

James Bradford of Hill Cliffe

THE Baptists of Cheshire who, as the Hexham records indicate, were to be found in the county by the early 1650s, began to congregate at Hill Cliffe from about 1660 on. They were assisted in this by William Morris, who had married Lydia, the daughter of Col. John Wigan to whom the origin of Baptist work in Manchester owed so much. Hill Cliffe became an important centre for Baptist work along the Lancashire and Cheshire border.

James Kenworthy in his *History of the Baptist Church at Hill Cliffe* (London, no date but between 1893 and 1907, whilst James Samuel Hughes was minister) records the low condition of the church towards the close of the eighteenth century, but whereas W. T. Whitley says that the work closed altogether in or soon after 1785 (*Baptists of North West England*, London 1913, p. 154) Kenworthy says (*op. cit.* p. 72) "no regular preaching took place at Hill Cliffe, but a company of godly women met regularly every Sunday for prayer and praise and so kept the light burning." Kenworthy then relates that in 1792 John Thompson, who had earlier been a Wesleyan, but had become persuaded of believers' baptism, was gathering a congregation every Sunday in his home at Wash Lane, Latchford. On the invitation of a trustee of the Hill Cliffe chapel, Thompson brought his people to join the remaining members of Hill Cliffe, and himself became pastor to the flock. The work flourished again, so that by his death in 1825, the membership numbered between 170 and 180.

James Bradford, born in 1786, worshipped at the Daresbury parish church. By 1808, however, he was to be numbered amongst the Hill Cliffe Baptists, for that year, through the ministry of Thompson, he was converted, baptised and became a member. He must have shown evidence of gifts, for his pastor encouraged him to preach in neighbouring causes. He married, and had nine children, one of whom married a later pastor of Hill Cliffe, Abraham Kenworthy, whose ministry there extended from 1839 till his death in 1876. The couple were the parents of the aforementioned James Kenworthy.

On the 14th September 1819, a new meeting house was opened in Cherry Lane, Lymm. That service was led by John Thompson, but he was assisted by James and John Swinton and by James Bradford. By the next year, the Hill Cliffe people recognised that their pastor was failing in health, so John Swinton and James Bradford were ordained co-pastors with Thompson for the Baptists not only of Hill Cliffe, but also of Lymm and Little Leigh. Swinton died on the 13th October 1825, and Thompson on the 21st November the same year. Bradford continued as sole pastor till his death on the 10th February 1830. Kenworthy says (*op. cit.* p. 82) "On March 21st Mr. Moses

Fisher preached the funeral sermon from Hebrews xi. 4: 'He being dead yet speaketh'. Hundreds attended who could not gain admittance to the chapel; the service was, therefore, held in the field adjoining the burial ground. More than 1,600 persons were present, great attention and deep solemnity were manifest." Moses Fisher ministered in Liverpool 1813-1840, first in Byrom Hall but later in Cockspur Street. The only other observation on the above record is that surely the length of time between the death of Bradford and the sermon preached by Fisher indicates that this was not the funeral but a memorial service.

Kenworthy (*op. cit.* pp. 77f.) says "October 12th, 1820, John Swinton and James Bradford were ordained co-pastors with Mr. John Thompson, over the Particular Baptist Church at Hill Cliffe, Cheshire (near the town of Warrington), and the two branches, one at Cherry Lane, in the Parish of Lymm, and the other at Little Leigh. The church at Hill Cliffe, has flourished under the pastoral care of Mr. John Thompson more than thirty years. But the venerable pastor being worn out with old age, two brethren were set apart to the pastoral office to assist him in his abundant labours. Mr. James Lister delivered the introductory discourse and received their confession of faith. Mr. Moses Fisher prayed the ordination prayer. Mr. Lister delivered the charge from Acts xx. 28. Mr. Fisher preached to the people from I Thess. xii. (sic.) 15, and Mr. John Thompson, the aged and venerable pastor, concluded the very interesting service in prayer."

There has recently come into my possession the confession of faith given by James Bradford on the occasion of his ordination. Written legibly on cartridge paper, folded once to foolscap size, it reads:

October 12th

1820

James Bradfords Confession of Faith

I Belive the Bible to be the word of Inspiration that the prophets spoke as they ware moved by the Holy Ghost

I Belive in the Three Equal Persons in the Goded the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost. I belive in the fall of man or Original Guilt from our first Adom that man is dead in tresposes and sins Elecion prisonal and eternal (These words are interlinear.)

I belive in the work of the Spirit to Convince of sin and Regenerate the people of God. particular Redemption through the Atonment of the Blood of Christ Justification by the Imputed Righteousness of Christ as free gift of God to all belivers the final perseverance of all real belivers. the Resurrection of the Dead. by him who is the Resurrection and the Life the Eternal happiness of the Righteous the Eternal Misery of all Impenitent Sinners who die in ublife, also belivers babtism by Imershion and the Super of the Lord to belivers as thee Commands of Christ.

And that belivers are called to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things

I belive in the moral Law to be a Rule of Conduct.

to state the dealings of God to my soul my firs begining was with the people of God wo worshiped in this house under the Preaching

of our honourable Pastor and Father Thompson and being born in the family I have continued with them believing them to be a part of the Family of God

I have been a member 13 years out of which time Six years I have been employd in preaching in vileges and amongst this people my motives for preaching has been the wellfare of Souls and the Glory of God and I have had great encourigment Still to go on in this good work of the Lord preaching Christ Crucified to pirishing sinners

I except the Call of the Churches to be Co paster with my elder pastors John Tompson and John Swinton in preaching and admines-tering the ordences of the Lord house.

From the same source as produced the above document have come two legal documents. One dated the 22nd November 1774 is a *Deed for the establishment of Trustees of the Meeting House at Hill Cliff* and the second, dated the 12th September 1866, is of the *Appointment of New Trustees of the Baptist Chapel at Hill Cliff in Stockton with- in Appleton in the County of Chester and Conveyance of the Trust Estate*. Unlike the Confession of Faith which is an original, these two documents are copies, though contemporary ones. In addition there is a small book in which, as it appears, a copy has been made of the Hill Cliffe Church Book for the period 21st November 1834 to 4th November 1900.

All these documents are now lodged in the library at Baptist Church House.

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