

Dissenting Meeting Places in the City of London

BETWEEN the mid-seventeenth century and the nineteenth century there were nearly three hundred places of Dissenting worship within the square mile of the City of London. Some of these were listed by G. H. Pike in *Ancient Meeting Houses* (1870) and by Walter Wilson in *Dissenting Churches in London* (1808-14), but a large number escaped their notice. I have attempted to compile a complete list noting their location, denomination, earliest known date, and whether it was a house-meeting or some more formal arrangement, and giving in each case the source of my information. A fuller survey of this aspect of City history is therefore made available. In addition to printed material my search has covered licences for such chapels and other manuscript material held in the Guildhall Library, London, Lambeth Palace Library, and Dr. Williams's Library. In almost all instances I have been able to discover the denomination of the meeting. Congregations described in the sources as Anabaptist, Anti-Moravian, Baptist, Brownist, Calvinistic Baptist, Calvinistic Methodist, Congregationalist, Dissenters of the Church of Scotland, Fifth Monarchy Men, Free Thinkers, Huguenots, Independents, Methodists, Moravians, Non-Jurors, Particular Baptist, Philadelphians, Paedo-Baptist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Relyianist, Sabbatarian Baptist, Sandemanian, Scotch Seceders, Swedenborgians, Unitarians, and United Brethren all had places of worship in the City. The list is cross-referenced so that sites can be identified either by location or by denomination. Although the index notes the better known chapels such as the meeting place of Isaac Watts in Mark Lane, Poultry Chapel, and of course City Temple, the emphasis has been placed on the less well known sites of Dissenting worship.

Meetings held in private homes do occur among the Bishop of London's licences; these nearly always appear to be Independent groups, as at the house of Abigail Taylor in Bow Lane (1704),¹ at the house of Obediah Skinner in Great Distaff Lane (1709),² and at the house of Arabella Moreton in Long Walk (1710).³ Unless the owner did apply for a licence, tracing early house meetings is a near impossibility. Well known mansion houses in the City were also used for meetings; Crosby House in Bishopsgate Street was the location of a Presbyterian meeting in 1683,⁴ and Fishers Folly in the same street was used by Presbyterians and Independents between 1660 and 1730. Fishers Folly⁵ has an interesting history for it was used for Catholic worship in the sixteenth century: Godfrey Anstruther in *The Seminary Priests*, vol. I (1968),⁶ notes that it was used by Father John Butler in 1594. A more unusual request for a licence for a chapel was made in 1782 when application was made for an Independent chapel in Fleet prison.⁷

Livery halls often rented accommodation to Dissenting groups, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: among the halls known to be used in this manner are those of the Brewers, Coachmakers, Plaisterers, Girdlers, Loriners, Glovers, Pinners, Armourers, Salters, Plumbers, Tallow Chandlers, Woodmongers, Embroiderers, Pewterers, Carpenters, Turners, Haberdashers, Dyers, Glaziers and Joiners. The Halls do not appear to have had any particular allegiances. As one group left another moved in; this is particularly noticeable with the Turners' Hall, where the premises were used by Baptists 1688-1695,⁸ Quakers 1698-1700,⁹ Independents 1699(?) - 1704(?),¹⁰ Peculiar Baptists 1704-1727,¹¹ and Independents 1727-1740.¹² The takeover of premises was quite usual and also applies to hired rooms as in Bull and Mouth Street, occupied by Quakers from the 1660s to 1760, and then by Sandemanians from 1760 to 1778.¹³ Some smaller streets were particularly favoured by a number of meeting places. Red Cross Street, now disappeared beneath the Barbican, seems to have housed several groups, mostly Baptist, in the eighteenth century; one chapel here was occupied successively by Scotch Seceders, Independents and Baptist Sandemanians.¹⁴

Eating houses and coffee houses could serve for meetings formal and informal. In 1683 a group of Independents seems to have met regularly at a coffee house in Exchange Alley,¹⁵ while Bakers Chop House in Cornhill¹⁶ was a well known meeting place for Dissenting ministers in the early nineteenth century.

This index, now housed at the Guildhall Library, is available for consultation. As the compiler of the index, I should welcome greatly additional sources of information concerning the meeting places especially new sites as yet unlisted.

NOTES

- ¹ Lambeth Palace Ms. VP/IC/4b.
- ² Guildhall Library Ms. 9579.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, vol. 3, p. 364.
- ⁵ Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster and Southwark (1808-14)*, vol. 1, p. 398; *Under the Dome*, vol. 9, p. 7; Guildhall Library Ms. 9579.
- ⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 59.
- ⁷ Lambeth Palace, Fulham Papers: London 110.
- ⁸ Wilson, vol. 1, p. 135f; G. H. Pike, *Ancient Meeting Houses (1870)*, p. 417; *Under the Dome*, vol. 9, p. 16f.
- ⁹ Wilson, vol. 1, p. 137f.
- ¹⁰ Wilson, vol. 1, p. 139f; Pike, p. 418f; Guildhall Library Ms. 9579.
- ¹¹ Wilson, vol. 1, p. 143; Pike, p. 420f; Guildhall Library Ms. 9579.
- ¹² Wilson, vol. 1, p. 146f.
- ¹³ *Antiquary*, vol. 35, p. 11; *CHST*, vol. 3, p. 365; Wilson, vol. 3, p. 364f.
- ¹⁴ W. T. Whitley, *The Baptists of London (1928)*, references (55), (94); Wilson, vol. 3, p. 303f; Pike, p. 472f.
- ¹⁵ *CHST*, vol. 3, p. 365.
- ¹⁶ *Under the Dome*, vol. 9, p. 9.