

Samuel Whitewood, 1794-1860, at Andover

SAMUEL WHITEWOOD was born in Newbury, Berkshire, in 1794,¹ and found peace in Christ under the preaching of the minister of Newbury Baptist Church, Thomas Welsh, who was pastor there 1813-1839.² Whitewood was baptized in 1815 and "was found at once actively engaged in the Sabbath school and in the exercises of the prayer meeting".³ With others he began to preach in the villages round Newbury and, after he had preached a trial sermon before the Church, he was formally set apart for training for the ministry. For a while, as was frequently the case in those days, before he was actually taken into Stepney Academy his minister was appointed his tutor to prepare him for the studies which lay ahead.⁴

In the annual *Report* of Stepney Academy, published in January 1824, it was recorded that "Mr. Samuel Whitewood, who was some time under the tuition of the Rev. T. Welsh of Newbury, has been admitted to the academy at Stepney".⁵ Since all students were required at that time, upon admission, to join one of the churches in London or its vicinity,⁶ Samuel Whitewood joined the church at Bow of which William Newman was pastor in addition to being in charge of the academy. It seems that his progress, academic and spiritual, satisfied his tutors and, in 1827, the *Report* announced his settlement with rather more complacency than later events were to justify: "It was stated in the last report, that Mr. Samuel Whitewood was supplying the infant church at Andover: he has since been ordained to the pastoral office there. The affectionate attachment of the friends who have made exemplary exertion in raising this cause, which early fixed itself upon Mr. W. (and which had no small share in inducing him, with some sacrifices on his own part, to accept their invitation) is unabated; and he has the happiness of seeing increasing numbers attend the means of grace, and the church prospering through the blessing of God upon his labours".⁷

It is, in fact, possible to fill in some of the details of the story summarised by the *Stepney Report* and also to carry it further by means of the records of the Andover Church. The "infant church" there had been formed on 12th January, 1824, by the minister at Whitchurch, the Revd. Phillip Davies, and it then consisted of eleven members.⁸ They certainly appear to have been energetic since they had their first church building opened for worship on 29th December.⁹ Two deacons were then elected at a meeting held on 14th February, 1825,¹⁰ and they were "advised to apply to Stepney Academy for Mr. Whitewood"—no doubt he had become known locally through his preaching in the villages between Newbury and Andover.¹¹ He came for two Sundays, one in March and the other in April and, as a result, the church invited him to spend "five weeks of his midsummer

vacation with us which he fulfilled". After this prolonged stay with them the church wrote to Whitewood in August inviting him to visit them "for six months with a view to a permanent settlement". On 9th September he replied telling them that his tutors had advised him to apply to the Committee of the academy for permission to spend the time in Andover since "his time was not expired" at Stepney.¹² It is a fact that every year the *Report* printed among the rules for admission one in which each student promised "that while he is under the patronage of the society, he will not listen to the invitation of any destitute church, without the knowledge and the approbation of the Tutors and the Committee".

On 28th September he wrote telling the church that the committee had left him free to make his own decision which was to come to them, in the first instance, for three months although, eventually, he did spend a further three months with them. At the close of this period the church invited him to undertake the pastorate but he seems still to have hesitated, perhaps for the reasons hinted at in the *Report*, and asked them to allow him yet another three months before he finally committed himself. When that period came to an end the church renewed its invitation and he accepted. The church then made application "to Dr. Newman for Mr. Whitewood's dismission from the church at Bow which, being received and read at our church meeting, he was regular[ly] admitted a member of this church by the giving him the right hand of fellowship".¹³ He was ordained on Wednesday, 18th October, 1826, at a gathering where the minister of Andover Congregational Church read the lessons and offered the opening prayer, at which his own former pastor, Thomas Welsh, delivered the charge to him and at which two of the then outstanding ministers of the denomination, J. H. Hinton of Reading and William Harris Murch of Frome (soon to become President of Stepney Academy), played leading parts. Seven other ministers shared in the occasion.¹⁴

When the church had originally invited Samuel Whitewood to spend six months with them they had offered him "twenty pounds and to provide him board and lodgings". On his settlement as pastor they proposed to offer him £70 per year and four Sundays a year free.¹⁵ One other significant decision had been taken before Whitewood was appointed: the church had adopted a statement of faith which, while properly Calvinist, did not suggest that those who agreed it on 30th August, 1825¹⁶ held, or were likely to hold, any extreme views about the doctrines of grace. Unfortunately for Samuel Whitewood this whole issue was to become central for his ministry at Andover in less than two and a half years.

Meanwhile he settled down to the pastoral work which was to involve him frequently, so he was later to tell friends in Yorkshire,¹⁷ in preaching five times a week. During 1827 he was married, his wife Martha being a member of the church at Newbury.¹⁸ Samuel Whitewood proved an active ministerial participant in the Southern Asso-

ciation¹⁹ which his church had joined as a result of a decision taken on 28th March, 1825²⁰ before he became pastor.

The first sign of approaching trouble in the church records was the report on 3rd December, 1828, to the church that Mr. George Morgan, who had only been received into membership on 7th October, 1827, being "dissatisfied with the ministry of his pastor, requested that his connexion with the church might be dissolved".²¹ On 23rd February, 1829, Andrew Martin's letter requesting that *his* membership should be ended was read to the church meeting. The specific objections which he had to the ministry of Samuel Whitewood were clearly doctrinal: "he did not believe the moral law to be a rule of life to the believer", "he did not believe in progressive sanctification", "he did believe that the salvation of the church was wholly completed in the eternal covenant of grace—that being chosen in Christ they were justified in him, and sanctified in him and eternally united to him". But the last point reported from the letter pointed to the real problem that Whitewood faced for, wrote Andrew Martin, "a ministry for which he had wished and prayed for years was now in the town and on it he must attend".²² The church, presumably, could do nothing but accept his resignation. There were, however, somewhat happier relations with other Christians in the town: on 17th April, 1829, the day "was solemnly observed by the Independent, Wesleyan and Baptist congregations in the town of Andover as a day for humiliation and prayer on account of the low state of religion in our own souls, in the churches with which we are connected and in the district around us". On 2nd October it was reported that William Rumsey (one of the two deacons) and James Anthony had repeatedly absented themselves from the fellowship. At a meeting later in the month those present were told that Rumsey refused an explanation while Anthony "preferred attending the ministry of another person". Both were excommunicated.

There was no church meeting for five months after this double blow then, on 16th May, three new members were baptized and received into membership. But these additions to the church evidently brought no lasting improvement in its morale for, on 18th October, 1830, the fourth anniversary of his ordination, it was decided by nine out of the eleven church members present at the meeting to send a letter to Samuel Whitewood telling him that they thought that it would probably be good both for him and them if he were "to resign, at a suitable period, the pastoral office".²³ The pastor's reply was commendably prompt:

To the Church of Christ of the Baptist Denomination meeting in High Street, Andover.

Christian Friends,

Most cheerfully do I accede to the proposition you have made and resign the pastoral charge and, at the same time, beg to assure you that the only motive why I did not do it at an earlier period was a desire to serve the interest of the Redeemer in this town. As you

have now expressed it as your conviction that my removal will greatly contribute to the prosperity of the cause and your individual satisfaction I will not trouble you with my services after next Lord's Day, October 24th.

Praying that the Lord may direct you in the choice of a pastor and that he may labour among you with more usefulness and comfort than I have done,

I remain,

Yours respectfully,

S. Whitewood.

Andover. Oct. 20th, 1830.²⁴

What had gone wrong? After all, Samuel Whitewood did not come to Andover from a very different part of the country, nor was he very young for he was over thirty when he was ordained. In addition, no one could argue that the church had not had every opportunity to get to know him, and he them, before his appointment. Furthermore, Whitewood was no ministerial drop-out: he was to sustain a steady ministry at Halifax from 1831 until his death nearly thirty years later, 31st October, 1860.²⁵ It seems quite clear that the trouble lay in the realm of doctrine. The new preacher who had come to Andover and had gathered a second Baptist church had recently seceded from the ministry of the Church of England and evidently held high Calvinist views: his name was Roger Hitchcock.²⁶ It was the powerful appeal of such teaching for a few members of Whitewood's tiny congregation which effectively wrecked his ministry at Andover. It is of some interest that Hitchcock moved away about the same time as did Whitewood²⁷ and it seems that the congregation which Hitchcock left behind is barely remembered among the Strict Baptists of the present day.²⁸

This whole affair is a pointer to the work that needs to be done on the schisms which rent the evangelical world in the first half of the nineteenth century—certainly it was not *all* gain when, in "the excitable years 1830-35 these Strict Baptists gathered a surprising number of converts from the Anglican clergy".²⁹

NOTES

¹ This study arose from a preliminary enquiry undertaken in preparation for a contribution to the story of Andover Baptist Church of which I was once myself pastor and which celebrates its 150th Anniversary in 1974. A major authority for items in Whitewood's own life is the obituary in the *Baptist Magazine*, 1861, 29ff.

² W. J. Lewendon, *Some notes on Newbury Baptists*, Newbury 1940, 21f. Mr. Lewendon remarks, "During this lengthy pastorate he kept a faithful record in the minute book of the meetings".

³ *Baptist Magazine*, 1861, 29.

⁴ *Stepney College Report*, 1824, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷ *Stepney College Report*, 1827, 7f.

- ⁸ "Andover Baptist Churchbook MS 1825-64", 4.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.
¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
¹² *Ibid.* E.g. *Stepney College Report*, 1824, 17.
¹³ "Churchbook MS", 6.
¹⁴ *Baptist Magazine*, 1826, 531.
¹⁵ "Churchbook MS", 16, 17.
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-12.
¹⁷ *Baptist Magazine*, 1861, 29.
¹⁸ *Baptist Magazine*, 1934, 212, 296.
¹⁹ *Baptist Magazine*, 1827, 186; 1828, 82; 1829, 299.
²⁰ "Churchbook MS", 15f.
²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.
²² *Ibid.*, 32.
²³ *Ibid.*, 37.
²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38f.
²⁵ T. Michael, *A brief historical account of the First Baptist Church Halifax*, Halifax 1890, 19-24.
²⁶ "Churchbook MS", 47.
²⁷ Hitchcock went to Devizes, Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part I* (2 ed.), 416, note 2.
²⁸ Ralph F. Chambers, *The Strict Baptist Chapels of England: the Chapels of Surrey and Hampshire*, London 1952, 95.
²⁹ Owen Chadwick, *op cit.*, 416. Another, not entirely dissimilar, case was rather better handled at Cambridge in 1837. See K. A. C. Parsons (Ed.), *St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge*, Cambridge 1971, 25.

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The M.Phil. degree of the University of Nottingham was awarded in July 1973 to John Arthur Oddy, B.A., for his thesis "The Reverend William Richards (1749-1818) and his friends: a study of ideas and relationships". Microfilmed copies are being deposited at King's Lynn Central Library, Norwich Central Library, and Brown University Library (Rhode Island).

William Richards—historian, pamphleteer, lexicographer, and extensive correspondent—is seen in the thesis as a hard-hitting, independent, alienated radical (a "rogue elephant") in both religion and politics. Though he remained a convinced Baptist, he abandoned Calvinistic orthodoxy in favour of (ultimately) a somewhat unorthodox Scripture-sufficiency Arminianism. He was greatly influenced by Archibald McLean, and the author (an Anglican) traces the two men's different errors to the acceptance of the principle of Scripture sufficiency, which in the eighteenth century had a tremendous vogue.

Richards' political stance was that of a mordant "censor" without many positive ideas. However, he and his circle of friends—e.g. Caleb Evans, Rees David, and Morgan John Rhees—constituted a section of Dissent in action, thinking, talking, propagandizing.