quakerism is Paganism*.²² It appears that a certain William Loddington had intervened, on the Quaker side, in a violent controversy which was then raging between the Baptists and Quakers of London. But Loddington claimed to be a Baptist at a time when no loyal Baptist was expected

to have a good word to say for the Quakers. Hence Ives had written to Roberts (an indication that he regarded him as the leader) to enquire whether, as seemed to be the case, Loddington were a member of the Reading congregation. Robert's reply was as follows: "I received yours, and advised with the Brethren about it, and the *Answer*; which is *That we do not own William Luddington in any such relation as Communion with us, neither do we know any principle of Religion that he is steadfast to.* But about ten or twelve years since he was here in Prison . . . (as Mr. Mason²³ can tell you) . . . looked upon by all *to be a Quaker* . . . he had wrote a book two years since . . . and going to print it: but Mr. *Maynard*²⁴ perswaded him to the contrary." The letter was dated from Reading, 6 December 1674, and concluded "*Your brethren in Christ.* Signed by Consent, by Daniel Roberts."

When Loddington replied to Russell, in *Quakerism no Paganism*,²⁵ he took occasion to comment somewhat acidly upon Roberts and his brethren. He first remarked upon the present size of the congregation saying²⁶ "unless there be a very late increase, *they need not fear the late Act against Conventicles.*" Since the Act defined a conventicle as a gathering of more than five persons over the age of sixteen in addition to the family living in the house this was a rather crushing retort. Loddington then insisted that, far from being a Quaker, he had been a Baptist for the last twenty-seven years and that this was the first time the Baptists had disowned him. Indeed, although Roberts charged him with instability of conviction, he claimed that,²⁷ "in all this time I never joyned, or commonly Assembled with any other people but them. In all their Dangers and greatest Sufferings I have been Partaker with them, not as it were of Necessity, but Choice." Furthermore, he confessed Robert's earlier influence upon him when he asserted that²⁸ "by his perswasion, I left a certain for an uncertain way of livelyhood, to my great loss, that I might be serviceable to him and others upon a Christian Account. There we continued in Church Fellowship until the Heat of Persecution brake all pieces, and made us Brethren in Tribulation also." It is clear that Loddington had the better of this exchange and that Roberts had done him a great deal less than justice: this whole incident serves to illustrate something of the personal bitterness between Baptists and Quakers at the time.

Little evidence now remains by which the "heat of persecution" in Reading can be documented²⁹ but in 1664 the churchwardens of the parish of St. Lawrence, Reading, reported, in the year of the first Conventicle Act,³⁰ "Wee have noe popish recusant within our pish but many which wee suppose have not of late come to Church who are (for the most pt of them) imprisoned in the Common Gaole soe farr ass know (sic) there remaining."

The last two references to Daniel Roberts in the Churchbook indicate that, by January 1681, he had for some reason become estranged from some members of the congregation and that it was decided to make a formal attempt to clear the matter up. This proved

successful and the last reference to him read, "Memorandum yt Uppon ye 23: of May 1681 ye Church being met together did unanimously agree yt Bro: Danell Roberts is a member still of ye Church of Reading Alsoe it is agreed of by the church at the same time that Brother Roberts was worthy of blame for not making good his place in the Church." After 1681 nothing further has been discovered about him apart from the mention,³¹ in the deed of 1686, which seems to imply he was still alive then. Daniel Roberts, glimpsed for a few moments amid the mists of a local congregational history, was, in his loyal, narrow, stubborn, bigoted way typical of many of those whose names are completely forgotten yet who, through a generation of persecution, held firmly to their convictions. Their courage should not be underestimated, nor the price they often had to pay. It is perhaps, some index to the quality of that generation in Reading that even the fragmentary records which remain make it clear that at least three of them left sons who held to the same cause: Daniel Roberts whose son was James and James Maynard and Ambrose Freeman whose sons took their fathers' names.

But the story of Daniel Roberts has carried this study beyond the chronological order of the Churchbook. Whilst no record remains from the years between 1660 and 1678 the silence was at last broken with the appointment, 26 September 1678, of "our well Beloved Brother John Rance to be our Minister." This event seems to have marked an attempt to re-organise the church after a period of what may have been almost total collapse. The next entry after the note of Rance's appointment concerned a decision, reminiscent of one taken in 1660, 11 May 1679, to have two members appointed each month to act as visitors and "to take notice of such as neglect coming to meeting; and those that faile to be at our church meetings those times when we Break bread" The two were to enquire into the reasons for such absences and, if dissatisfied, to bring the matter "before the Church". The following January saw three deacons appointed, Richard Quelch, James Maynard Jnr. and Robert Ayres.

When a loan was recorded, 28 March 1680, to Christopher Burgis on condition that "if ever God did raise him up in the world that then he should pay backe this money againe to the Deacons to be put into the Church Stocke" it drew contributions from several families³² whose names were known as churchmembers in earlier years. At about the same time³³ William Butler also became a deacon to "assist our Bro. Maynard and Bro. Quelch" and he seems to have become treasurer for, 25 March 1683, the church ordered him to make a payment, on their behalf, of £5 to John Rance.

It was during this period, from 8 December 1680 to 27 May 1682, that the church accounts, entered in the Churchbook,³⁴ have some fifteen references to payments made to "Brother Ketch" mostly either for his board and lodging with churchmembers or for food for his horse. On three notable occasions he stayed for periods of four, eight, and twelve days. The important exception to these entries for food and lodging was one dated 1 January 1682 which read as

follows: "Paid . . . according to the order of the Congregation a quarters pay to Bro. Ketch which amountid to £3.10." The traditional view, held by C. A. Davis on the authority of Joseph Ivimey and unquestioned in Dr. E. A. Payne's *The Baptists of Berkshire*, is that this visitor was Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) of Southwark.³⁵ Keach had once himself been a General Baptist and now was the Particular Baptist minister of the congregation meeting on Horslydown, Southwark.

Certainly two other visitors, if rightly identified, suggest that the Reading General Baptists were not especially exclusive in their attitude to other Baptists: one was "Brother Stennett", almost certainly Edward Stennett, the Seventh Day Particular Baptist leader from Wallingford,³⁶ and another was "Bro. Plant", perhaps Thomas Plant, minister at the Barbican, London. This church was one of those which took a middle position between the Particulars and Generals, and which had shared in the Baptist-Quaker debates in which Loddington and Daniel Roberts had played their parts. Thomas Plant tended to be sympathetic towards the General Baptists himself and was a friend of Jeremiah Ives.

In spite of this argument, however, considerable objections can be urged against the traditional identification of "Brother Ketch" with Benjamin Keach. These, when added together, must make any student extremely cautious in accepting it and may well incline him to accept the suggestion made in the note³⁷ that either Henry or Joseph Keetch of Soulbury, Buckinghamshire was more likely to have been the visitor.

Meanwhile it is clear that John Rance's ministry was not an especially strong one and that it was not, in any modern sense, a full-time task.³⁸ This conviction is further strengthened by the fact that, on 21 May 1682, James Maynard the younger was appointed to share in "the ministration of the Gospell to the Congregation." Later that summer³⁹ the Church paid fifteen shillings "for halfe a years Rent for ye meeting Roome". This was, presumably, no longer in Daniel Roberts's house, as at the time of the Declaration of Indulgence ten years before, and it seems possible that payment for the hire of a regular "meeting Roome" indicated the church's feeling that times were becoming easier, at least in Reading.

Apart from a few entries concerning other money payments and a decision taken, 3 June 1683, to appoint Rance and seven others to enquire into some unspecified disorders⁴⁰ "in the Congregation" no other entries of importance were made before 1692. But, on 5 March that year, the church decided to⁴¹ "set apart to or three members . . . to Correct any disorder or disorderly proceeding that may arise amongst us." Twenty-two men and eleven women signed an agreement "meekely and readily to Receive and Forbeare their Christian Admonitions." Nevertheless it is clear that this did not include the whole membership since William Butler was one who, for whatever reason, did not subscribe to it.

In 1695, however, the church either met more often or the records

were more faithfully kept. On 24 April that year Mark Key, a General Baptist preacher from the White's Alley Church in London, who had had to resign his work there for health reasons, made his first appearance in the Reading records when he was invited to preach "once euerie Lords day" and, with two other members, was appointed to visit all the members before the next churchmeeting.⁴² On 9 June the first mention of the coming negotiations for union with "Mr Ward⁴³ and his Church" in "Preaching and Praying" was made when Mark Key, "Bro. Wigg", and Ambrose Freeman (whether the elder or, less probably, the younger was not made clear) were deputed to discuss the matter with the Calvinists and report back at "the first opportunity." On 23 June the delegation reported that the other church were "willing for union" but on condition that only Ward and Key should preach on Sundays. To this the General Baptists could not agree. On 21 July, however, a delegation from "the Congregation In Castle Street" reported that they had had second thoughts about this and would like to discuss the matter further. Key, Butler, Freeman, Willmat, Boote and Wig were to meet the other representatives, it was agreed, on "ye 24th of this instant at 5 of clock in ye Afternoone at Bro Wigs." After that meeting, just a week later on 28 July, another churchmeeting agreed that "This Meeting Be Removed Near to the Beare." Whilst it is clear that the union was to be achieved in two steps, first by preaching and praying together and only later, by holding the Supper together, the phrase "That This Meeting be Removed" is difficult to explain. In view of the fact that only in 1692 had the congregation come into possession of their own new meetinghouse, which is known to have remained in the church's hands,⁴⁴ it seems that the removal in order to worship with Ward's congregation must have been very temporary.

The records now again become scrappy and unclear. It appears, from the fact that "Brother Dadly" was at intervals asked to administer the Lord's Supper, that John Rance, whose signature appeared for the last time in the account of the meeting on 28 July, had almost finished his course and that the union between the two churches was not yet consummated. On 24 January 1697 Mark Key was appointed to administer the Ordinance until further notice and since no further reference was made to the proposed union it cannot now be decided whether this had been completed. Whether or not, however, it appears that Key was paid as pastor,⁴⁵ and received additional payments toward the cost of some fairly extensive journeyings. Evidently he had recovered his health. The last mention of Mark Key in the Churchbook was in September 1700. He has next been traced at his reception into membership, 27 February 1702, at the Particular Baptist Church in Devonshire Square, London.⁴⁶

Granted the fact that the Reading congregation Key began to serve in 1695 was General Baptist the progression of his theological development seems fairly easy to understand. He came to Reading to convalesce and naturally joined a congregation of the same type as his home church. In sharing the negotiations for union at Reading

he came to share the Calvinist position and hence joined the Devonshire Square church where he eventually became pastor.

There is only one entry in the Churchbook between 1700 and 1712 and that concerned the graveyard. Each burial was to cost 2/6 and, of the seven men who signed the entry, five are known to have been members of the General Baptist congregation. In 1704, however, William Butler⁴⁷ who had been a deacon ever since February 1680, bought a house and garden from James Roberts for £40, which stood to the east of the meetinghouse site and, in the following year, handed it over to the church as a gift, to be used for the support of a preacher or for the relief of poor members.

As will later be seen the latest date for the completion of the union was 1708 but it may well have been complete before Mark Key left Reading in 1700. Unfortunately conclusive evidence has not been found.⁴⁸

The Reading Particular Baptists from 1652.

Although there is no Churchbook extant for this congregation it is possible to glean some information about its earliest years from the Abingdon Manuscript⁴⁹ which gives details, from 1652-1660, of an association of Particular Baptist churches of which Reading was one of the three founder members.

This association whose representatives, after the first meetings at Wormsley,⁵⁰ became accustomed to meet at Tetsworth, a village a few miles out of Oxford on the London road, eventually grew so numerous and so scattered that it agreed to divide in two. Not only did the sister groupings keep in touch with each other but they also communicated with London and with other similar gatherings all over the British Isles.⁵¹ The normal pattern of the Tetsworth meetings was for gatherings of messengers from the member churches, usually two representatives from each congregation, to meet twice a year for two or three days of unhurried discussion of problems connected with the life and witness of their congregations.

As the result of the problems of faith and conduct brought before the messengers for their joint solution a body of decisions on various matters, with scripture reasons annexed, was built up for the guidance of the churches. It must be realised that these men were trying to think all the old questions out afresh in the light of their understanding of the Bible and in an attempt to provide virtually a new framework of *Baptist* casuistical divinity. By trial and error they were seeking to build up a pattern of inter-church relations, of the duties of members to each other and to their churches.

The three founder congregations were Abingdon, Reading and Henley.⁵² On 27 December 1652 representatives from Reading and the other congregations signed a reasoned declaration of the need and theological basis of inter-congregational co-operation,⁵³ at Tetsworth. Next year, 16-17 March, two representatives of the Reading congregation, William Millward and John Deane, signed "the Agreement of the Churches" as the basis of the Association.⁵⁴ At a further

meeting in June 1653 Millward and James Cowdrey⁵⁵ signed the account of the proceedings. At a meeting in December Millward was again accompanied by John Deane,⁵⁶ and in March 1656, the next occasion when the names of the messengers were recorded, Millward attended and the other delegate was John Man.⁵⁷ It was at this gathering, 11-14 March 1656, that the assembled messengers answered two queries from Reading. To the question "How and by what means and rules of Scripture may any person be justly judged a visible believer" the messengers answered: "a visible believer may be manifestly discerned and known by these two things: his profession or confession of Christ and his practise or conversation; and the agreement betweene both these." The second question was: "If a member of a church contrarie to advice and counsaile take an unbeliever for a yoke-fellow, whether such a one deserves to be dealt with for the same?" The reply of the messengers was firm and not unreasonable: "it is the duty of believers about to marie, earnestly to endeavour to get godly yoke-fellows; if such who are church-members be found despising, slighting or rejecting wholesome counsaile herein, they then are reproveable" and if they continue recalcitrant "they are to be put from among ye Saints."

Millward's name appeared among those present on other occasions⁵⁸ but it was not until the report of the meeting held 14 September 1658,⁵⁹ his last attendance, that another name of a Reading messenger appeared again in the records. This was William Goodale and with them the two brought another query from their church about a new problem which had arisen. The question was stated thus: "If a brother engaging himself by promise and contract to a maid to marie her, (the parents on both sides giving their consent, and leaving him to his libertie to marrie her when he will) doe before the consumation of marriage goe in unto this maide; then what is this act by scripture to be judged?" Questions such as this probably only went before the assembly of messengers at their general meeting when the church found itself divided. It would therefore seem, both from this query and the other two which have just been mentioned, that probably there was both a more and a less rigorist view held at Reading. The messengers, however, had no doubts at all and informed the questioning church bluntly that pre-marital intercourse was "a great sin."

At the spring meeting in April 1659⁶⁰ Reading was represented by two men whose names had not earlier appeared, these were Thomas Smith and John Mallsop. They brought with them a report on the state of the church: "The church appointed their messengers thus to signifye; That through mercie they are unanimous (sic), and sound in fundamentalls: that they are well settled as to ye order of the gosspeil; though some among them have or bene formerly staggered &c: yet generally, as[to the] generalitie of their members; they confesse a dec(1)ination as to the measure of their love to god and to his wayes and to the saints: but they have a sense of it upon their hearts, and are troubled: And yet some of them are found through the grace of God verie lively and vigorous." The messengers themselves mentioned

two specific matters—one brother “sore burdened with a dead and dull heart” and another “sincerely comforted in spirit” although judged to be at the point of death. At the same meeting it was decided that a deputation of seven from the associated churches, among them John Deane, should visit the Henley church in order to settle a dispute there and that Reading, Henley, and Kingston Blount should assist the Longworth church it being in a “low istance (as to temporalls)”.

William Goodale represented Reading again at the spring gathering held 24-5 April 1660, just a month before Charles II returned in triumph to England, with a political situation which was, from the point of view of such Christians as the Baptists, rather threatening. At all events only five churches were represented and even Abingdon was among the absentees. On this occasion Reading reported that,⁶¹ “As to the foundation-truths of the gospell, they remaine firm and also as to matter of order. but as to spirituall gifts, they are sensible of a decay, and are groaning under it. Also complaints are made of little growth in grace, and little love manifested. It is desired yt praise be given to God for their aforesaid establishment; and prayers made for the supply of what is wanting.”

A letter was sent from this meeting to the associated churches, signed by the messengers among whom Goodale's signature stood first, summoning them to a special emergency gathering in view of the poor attendance on this occasion. They wrote,⁶² “we have appointed the next meeting at the same place, on the 19th day of the 4th moneth next coming; desiring and hoping that there may not then be a further need of a further pressing of this matter. Although we be very sensible of the travaile and expenses yt these meetings doe cause, and therefore could have desired that the next meeting might not have bene so soone; yet the failing now complained of, having hindered very much the completing of our work, we have thereby bene induced to appoint the next meeting to be at the time now specified.”

The final meeting in the Abingdon Association MS was the one now summoned. It was held 19-20 June 1660 and eleven churches were represented.⁶³ Among the messengers was Thomas Smith of Reading who reported that the members of his church “remaine as it was declared at the last meeting. They are generally in peace; but one brother is under admonition. They have had no addition.” No autumn meeting was arranged but the next was appointed “to begin on the 3rd day in Easter-weeke, 1661. in ye afternoone”. Whether or not this meeting took place cannot be known for certain since with this note the report ended and the manuscript closed. It seems, however, rather unlikely that it took place since, later in 1660, Henry Jessey published a letter dated 16 July that year from six of the leaders of the Association by then lodged in Reading Gaol.⁶⁴ Only one of them, John Jones, had attended the June gathering. The new government began by being, and continued to be, immensely fearful of the threat to national security posed by left-wing political plottings. Too many Baptists had been linked with the Fifth Monarchists for

them to be able to run Association meetings without being suspected of planning subversion.

There is no other certain evidence concerning the Reading Particular Baptists between the Association meeting in June 1660 and the London Assembly of 1689. On the other hand there are two pieces of external evidence which bear on this period together with an interesting piece of internal oral tradition.

First, under the Declaration of Indulgence, on 5 September 1672, the home of one Mary Kenton⁶⁵ was licensed for Baptist meetings in Reading. Her name is not found among the scanty General Baptist records and it is possible⁶⁶ that she was a member with the Calvinists.

Secondly, the church which had met during the days of the Commonwealth in London in Petty France and which had then been closely linked with the Abingdon Association met together in a similar fashion with a number of other churches 1678-1683. These meetings were held in London, Hemel Hempstead, St. Albans and Abingdon. It is quite possible that meetings held in this area, so similar to that of the Abingdon Association at its widest extent twenty years or so before, would have included the Reading Baptists once more.⁶⁸

The third piece of information, which is certainly intended to bear upon the period of persecution, was contained in Ivimey's record to which reference has already been made.⁶⁹ In this he reported that during the years of persecution they "used to meet for worship in Pignie's Lane on the banks of a branch of the river Kennett. From the back door of the house where they assembled they threw a bridge across the stream; that when interrupted by the informers they might make their escape." On a map of Reading, published in 1802, during the pastorate there of Ivimey's informant, "Pinkney's Lane", off Castle Street and the main Bath road, in the west part of the town and leading down to an arm of the Kennett was clearly marked.⁷⁰ It will be remembered that, during the negotiations of 1695, Ward's congregation was described as "the congregation in Castle Street", an address which goes some way to support the tradition. The statement which Ivimey also printed, that John Bunyan "was very intimate with the people at Reading", and which was somewhat embellished by C. A. Davis in his account, seems only reasonably well authenticated and must, unfortunately, be received with more caution than the "Pignie's Lane" tradition.⁷¹

At the Particular Baptist assembly held in London 3-12 September 1689⁷² the letter sent afterwards to the churches, and other documents also, were signed by a number of leaders, among them William Facey⁷³ who as pastor, with Reyamire Griffin⁷⁴ as messenger, represented the church at Reading. In 1690 the second Assembly report⁷⁵ printed no names of delegates but did provide "An Account of the several Associations of the Churches in England and Wales." There the "Association of the Churches in Abbingdon, &c." included Reading and eight others several of which had been linked together in the Association which had met a generation before. This Association was continued in 1691,⁷⁶ then, in 1692⁷⁷ the names of delegates were

published again. From Reading Facey and Griffin had dropped out and the church was represented by "Jos. Ward" as *minister*. Judging from the General Baptist records, if Ward were not yet pastor, he certainly was by 1695.⁷⁸

As has been noted there is no evidence for the actual date of the union in Reading. It had, nevertheless, presumably taken place before 29 October 1707⁷⁹ when an association between the Abingdon congregation and other neighbouring churches was re-established which included Newbury, Wantage, Faringdon, Coate and Witney but not Reading. The messengers at Abingdon for this occasion "being satisfied of each others soundness in the fundamentalls of ffaith and Church discipline" agreed that from this time forward the association should be "carefully and orderly maintained". The absence of Reading, a founder member in 1652, represented at the Assemblies of 1689 onwards, and a member of the Abingdon Association from 1690, surely indicates either divided counsels at Reading or some uncertainty, among the associated congregations, as to Reading's present status doctrinally. Certainly it seems reasonable to assume that this absence is a further indication that the union was now an accomplished and a public fact.

At the next meeting of the Association, held at Wantage, two messengers from Reading brought a letter from that church asking to be admitted by the others. The key paragraph of the letter ran as follows:⁸⁰ "Dear Brethren by these wee Informe you that wee highly Approve of and Readely Consent unto all those Articles of Agreements proposed by you and Communicated to us; and Desire at this time and for the future to Joyne and make one with you in the same. In Order to which; wee have with this (at this time) sent to your Assembly (as our Messengers) our Beloved Brethren Tho: Flower and and (sic) Tho: Goodwin; with full power to Act in our behalf; in Consort With you; Desiring the Lord may Render them servisable upon this Account." This letter was signed "at our Church meeting the 2 day of the 2 month" by forty-seven brethren including a number of those who had been members of the General Baptist congregation such as the two Ambrose Freemans and James Roberts. Apparently the associated congregations had already discussed the matter and, when the Reading messengers had signed the following agreement, their church was admitted:⁸¹

"We whose Names are underwritten being Messengers from ye Baptized Church In Reading do by ye appointment & speciall direction & in ye name of ye said Church promise & agree to & wth ye Churches above mentioned to hold and maintain the Consociation with them According to ye termes & methods in this book before specified or any other which shall be unanimously agreed upon."

At the September meeting in 1708 Thomas Flower and James Knotts were the messengers but the letter from the church revealed no details of its inner life. In the letter sent out from the Association, however, some news was given:⁸² "In Reading one added, one proposed for baptism & Accepted, two dead likewise severall under

bodyly indisposition by reason of a prevaileing distemper for whom ye prayers of ye respective churches are desired."

In 1709 the meeting of the Association was again held in Wantage, 18 June. The church letter, dated 12 June 1709, commended their two messengers, Thomas Flower and Edward Billson, and reported that "since your Last Meeting of this Nature, wee have had three Removed by Death; and 7 Baptized and Added to ye Church." Whilst the fellowship was reported to be at peace the spiritual health of the individual members was confessed to be very varied.

The following year, however, a new note was struck in the Reading report to the association held at Abingdon 31 May, which commended as its messengers William Banks and John Glover. The church expressed its gratitude to its sister congregations and, especially, to Abingdon for "those frequent needfull & exceptable (sic) Supplies wch wee have Had in this our Destituted Condition." They hoped that this help would continue until God should "sett A man over this Church" as pastor. The Association letter expanded this information somewhat and mentioned that⁸³ "one hath beene added to the Church of Redding and two more Baptised but one hath beene taken from thence by Death, also thir Pastor is removed from them by reason whereof they are brought to great straits and inconveniency."

It was in these circumstances that the messengers devoted special, but not entirely comforting, attention to the situation at Reading in their Association Letter. They wrote,⁸⁴ "we Judge that it highly concerns you of the Church of Redding, to be deeply sensible of the displeasure of God which seems to be manifested against you, in that he hath suffered you to be bereaued of yr Pastor, who was formerly very serviceable amongst you; It is likely to be a dark season when such Luminarys suffer an Eclipse; and haue you not Just Cause to fear that it is a sad Omen portending approaching calamitys; We therefore exhort each of you to lay the matter to heart, and consider of your own ways, that you may be sensible how you haue offended, and may humble your selues under ye mighty hand of God, and reforme what is amiss . . . In the meane time it concerns you to continue your commendable care to maintaine your meetings, by providing acceptable persons to minister among you, and it will become you as members of the same body to haue a speciall care one of another that you may maintaine peace and purity amongst your selues: Improve yr abilitys for mutuall edification, and let a hearty concerne for ye Cause of Christ induce you to be zealous and forward in promoting the same." The most likely person whom the church had lost as pastor would seem to have been Thomas Flower⁸⁵ but this cannot be certain because of the lack of Churchbook entries 1705-1712.

No letter from Reading to the Association in 1711 has survived: probably none was written for no messengers were sent to the meeting held at Abingdon 23 May that year. This in itself was probably a further indication of the church's leaderless state. The next entry in the Churchbook falls before the Association meeting in 1712. On

2 March 1712 a subscription list for the support of the ministry was opened and the signatures of twenty brethren and eight sisters promised support amounting to £29.13.0. per annum.⁸⁶ The largest promise was made by James Roberts of £6. All the promises were to be redeemed quarterly. This entry was introduced by the following statement: "We whose names are hearunto subjoynd, being such who have given up our selves to the Lord & to each other, in a solemn Covenant & Union: by which we are Constituted a Church of Christ: Its thereby become (not only an article of the abovesaid Covenant, which we ought to have a Tender Regard vnto, but) also our Indispensible duty: according to the vtmost of our Abillitys & capacitys, to support the Intrest of Christ, in defraying whatever Charge may attend itt, in Providing & Maintaining a Gifted Ministry as also all other Necessary Charges."⁸⁷ Unless the covenanting referred to was a very recent occurrence, and there is no reason to believe that this was so, the likelihood is that it took place when the two congregations were united some years before.

However, the church's spirits were low and the letter accompanying their messengers Thomas Goodwin and James Mundy, lamented the loss by death of a young and especially promising member, William Banks (who had been a messenger in 1710), and reported that although fourteen had been added to the church in the last two years (of whom three had been by transfer) five had died. Then, rather guardedly, it said, "as to ye present frames of our members, we Refer you to our Messengers, who have Lately visited many of them." Apparently the messengers from Reading described the situation as rather unhappy since the associated messengers, in their letter to the churches, wrote,⁸⁸ "we understand there are in that Church such discords as prevent them from their Comfortable Communion at the Lord's table." In December the Churchbook reported a decision which was evidently part of an attempt to pull the membership together. They decided once more to appoint two men to note absentees from Sunday worship and to report them on "the Evening of the same day to the Church that care may be taking (sic) to visit them & know their reasons for their absence."

Nevertheless during the ensuing months the church was still despondent and the tone of their letter to the Association, dated 26 May 1713, betrayed their poor morale. They were depressed not only about themselves and about the likelihood that they would obtain a pastor but also about the state of the churches generally. Their messengers, James Knotts and George Elliott, reported⁸⁹ three dead during the last year and no additions to the membership. The following year they were more cheerful, largely, it appears since they were receiving considerable help from a certain Mr. William Benwicke⁹⁰ in carrying on "the publick worship amongst us." Even so they had to report no addition to their membership and, on the contrary, that one member had died and that several others who lived at a distance had "not been with vs ffor som Considerable time." Sadly enough the Association which had begun with real enthusiasm in 1707 appears to

have ceased meeting after the gathering held on 19 May 1714. Perhaps this was but one more example of the fading spirituality of the times. On the other hand it is possible that the constitution of the Association was at fault.

In 1715 the Oxford Baptist meetinghouse was burnt down by a mob, Christianity in Britain was going into a decline which would last for a generation, and Jacobite rebels attempted to rock the still uneasy Hanoverian throne. But nonetheless the Reading Baptists thought they had entered a new era for in that year a new pastorate was opening. On 1 April a list of members was drawn up⁹¹ on which there were one hundred and four names, thirty-eight men, and sixty-six women. For all these Jonathon Davis assumed pastoral responsibility⁹² "about ye beginning of July 1715" perhaps five years after the last minister's departure. Now they had got a minister they were to find that this did not necessarily mean that all would now be well—but that is another story.

The Reading Baptist records, fragmentary and disparate as they are, together with their use by Ivimey and Davis, provide a classic case for the review, in this generation, of the accepted Baptist myths and legends. It is clearly necessary that the authorities of the past should be ruthlessly questioned and that hypotheses, however hoary with antiquity's ennobling gloss, should be rigorously re-scrutinised. The results of such a process may not always be to provide the old casual certainties but they will provide a new dimension to our grasp of our "authorities". It is necessary that today there should be a microscopic study of Baptist history, if only to serve as a check upon the too fluent pens of those who advocate and practice the inaccuracies and inadequacies of the telescopic approach.

In this study there have, perhaps, been rather richer new results than can normally be hoped for: here a tangled early history of General and Particular Baptists has been unravelled by the use of other documents than the Churchbook alone. Here, in the person of Daniel Roberts, a new, if still shadowy, personality is introduced to the student of Baptist history: a man, it may be, in both his faults and strengths, more characteristic of Baptist people than some who have monopolised the headlines of denominational history. Here the spiritual biography of Mark Key has become a little more intelligible and two old legends about John Bunyan and Benjamin Keach have been taken down and dusted. If little more can be claimed for the references to Bunyan and Keach than an inconclusive balancing of possibilities, *for* in the case of Bunyan and *against* in the case of Keach the possibility and the necessity of going behind Ivimey's bland assertions has been demonstrated and a most interesting example of oral tradition within a church has been disinterred.

NOTES

¹ C. A. Davis, *A History of the Baptist Church, King's Road, Reading*. Reading, 1891.

² J. Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*. Vol. 2 p. 68f. The whole of this section from Ivimey is transcribed and discussed at note 37.

³ This document, together with others and including the earliest church-book which is cited as "Reading Churchbook" in this article, are still in the possession of the King's Road, Reading Baptist Church but have been deposited with the Berkshire Record Office, Shire Hall, Reading. I would like here to acknowledge the great courtesy and helpfulness of the Berkshire County Archivist.

⁴ C. A. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 18 and corrected from the Deed of 29 September 1692.

⁵ Dr. E. A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire*, 1951, pp. 57, 63 appears to have suspected this.

⁶ The trustees were: William Butler, Cordwainer; Ambrose Freeman, Clothworker; Joseph Wigg, Mercer; Joseph Blackhead, Feltmaker; James Merrifield, Cordwainer; Peter Dadly, Throwster; Mark Smart, Weaver.

⁷ "Reading Churchbook" p. 87.

⁸ This appeared in the course of a letter written to oppose the limitation of the Particular Baptist Fund to Calvinists only and printed by T. Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, Vol. 4. pp. 350-6. For a fuller account of the views of Stinton and Crosby see my "Thomas Crosby, Baptist Historian", *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXI October 1965, January 1966.

⁹ The visitors appointed for the south quarter were: Henry Collis and Sister Horsington; for the west, John Willmat and Sister Stoner; for the north, Jeremiah Willmat and Sister Belchamber. C. A. Davis's explanation (*op. cit.* p. 9) for the omission of an "east quarter" that this was due to the shape of the town is probably correct: at this period Reading was a long, narrow sprawl from north to south with a developing bulge westwards.

¹⁰ *The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations*, London. 1651. There is no evidence of any Reading signature to this document.

¹¹ *A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith*, London. 1660.

¹² Nevertheless C. A. Davis (*op. cit.* p. 9f.) can hardly be taken seriously in his more than inadequate reasons for holding the 1640 date. But note Daniel Roberts as a General Baptist in the district in 1655, see below (note 14).

¹³ Among the documents deposited in the Berkshire Record Office is a Deed of 14 May 1686 transferring the site on which the 1692 meetinghouse was built from Nicholas Gunter to "James Roberts feltmaker" and mentioning "Daniell Roberts of Reading . . . father of the said James Roberts". The site was north of Church Lane in the parish of St. Giles, Reading. This was (see note 9) in the "south quarter".

¹⁴ Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum*, London 1655. See *D.N.B.* for Fowler.

¹⁵ See *D.N.B.* for John Pordage of Bradfield also.

¹⁶ Christopher Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 8. This was also the trade (note 13) of James Roberts.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 14.

¹⁸ The word "compounded" here appears to be a slighting reference to a "General" Baptist.

¹⁹ See notes 23, 30, 64.

²⁰ G. L. Turner, *Original Records of Nonconformity*, London. 1911. Vol. I. p. 559.

²¹ *Ibid.* See *D.N.B.* for Jeremiah Ives.

²² William Russell, *Quakerism is Paganism*, London 1674. p. 96.

²³ Mason was, presumably, the "John Masson" appointed an overseer in 1660.

²⁴ Maynard was, presumably, the "James Maynard" also appointed an overseer in 1660.

²⁵ William Loddington, *Quakerism no Paganism*, London. 1674. He later did become a Quaker and several of his books were listed in Joseph Smith, *Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books*, 2 Vols. London. 1867. Smith reported that Loddington died at Watford in 1711 at the age of 85.

²⁶ William Loddington, *op. cit.* p. 56.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 61.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 56f.

²⁹ Felix Hull, *Guide to the Berkshire Record Office*. Reading. 1952. p. 1. "a fire . . . destroyed all archives of the Berkshire Quarter Sessions of earlier date than 1703."

³⁰ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Oxford, Archdeaconry of Berks. c.130.f. 112, 10 May 1664.

³¹ See note 13.

³² "Reading Churchbook" p. 22. Among them were James Maynard Snr., James Roberts, John Willmat, Marke Smart, Ambrose Freeman Jnr.

³³ The date was probably 28 February 1679/80 but since some items, such as the Burgis loan were evidently entered out of order dates sometimes, like this one, present a problem.

³⁴ "Reading Churchbook," pp. 26-29.

³⁵ J. Ivimey, *op. cit.*; C. A. Davis, *op. cit.* p. 16f.; E. A. Payne, *op. cit.* p. 58.

³⁶ C. A. Davis, *op. cit.* p. 17.

³⁷ It is necessary, at this point, to transcribe the whole of Ivimey's section on the early years of the Reading church and to discuss its historical value. Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, Vol. II. p. 68f.:

"WILLIAM FACEY. He was pastor of the Church at Reading in 1689, and his name appears to several resolutions of the Assembly in that year. He had been a sufferer for the cause of Nonconformity in Dorchester jail, and it is supposed died before the year 1692, as he was not present at the General Assembly. He was the Author of a system of shorthand known by his name. He was, it is probable, succeeded by Mr. Joseph Ward, of whom we have no account; nor of a Mr. Ryamire Griffin who was a *Messenger* to the Assembly in 1689.

We have been informed by Mr. John Holloway, now of Bristol, for several years the pastor of the church at Reading, that the members were at one period greatly persecuted. They used to meet for worship in Pignie's Lane on the banks of a branch of the river Kennett. From the back door of the house where they assembled they threw a bridge across the stream; that when interrupted by the informers they might make their escape. He observes also that it is said, the celebrated John Bunyan was very intimate with the people at Reading, and that he has been known to pass through the Town habited as a Carter, with a long whip in his hand, to avoid detection. This may probably account for his visit to Reading mentioned in his Life. In returning from hence he contracted the cold which terminated his useful course. At one period Mr. Benjamin Keach used to ride from London to Reading, to administer the ordinance of the Lord's Supper to the baptist church there: but whether this was before or after the death of Mr. Facey cannot be ascertained."

i. Ivimey's paragraph about Facey, Ward and Griffin is obviously built upon some private knowledge of Facey and the *Narratives* of the Particular Baptist Assemblies of 1689 and 1692.

ii. Ivimey's second paragraph evidently derives from John Holloway who had been pastor at Reading 1797-1811. Much of it—the details about worship in Pignie's Lane, the John Bunyan tradition, has no basis in the Churchbook records for the period.

iii. Whilst it is reasonable to assume that Holloway had access to oral tradition (and, perhaps, even documents) now no longer available it is noteworthy that he shows no awareness of his church's ambiguous past: partly General Baptist and partly Particular, and this implies that his sources of information were severely limited.

At this point it is only necessary to scrutinise the tradition about Benjamin Keach. Ivimey wrote "At one period Mr. Benjamin Keach used to ride from London to Reading, to administer the ordinance of the Lord's Supper to the baptist church there." It can, I think, be safely assumed, with C. A. Davis, (*op. cit.*) that the basis for this statement is to be found in the Churchbook references to "Brother Ketch". If this assumption is made it seems likely that this was Mr. Holloway's source with or without the addition of oral tradition in the Church. But how reliable was Holloway's source at this point or, how reliable was Holloway's guessed identification?

- (a) "Brother Ketch" is termed so consistently in the Churchbook although Benjamin Keach was, by 1680, a well-known writer and his name was before the public in its correct spelling.
- (b) The Churchbook does not at any point suggest that "Brother Ketch" came to administer the Lord's Supper. He may have done, of course, if for example John Rance were unwell throughout the period. But the point must be made that the administration of the Supper by "Brother Ketch" cannot be documented and may, therefore, be only Holloway's guess.
- (c) Ivimey had evidently not studied the Churchbook personally for then he would have quickly discovered that "Brother Ketch's" ministry was for a period before William Facey's presumed death. Alternatively, if Holloway were the source of this remark "whether this was before or after the death of Mr. Facey cannot be ascertained", this argues a defect in his memory.
- (d) Whilst it has been shewn that this church was prepared to welcome non-General Baptists to its gatherings it would surely, c.1680, be less enthusiastic about receiving Keach who had, in fact, turned his coat and abandoned the G.B. position, for repeated visits.
- (e) Benjamin Keach himself, in *The glory of a true church and its discipline display'd*, London, 1697, p. 16, held that the pastor of one congregation ought not to administer the Lord's Supper in another. If it be argued that his views might have changed the onus of proof lies upon those who so argue.

For all these reasons it seems that the traditional identification must be treated with the greatest caution since it may quite likely rest upon a guess by John Holloway. On the other hand W. T. Whitley, *Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists*, Vol. I. p. xlvi. mentioned two General Baptist leaders named "Keetch", Henry and Joseph, who were known to be active not very far away at Soulbury, Buckinghamshire in 1669.

³⁸ C. A. Davis, *op. cit.* p. 15 wrote "Brother Rance" appears to have received £5 a year "being a token of the church's love", together with the rent of his house at 30s. a year, and his wood, for which there is an item of £1.8.0 in the Church accounts . . . it is plain that this sum was not regarded as a full allowance for maintenance from this fact that it is given, not as payment, but as "a token of the church's love".

³⁹ "Reading Churchbook", p. 29. 7 July 1692.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Rance was to be assisted by Merefield, Rowland, Burgis, Havill, James Roberts, Ambrose Freeman, and Smart.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴² On Mark Key see Ivimey, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 322f. and the Churchbooks of White's Alley (at the Guildhall Library, London) and Devonshire Square.

⁴³ Ward is mentioned in the section dealing with the Particular Baptists in Reading.

⁴⁴ See note 47.

⁴⁵ C. A. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 23 "in 1697, 1698, and 1700, there are accounts which indicate that Mr. Key had become the pastor, for he is receiving £30 a year, besides the expenses of his journeys, for ten of which he is paid £8.15." See also note 86.

⁴⁶ Devonshire Square Churchbook B. (unpaged, cited by date of entry). This, with the other Devonshire Square records, is kept at the Church.

⁴⁷ This deed can be seen at the Berkshire Record Office. (*Cf.* Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 25).

⁴⁸ The almost total blank in the records after 1700 until 1712 (with but one entry in 1705 dealing with business connected with what had been the G.B. burial ground) suggests that the united congregation must have kept some other records during this period. If this were so they are not now extant.

⁴⁹ E. A. Payne, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-9 printed from the Longworth-Cote MS the record of the two inaugural meetings held at Wormsley. These were not recorded in the Abingdon MS. The latter deposited by Dr. E. A. Payne in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, came into his hands too late to be used in his book. It consists of 87 pages (9 in. by 5 in.) in the small, neat, hand of a single scribe. I cite it as the Abingdon MS because (i) internal indications suggest Abingdon as its origin (ii) to speak of the Berkshire Association is to commit an anachronism. (iii) to refer to the Abingdon Association follows the precedent set by the 1690 General Assembly.

⁵⁰ E. A. Payne, *ibid.*, pp. 147-155.

⁵¹ B. R. White, "The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644-1660" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, October 1966.

⁵² According to the Longworth-Cote MS only Henley, Reading and Abingdon were represented at the October 1652 meeting at Wormsley.

⁵³ "Abingdon MS" p. 1.

⁵⁴ E. A. Payne, *op. cit.*, p. 147f. printed the first draft of this agreement.

⁵⁵ "Abingdon MS" p. 3. In the letter to the Association of April 1708 (see note 80) John and Francis Cawdery appear. In the list of churchmembers in the "Reading Churchbook" dated 1 April 1715 John and Francis Cordery, and Sister Cordery.

⁵⁶ "Abingdon MS" p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22f. W. T. Whitley, *Baptist Bibliography*, Vol. I, p. 223 has an entry which may refer to this man.

⁵⁸ May, September 1656. Reading was certainly represented in October 1657 and March 1658 but its messengers' names do not appear. It is probable that Reading was represented at all the meetings: on the odd occasions when messengers were not sent by a church this fact tended to be recorded. No such mention was ever made concerning Reading.

⁵⁹ "Abingdon MS" p. 65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68. As might be expected three female Smiths appear in the 1715 list.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 83f.

⁶⁴ Henry Jessey, *The Lords Loud call to England*, London 1660 p. 24ff.

⁶⁵ Lyon Turner, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 951.

⁶⁶ But it should be noted that (i) not all congregations registered themselves (ii) the other three Reading entries of 5 September were concerned with General Baptists (iii) one congregation often registered more than one meeting-place. Hence it is quite possible that Mary Kenton could have been a General Baptist.

⁶⁷ Devonshire Square Churchbook C. The Petty France congregation appointed messengers to meetings at Hempstead and Abingdon in 1678, at London and Hempstead in 1679, at St. Albans in 1680, at Abingdon in 1681,

at Hempstead in 1682 and at London in 1683. Ivimey, *op. cit.* III, p. 333, who had seen and used this churchbook, gave a list of these meetings.

⁶⁸ At the autumn meeting of the Abingdon Association in 1657 Kensworth, Eversholt, Pyrton and Hemel Hempstead suggested they should form a separate association to cut down travelling and in order to draw congregations nearer them into association with them. This policy brought results and soon the new association included churches in Bedford, Luton, Newport Pagnell, Watford and Stukeley (which was in Bucks).

⁶⁹ See note 37 quoting the whole section from Ivimey, discussing his source, and the reliability of the "Ketch" identification with Benjamin Keach.

⁷⁰ Charles Coates, *The History and Antiquities of Reading*, London 1802. Plate 1.

⁷¹ The need for caution is due to two factors (i) the Reading Particular Baptists were likely at this time to have been "closed-membership" (as they were in the time of the Commonwealth quite certainly) a group with whom Bunyan was totally out of sympathy. (ii) The link with Bunyan was based upon oral tradition which can be seen to be at work even in C. A. Davis's time re-shaping and adding to the fragmentary material in Ivimey. It should be remembered that, perhaps through mere looseness of phrasing but perhaps through the indefiniteness of his information, all Ivimey actually said about the link with the Reading Baptists was "it is said that the celebrated John Bunyan was very intimate with the people at Reading." It can probably be assumed that this reference to "the people at Reading" in such a context does mean the Particular Baptist congregation but it must be noted that this is an assumption. Furthermore Ivimey was clearly quoting Holloway quoting (probably) oral tradition when introducing the statement with "it is said".

At all events it is instructive to set C. A. Davis's version against Ivimey's (the latter was quoted in full in note 37): (*op. cit.*, p. 19).

"The congregation, as we have seen, had met for worship in Pigney Lane, on the river bank. It appears to have made use of a large boat-house on the banks of the Kennet, not far from the Bear Inn. Certainly in this place, in 1688, John Bunyan preached his last sermon but one. He had on more than one occasion visited Reading to preach the Gospel in the days of persecution disguised as a waggoner, with a long whip in his hand to avoid detection. On these occasions the service was probably held in the usual meeting place of the congregation; whether this boathouse or some other room. In August, 1688, he paid his last visit; his errand being to reconcile a father to his son who lived in Bedford. This task of the peacemaker accomplished, he preached on Wednesday or Thursday, August 15th or 16th, in the boathouse on the Kennet. This circumstance was attested to me by our late aged member Miss Greenwood, who had it from her father, in whose young days Bunyan's visit was a matter of common recollection among the elder members."

In this section it is not possible to discern with certainty where the details were culled from. Some sources were: the Churchbook for the Bear Inn, ref. 28 July 1695, Ivimey for the legend of the Carter, Miss Greenwood, and Mr. Davis's own efforts. But it seems that Bunyan's sermon "in the boathouse on the Kennet" was, rightly or wrongly, firmly embedded in the traditions of the church. This being so, and since it is not possible to reach behind the tradition, it must be accepted with an awareness that it is not without difficulties.

Davis's own section, as quoted above, is an interesting example of the weaving together of documentary sources, secondary works and oral tradition, by the amateur church historian.

⁷² *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the General Assembly*, London. 1689. pp. 8, 27 and the appended, unpagged, note giving "The Names of the Receivers of all Money to be raised."

⁷³ Ivimey, in the section quoted in note 37, has given the only published sketch of Facey. There is more to be done concerning him.

⁷⁴ In the 1715 list of churchmembers were Giles Griffin and Sister Griffin,

both of "Oakingham". Giles Griffin also figured upon the list of those in membership when Daniel Turner's pastorate commenced in 1741.

⁷⁵ *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1690. pp. 10-12.

⁷⁶ *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1691. p. 14.

⁷⁷ J. Ivimey, *op. cit.*, I. p. 503.

⁷⁸ Nothing more is known of Ward from the Churchbook. However he was present at the Assembly of 1693 in London (Ivimey, *op. cit.*, I. p. 532). An Ann Ward was listed in 1715 as a member and a Griffin Ward of "Oakingham" appeared in the lists of both 1715 and 1741.

⁷⁹ "A Record . . . of an Association of the Churches of Newbery, Wantage, Farington, Abingdon, Coate and Witney." Unpagged MS in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford. Records from 29 October 1707 to 19 May 1714.

⁸⁰ A Letter from Reading dated 2 April 1708 in a bundle of various MSS one belonging to John Rippon. Other letters, quoted below, from Reading to the Association; were dated,

12 June 1709

May 1710 (undated but sent to the Association meeting 31 May)

8 June 1712

26 May 1713

16 May 1714.

⁸¹ "A Record . . . of an Association", *op. cit.* Entry dated 8 April 1708.

⁸² *Ibid.* Entry dated 23 September 1708.

⁸³ *Ibid.* Letter from the Association dated 31 May 1710.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ There is a certain ambiguity in the references to the "lost" pastor in the documents; expressions used in this connexion at this period describing a church as "bereaved" do not necessarily mean the pastor had died. Assuming that he had merely removed to another church it seems possible that this was Bourton-on-the-Water. Flower's name was apparently unknown to Davis in connection with the church at Reading c.1709. However, in the Churchbook entry of 4 December 1735, recording the withdrawal from the pastorate of Peter Belbin, the relevant section reads "whereas Providence hav cast our Beloved Frind & Brother Mr Thos Flower Senr among us at this time, tis agreed to desire Him on this ocation to Administer ye Ordinance of ye Lords Super among us ye next Lords day." The only other reference to Flower was in the list of members dated 23 July 1741 where a marginal note recorded that Mary Steavens and Jane Seagrove were admitted into membership by him on 5 December 1736. (C. A. Davis's own contribution concerning Thomas Flower is not helpful. He quoted a tombstone "against the west wall of our burial ground" which "bears the inscription, 'Here lies interred the body of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Flower, who died June the 10th, 1735 (old style, meaning 1736), aged 61 years'." It must be self-evident that Davis (*op. cit.*, p. 28) read the inscription incorrectly—no difference between old style and new style dating can possibly turn 10 June 1735 into 10 June 1736 and, in any case, the Churchbook's reference had him receiving people into membership several months after Davis's revised date for his death). It happens that there was a "Mr. Tho Flower Senior" known in Baptist circles in the 1730's. He was pastor at Bourton-on-the-Water when the church meeting in Unicorn Yard, Southwark wrote to Bourton 28 March 1736 ("Unicorn Yard Churchbook," *L.c.*), asking that the church there should release Thomas Flower Junior to them to become their pastor. Bourton did release Thomas junior, somewhat unwillingly, and his father assisted at his ordination on 29 April 1736.

In view of all this, and the fact that the gravestone is no longer visible, together with the fact that Bourton-on-the-Water has no records prior to the ministry of Benjamin Beddome, it yet seems possible that Thomas Flower had

an earlier ministry (c.1707-1710?) at Reading. The name is sufficiently uncommon to justify the assumption that there was no *third* "Thomas Flower" in Baptist circles during the period concerned.

⁸⁶ Little is known about the comparative finances of Baptist churches at this period but, it will be remembered, Mark Key had been paid £30 p.a., and, at his death in 1719 Benjamin Stinton, Keach's successor in an important and influential pastorate, was receiving £52.9. His successor, William Arnold, *after* the church had been split and half the members had set up another church with John Gill as their minister was paid (if the subscription list is a fair guide) £84.7.0 in 1720. The church was, at Stinton's death, about twice the size of the membership Jonathon Davis found in 1715 at Reading and, no doubt, the Southwark congregation was far wealthier.

⁸⁷ "Reading Churchbook" p. 113 (pinned in).

⁸⁸ "A Record . . . of an Association" *op. cit.*, Entry of 11 June 1712.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Letter of 26 May 1713.

⁹⁰ The letter from Reading to the Association said they had failed to persuade him to serve as one of their messengers on this occasion because he was "fully Bent to vizitt his ould friends at ye association at troubridge."

⁹¹ "Reading Churchbook", p. 118f.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

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