Early Baptists in Leicestershire and Rutland

(I) ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: SAMUEL OATES IN RUTLAND, 1647-1648

BAPTIST preaching and meetings are first recorded in Rutland early in 1647, and were pioneered by Samuel Oates. Contemporary records survive in the Leicestershire Record Office, New Walk, Leicester, in letters written or received by Rutland’s High Sheriff of the time, Abel Barker of Hambleton Hall; and in the House of Lords Record Office in petitions from parish ministers in and around Rutland presented to the House of Lords.¹

(i) Letter from Abel Barker to Sir Thomas Hartopp, March 1646/7.²

“For his much honoured Freind sr Thomas Hartopp, Knight at Leicester these pesent.
Worthy sr I have beene much importuned by the ministers of this county for the apprehendinge of one Samuel Oates (a weaver as they say) who preacheth constantly in this countrey, & yesterday I Rec’d a lre from some of them for that purpose, wth I have herewth sent you, & ye declaracon of the house of Comons, requestinge that you would be pleased to doe me the favour to acquaint the Judges therew th & know wt their pleasure is shalbe done therein, or whether they will please to issue a warrant for the conveneing him, before them at the assizes at Okeham. . . .

Hambleton 19mo yo’ gravefull freind & serv’t
Martij 1646 / A Barker”

(ii) Letter from Robert Horsman of Stretton-on-the-Street, Rutland, to the village constables, October 1647.³

“Rutland. To the Constables of Stretton
These are to will and require you in his Ma’ties and his Parliaments Names to take into your Custody the body of Samuel Oates, and to deliver him into the hands of Abell Barker Esqr the high Sheriff of the County of Rutland, to take Security for his appearance at a certaine day (to bee appointed by him the sayde high Sheriff) to answerd to such Articles as shall then bee layde unto his charge touching his gathering togetheer of unlawfull, and disorderly assemblies and dispensing of unsounde doctrine unto the people, whereof faile you not at your
perills: Given under my hand and seale this sixth day of Octob. 1647.

Robt: Horsman"

(iii) Letter from Robert Horsman to Abel Barker, October 1647.

"Sr

Having bin long greived in my soule to see our poor Country beecome soe obnoxious to men of extravagant opinions, and unbrideled spiritts and Toungs to vent them, to the seducing of others, and too long forborne (as my Conscience upbraydes mee) in performing that Duty that every sounde Christian Professor (in this kingdome) ought to looke unto (by vertue of his solemnne Covenant) for the discovering and bringing to just Censure, Such as take liberty (against lawfull Authority) to disperse Heterodox Doctrines unto the People [rest of sentence deleted].

At the last that we might wade us in his Triumph (with others) this noveлист Samuel Oates, a person (commonly) noted for a dangerous schismatick comming to Stretton, and into a Tement of mine, very presumptuously, and against fore-warnings that hee should refraine to intrude amongst my neighbours to assemble people togeather to preach unto, as justly fearing hee might pervert others of my Tenants (as hee hath don some allready) to distast the sound Truth, and to alienate there mindes from there faithfull Teachers, as Hee (and others of his sect) have don both here, and in other Townes; I could not but uppon his obstinacy to persist to act soe illegall and dangerous a Practice but apprehend him (as a Disturber of the Peace of the State and Church, and a particular annoyance to o' County) and send him to yourself as the Cheife Officer for executing such Acts as make for the safety, and weale thereof, to bee by your meanes (on the Countyes beehalf) either presented beefore the Parliament, or other wayes disposed of as you in your better Judgement shall thinke meete: And soe s' not doubting of your care, and sympathy w th mee in these matters, I present you w th my service, and am unfeinedly


Your frende, and servant

Robt Horsman"

(iv) Letter from Robert Horsman to Abel Barker, October 1647.

"Sr

As I have thus far don my duty on the beehalf of the Church to deliver this Disturber thereof into your hands, soe for the satisfaction of our orthodox Ministers, and Professors unto whom hee hath given scandale by his false Doctrine, & disorderly practices, it is desired that you would bee pleased to secure him soe that hee may bee ready to appeare at a day and place to bee appointed by y'self either the next weeke or the weeke following that, to answeare unto such complaintes, and charges as shall
bee objected against him: Persons of his spirit cannot bee suffered without bringing much Guilt & Divine wrath uppon a Church & State: Hee is a malevolent Depraver of our Church, and I beeleeve will bee proved alsoe an Adversary to Magisteriall Governement, and (to say noe more) such men are not to bee slightly past over by you and mee, to have there voage at ther pleasure but should bee stayed, and stoppt from proceeding any farther: I write not this soe much for yr incitation, as to declare my owne sense, and discharge my Conscience in soe weighty a busines; soe desiring to bee certifyed of your purpose and appointement heerein, I rest

Sr
Stretton Oct. 8th 1647.

Your loving frende to serve you
Robt. Horsman

Sr I think it is requisite that some secure place bee appointed least there should bee any Disturbance to hinder proceedings."

(v) Petition to Parliament from parish ministers in Rutland and adjacent parts of Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, December 1647. 6

“To the Hon: ble the Lords and Commons assembled in Parlament
The humble Petition of sundry of ye Ministers of ye Countie of Rutland & ye Parts adjacent
Humbly sheweth
That yo'r Petition" being assured of the sincere intentions and endeavours of the Hon: ble Houses to promote the reformacion of Religion, & ye extirpation of Poperie, Heresie & Schisme according to the Solomne Covenant, & to bring to condigne punishment all such as shall indeavours Contrarie, as appeares by an Ordinance of Both Houses of ye 26 of April 1645. And by a Declaracion of ye House of Comons for ye apprehending of Offenders in that kinde of ye 31 Decemb. 1646, And the expression of their deepe sense of Gods Dishonor in ye spreading of such blasphemies & Heresies as tend to the subversion of the faith with profession to improve the utmost of their indeavours that nothing be done agst the truth but for the Truth as in ye Ordinance for the Fast of Febry. ye 4. Ann: 1646.

Upon Consideracon whereof, we yo'r Pet's are imboldned in pursuance of the said Cov'en, & in discharge of o' dutie to God & the State, to represent unto the Ho: ble Houses the perilous Condition wherein o' Countrie now stands, by reason of divers erronious & seducing spirits lately crept in amongst us, Succeeding one another in their wicked practices, Namely one Wik-, Lambe, & especiallie one Samwell Oates, now settleing himself
amongst us, a Weaver by Trade, & a professed & knowne Anabaptist, who pretends to have his Authoritie from God & not from man: One that hath bene arraigned for the death of a woman Rebaptized by him, for wch and other his grosse misdemeano"rs he stands bound to the good behavio"r. And having bene driven out of other Countries by the hand of Justice is bold to thrust himself into this Countie of Rutland going up and downe from Towne to Towne Preaching and Rebaptizing verie manie and drawing a Concourse of people after him, Appointing his publique meetings weeklie in Barnes & Stables & such unfitt & unseemely places, Sometimes also breaking into Churches, & thrusting himself into o"r Pulpits. And vents most false & Heretical Doctrine of Arminianisme, Antinomianisme, Anabaptisme, Sosinianisme, & Divers tenents tending to that Atheisme (some particulars whereof we do exhibite in the Articles annexed herunto) whereby he draws disciples after him, not onelie to prey upon their Estates for his Belly's sake, but poisons their Soules wth his wck Errors: filling the Countie with divers sects and Schismes, withdrawing them from theire owne Ministers into mutinous assemblies, weeklie and almost dailie, and perverting wholl familys, working divisions even betweene nearest Relations, wch tend not onelie to an apparent Schisme, & seperacon, but to a generall Mutiny through the County, & parts Adiacent of Lincolne, North-hampton, & Leicester Shires bordering upon us. He having of late also dispersed and indeavored to promote that Sedicious paper, called the Agreement of the People: which he hath by himself or his Agents brought or sent to severall Townes in the Countie. All we if not timelie prevented will in all likelihood raise a great Combustion amongst us speedily, The rather because he is now labouring to settle himself & his familie amongst us, to our further disturbance.

In due consideracon whereof we humblie Pray ye Hon: ble House, to cause the said Samwell Oates to be forthwth apprehended & Comitted to safe Custody, according to the aforesd Declaration, And speedily to suppresse all such mutinous meetings & Concourse of People, occasioned by him. And if it seeme good to yo"r wisdomes to ease yo"r selves of the trouble, & us of the Charge & burden of bringing up manie witnesses to London, To grant out a Comission to some Justices & Gentlemen of the Countrie, and pts Adiacent (such as are not tainted wth thes errors, nor have Countenanced such practises) to examine witnesses, & to returne their Examinacons to yo"r Honors; Or wth other course yo"r wisdomes shall appoint in Justice, so as we may be freed ffrom this Disturbance for the present, & secured from the like for the ffuture.

And we shall hartily Pray &c.

John Barry Minister of Cotsmore
Wm Holden, minist'r of Casterton magna.
Josias Beacham, minister of Seaton
Samwell Craddock, minist'r of Thistleton
Kenh: Cheseldine Minist'r of Deene
Tho: Johnson, Minister of Tinwell.
Wm Shallcrosse, minist'r of Glaston
Edward Spinke, minist'r of Castor.
John Ludlam minist'r of Barnack
John Rowell minist'r of little Casterton
Henry ffeild minist'r of Uffington
Jonathan Holled minist'r of Easton
Tho: Perkins minist'r of Burly
Edw: Browne minist'r of Alhallowes in Stamford.
John Bucklie minist'r of Stretton
Edw: Skulthrope minist'r of Riall.
Laur: Hungerford minist of Hambleton
Alexan: Worger. minist of Brasborough
Daniell Caldecot, minist of Sutton."

"Articles against Samuell Oates annexed and exhibited w' th ye Petition to ye Hon: ble. Houses.
Imp's. The said Samuell Oates being a weaver by Trade haveing not lawfull Calling to the ministry, takes upon him to preach and administer ye Sacraments, and being a knowne and professed Anabaptist, hath Rebaptized very many in ye Countye of Rutland, still continuing to seduce more and more to his wicked Errors, and drawing ye people into fancies and separations, preaching in Barnes and stables and severall Houses, venting many Erronious Doctrines, contrary to ye Doctrine and faith received and beleived in ye Church of England
As namely,
1 That Christ dyed for all and ev'ry man, pverting scriptures to ye end, as Esai: 55.1 Gen 4.7.
2 That Eleccon is out of foreseene fayth, & ye ev'ry man hath power to beleive.
3 That ye Church of England is noe true Church.
4 That ye Minist'rs of ye sd Church are Anti Christian preists, periured psons. &c.
5 That ye baptizing of Infants is a marke of ye Beast, and a Cozening of Children.
6 That ye old Testam' is nul'd, and they ye preach it or alleadg it, are Moses disciples, not Chts.
7 That there is noe Saboath to bee observed, but all dayes are alike.
8 That any man may preach & administer ye Sacraments as well as a Minist'r.
9 That ye soule of man was Created mortall, & dyes or sleeps w' th ye body.
10 That ye settling of Religion by a Law is Idolatry & superstition.
11 Hee makes people beleevve, yt his Baptisme hath cured men of ye Gout. & other diseases.
21 y Hee ye said Oates is a man evill & scandalous in his life, & guilty of many Misdemeanors.

1 Hee hath bin openly Arraigned at ye Assizes at Chelmsford in Essex for ye death of a woman.
2 Hee stands bound to ye good behaviour for divers his misdemeanors.
3 Hee Carryeth women about with him from place to place, being absent from their families and husbands 2 or 3 weeks together, plying from them to mayntaine him.
4 Hee dipps women naked, & in ye night, fit for workes of darkenes.
5 Hee sleights & vilifyes the Authority of Parliament.
6 Hee makes mutinyes in ye Country, & give out most dangerous words by himselfe or his Agents of ye cutting of their throats are opposite to him in his opinions.
7 Hee hath lately bin a great disperser and promoter of ye seditious paper Called ye Agreement of ye people, bringing or sending it to divers places through the Countrie.
8 Hee hath prevailed with people to thrust out some good ministers, put into livings by ye Parliaments, and to bring in others put out by sequestracion.
9 Hee most bitterly railes against Ministers, for their maintenance, and yet most basely goes begging about from one to one in their meetings, with his hatt open under his arme to receive their Almes, by which means he robs many of his poore deluded followers for his owne Belly.
10 Hee hath at severall tymes broken into Churches, with his mutinous Companie following him, in affront to ye Ministers of those places, & there vented his wicked Errors in Opposition unto them, even to some of their faces by way of Preaching."

(vi) *Orders of the House of Lords, December 1647 and January 1647/8.*

"31 Dec. 1647.
Whereas Samuel Oates was attached, by Order of this House, and brought to London, but is since escaped:
It is ORDERED, That the Sheriffs of the Counties of North'ton, Lyncolne, Rutland, and Leycestere, shall attach the Body of the said Sam. Oates, if he come into their respective Jurisdictions, and send him up before the Lords in Parliament, to answer the Charge exhibited against him to this House."
ORDERED, That Samuell Oates, against whom there are Articles depending in this House, shall be bound in a Bond of Two Hundred Pounds himself, with two good Sureties in One Hundred Pounds apiece, to the Gentleman Usher of this House, that he shall appear in Person at the next Assizes for the County of Rutland, to answer such Complaints as shall be made against him there; and that the Articles in this House against him shall be remitted to the Persons that brought them, who are to prosecute the said Oates at the Assizes."

(vii) *Petition to the House of Lords from parish ministers in Rutland and adjacent areas, May 1648.*

"To the Right Ho: ble the House of Lords assembled in parlament
The humble Petition of the Ministers of the County of Rutland, & the Parts adjacent

Sheweth That, whereas yo' LoPPs Petition did formerlie exhibite to yo' Ho: r a Petition with Articles annexed against one Samuel Oates weaver, a known & professed Anabaptist, for preaching divers blasphemous & Erronious doctrines; Seducing & Re-baptizing very many in our Countie, and for sondrie other fioulc misdemeano's. Whereupon yo' LoPPs were pleased to cause his Person to be Attached by a pticu1ar Messenger, and after an escape made by him, being againe Apprehended, was by your Ho' Order bound over upon Recognisance to appeare before the Judge of Assises for the Countie of Rutland, to answere such Articles as should be exhibited against him: wch Order tooke no effect by reason yo' Pet: r had not timely knowledg of it, whereby they might have examined their Articles & pro­duced their witnesses against the said Oates: neither did the said Oates put in any record of yo' Lo: PP's order into Court, nor make any Legall appearance, so as the Judg might Legallie proseguate the said Oates. Whereupon the said Oates taking himself wholly acquited & discharged with much more audacious bold­nes proceeds, to prosequete his wicked designe then formerlie he had done, by more frequet gathering of Mutinous assemblies, Venting his blasphemous Errors, Seducing and deluding the people, and Triumphing over the Ministers whom he and all his followers ordinaryly call by the name of Scribes and Pharisies, AntiChrist's Preiste, Persequuto's of the Trinity &c, labouring in all places to bring them into Comon hatred and Contempt: Yea not onelie Contemning ministry, but also outfacing Maigtracy, Yea, uttering most sedicious and Treasonable speeches against Monarchy it self. To the high dishonor of God, the great
incouragemt of rebellion and mutiny, and the woffull distraction of all the Godly and well affected People of the Countrie.

For remedy against all wch mischeivous and destructive Practices yo Pet do againe address themselves to yo Lopwisdom and Justice, humbly submitting and adhering to yo Ho further orders and direction for the suppressing of the said Samwell Oates in his wck designes: And the dissolving of the Scismaticail and mutinous meetings of his deluded followers, so as the Countie may be freed of this disturbance for the present; and secured from the like for the future.

And yo Pet shall pray, &c.

John: Barry:
Josiah Beacham
in the name of the rest.”

NOTES

1 I am grateful to Mr. John Conant, of Lyndon Hall, Rutland, for permission to publish four of the Barker letters (documents i, ii, iii and iv); to the Clerk of the Records at the House of Lords Record Office for permission to publish documents v, vi and vii; and to the staffs of the Leicestershire Record Office and of the House of Lords Record Office for their help.


5 Ibid., p. 27.

6 House of Lords Record Office. Main Papers, House of Lords, 11 December 1647.


8 H. L. R. O. Main Papers, House of Lords, 15 May 1648.

ALAN BETTERIDGE.

(To be continued)

ANNUAL MEETING 1974

Our next Annual General Meeting will be held at 4.0 p.m. on Wednesday, 1st May, 1974. Contrary to earlier expectations, we shall again be meeting in the Institute Room of Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, London. Members requiring tea are reminded to apply for a ticket, sending s.a.e. to the Rev. B. W. Amey at the B.M.S., 93, Gloucester Place, London W1H 4AA. The cost is 15p and a remittance must be sent with the application. Our speaker this year will be one of our own distinguished members. Dr. Marjorie Reeves has chosen as her theme “Joachim of Fiore and some Protestant Radicals”. Please book the date in your diary now.