

THE GENERAL BAPTIST CHURCH
NETHERTON, DUDLEY

"Messiah" Baptist Church, Cinder Bank, Netherton, Dudley closed on 7th October 1979 because the buildings were unsafe. They have since been demolished. The present church had been reorganised on 20th February 1820 after a lapse of about twenty years. It holds a church book¹ which commences with a membership roll of persons baptised in the years between 1654 and 1787.

The first page is headed "The names of the persons which have bine baptizid into the body of Christ which is the Church". The next page starts "The names of the persons which have been baptizid into the body of Christ which is the Church meeting together at Netherton or thereabouts".

Page 1 has these entries:-

Edward Williams baptizid in the year 1654 under laying on of hands --

Maid Elder of the Church in the year 1665.

He departed this life April 14th 1707.

Hugh Davies baptizid and under laying on of hands.

Maid deacon in the Church of Christ 1665.

He departed this life January 26 1691/2.

Isaak Ocke baptizid and under laying on of hands.

John Newey baptizid and under laying on of hands -- 64.

He was a Deacon. Died May 1710. A man of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.

Solid, constant, chearfull, active and usefull.

Robert Pires baptizid and under laying on of hands.

Janne Pires baptizid and under laying on of hands.

The roll continues page by page in similar style, but with varying handwriting as the keeper of the book changes. Having seen John Newey's Will² and other wills which he appears to have written for members it is obvious that he was the scribe for a time. Indeed there is a cross heading between a baptism in 6th month 1697 and 3rd month 1698 which says "Hereafter follows the names of those persons that have been baptizid since this book came to my hand which belongs to the society and church of God, Assembling at Netherton. witness my hand. John Newey". A similar entry over the name of William Elwall occurs in 1712 or 1713. He became a deacon in 1710 after Newey's death.

A scribe wrote out the current membership list in 1698, when the number on the roll was 113. Another roll totalling 112 was entered in 1710. In 1718 yet another current list gives 85 names. There is a high measure of agreement between these lists and the names on the baptismal roll, but inevitably we have the problem of female members changing names by marriage, so leaving us guessing who may have married whom. Another trap for the unwary is that the baptismal roll does not necessarily include

all who were received "by letter". In all, approximately 350 persons are on the roll, with baptisms dated between 1654 and 1787.

This was a General Baptist Church. It sent messengers to an Association at Colten Hall³ on 3rd June 1717 (or 1713. The figure is indistinct) and again on 6th June 1720, and to Namptwich on 30th May 1721. Two lines indicate that it was held at Netherton on 30th May 1726. After the death of Samuel Buffery in 1712 the church held a period of prayer and fasting before meeting to consider the vacant pastorate. The thoughts of members turned towards Richard Clark, member of the Particular Baptist Church at Bewdley. It was decided to seek advice from Mr Sing of Bridgnorth. His reply is minuted thus:

- I. Bro. Clark is a man of good conversation.
- II. He has an excellent gift and is therefore fit for the congregation.
- III. He is a man suitable for .. [unclear] .. and proper in his doctrine.
- IV. He is fit for them because he is not likely to become chargeable to them.

But

- I. He is a man of quick and unhappy temper.
- II. He would soon be angry and safely reconciled, and if he has anything against his brother he would tell them his mind from the pulpit.

The church, feeling this to be a favourable reference, entered into negotiation with the Particular Baptist Church at Bewdley. Stokes's *History of the Midland Association of Baptist Churches* (p.97) prints the letter signed by William Gilbert and William Elwall, Deacons of Netherton and 21 male members imploring Bewdley to release Bro. Clark as Bewdley had two members qualified for ministry whereas Netherton was destitute. Clark soon became minister at Netherton. He took his first baptism in July 1713. It is noticeable that those who were baptised by him were later, when he had ceased to be minister, brought under "laying on of hands" by Brother Hands.

Laying on of hands was the regular practice of this church. During the first ministry, i.e. of Edward Williams, Elder 1665 until he died in 1707, the phrase in the book is usually "baptised and under laying on of hands" with the date. But in 1672, 1673 and 1676 some who were baptised waited some months before "laying on of hands". The book does not comment. I surmise the reason might have been some local difficulty about meeting for communion or perhaps the correct person to lay hands was not present at the time of baptism. Samuel Elwall, who was baptised by Bro. Clark in 1717 came under laying on of hands at Namptwich at the Association Meeting, 30th May 1721 by Bros. Hands,⁴ White and Lea.

One has sought unsuccessfully to discover how this church originated. Is this the first church book or is there an older one? Who baptised Edward Williams in 1654 and layed hands on

him? I suppose this book began to be used when Edward Williams and Hugh Davies were made Elder and Deacon respectively in 1665. But 34 of the members on the roll had already been baptised by 1665.

On 23rd July 1664 Halesowen Churchwardens⁵ presented to the Bishop of Worcester:

Richard Lowbridge Jnr, a reputed Anabaptist and Joyse his wife for being diped or ducked in a brook by an Anabaptist, also Thomas Tibbotts of Cradeley for keeping conventicle constantly in his house and neglecting communion with the Church of England... also William Darby reputed Quaker and John Biddle.

We also present Richard Fitch of Cradeley and Thomas Mulcraft of Warley Wigorne for refusing to have their baby baptised. We present as we are informed by our minister for not joyning in communion or not receiving the blessed sacrament of our Lord's Supper, Nicholas Holmer and Mary his wife, Mr Edward Paston Clk, John White, Thomas Tibbotts of Cradeley. We present for not paying rates for repair of the Church Mr Gilbert, Warley, Richard Moore, Edward Forrest, Cradley.

The allegations of the churchwardens may be supported by our Netherton church book. Joyes Luboriges was baptised in 1662 and Richard Luborig in 1688. Spelling was not fixed at that time. Folk familiar with present Black Country dialect will recognise that our book spells phonetically. A Thomas Tibots is in the book as baptised in 1658, with Elnor Tibots baptised earlier, undated before 1657. Brigart Fitch was baptised in 1667. I think Mr Gilbert of Warley must be William Gillbart baptised in 1671, with this note added later "He was a Deacon, a faithfull Professor, steady and fearing God above many". I see corroboration here. Surely there were nonconformists in the Cradley part of Halesowen parish in 1664, and some were Baptists, and some then or later belonged to the Netherton Baptist Church.

Another presentment⁵ was made by Halesowen Churchwardens on 3rd September 1674:

We present these being knowne Anabaptists. Richard Hill. ? Davis. Thos. Blumer. Rich Fitch and at his house they keep conventicle. Hum. Buffery. Tho. Tibbetts Snr. Tho. Tibbetts Jnr. Tho. Maunrill has binn & baptised John Lombards. ? Downing. Will Cole. Wm. Allchurch. Rich. Lowbridge. Marie Holmer. Marie Davis all living in Cradley. Also we present Philip Dugard, a profest Quaker and for not paying or minister his dues these 12 years we present Richard More and John Coley who stand excommunicated. We present Thomas Hitchens and Marie his wife for being clandestinely married (as we are informed) by one Edward Williams a shoemaker, living in Dudley, a reputed Anabaptist.

Our book give Richard Hill, baptised in 1657, made deacon in 1674. Several of the others mentioned were Netherton members. Thomas and Marie Hitchens were among them, but our book does not register weddings. Chronologically this is the earliest mention of Edward Williams I have discovered outside the church book and Dudley Parish Registers. The Dudley Parish Register lists the burial of Edward Williams, shoemaker on 16th April 1707. Our book gives the date of death as 14th April 1707.

What else do we know about Edward Williams? He and Henry Dixon Jnr are to be positively identified as Netherton Baptists in the list of 45 dissenters presented by Dudley Churchwardens in April 1676.⁶ Dudley Parish Register has an entry "Kalib, son to Edward Williams born 30 July 1667". Another entry dated 9th November 1669 states that Edward Williams had a child "born and buried". The absence of "baptised" in these two entries leads me to think they refer to the Netherton Baptist. A Caleb Williams baptised in the second month 1696 might well fit the Kalib mentioned above. Edward Williams's wife, Jone, is in the baptismal roll, date not given, but presumably before 1657. She was buried on 7th November 1699, "wife of Edward Williams, shoemaker", according to the Dudley Parish Register.

Bromsgrove Baptist Church book has four pages of accounts for 1694. One item is "Given Edward Williams, five shillings".⁷ The Netherton book has accounts for 1695-7 with an item "in charges of Bro Eckles" some coppers. The edge of the paper has worn and the precise figure is lost. John Eckels was the minister at Bromsgrove. It is interesting to think that pulpit fees or expenses varied between churches even then.

The Netherton book lists eighteen sums of money collected for the use of Bro. Williams, the Elder between 1682 and 1706, totalling £114. 4. 0. £4. 4. 0. in 1692 is described as Poll Tax.

By coincidence an Edward Williams A.M. was instituted to the benefice of Dudley on 17th June 1660 on the presentation of Humble Ward, Lord Dudley. His signature is in the Subscription Book⁸ to the Act of Uniformity at Worcester dated 17th June 1662. The Act Book of Worcester Consistory Court⁸ states that Edward Makernes B.A., an earlier vicar of Dudley, was reinstated on 10th November 1668. I have found no explanation why Williams relinquished office. In 1974 a Dudley Churchwardens' book was discovered in a solicitor's office.⁹ In this book Edward Williams's signature, or name written as his, is at the end of the minutes from Easter 1661 to Easter 1668. Edward Mackernes, Vicar, signed at Easter 1669. At Easter 1670 George Repington, Edw. Williams and John Price of Woodfield were appointed as overseers. Could this be the Baptist Edw. Williams? A local historian might usefully investigate further the relationship of the two Edward Williams in Dudley at the same time, one the vicar and the other a shoemaker elder of a Baptist church which grew steadily to have more than one hundred members.

We get another glimpse of the Baptists of Dudley in the Presentment¹⁰ of Dudley Churchwardens dated 15th May 1682. "Thomas Dudley of Russells Hall for not coming to church. William Pardoe of this city and one Kieres for speaking at an Anabaptist meeting in our parish". No less than four Thomas Dudleys were baptised between 1695 and 1700 so precise identification is not possible. William Pardoe, a well known General Baptist itinerant is said to have been born in Tenbury, Worcester.¹¹ The *Baptist Magazine*¹² has a fragment of an undated letter from Pardoe to Lawrence Spooner,¹³ General Baptist minister of Lichfield, telling Spooner that he had been in Dudley on the last Lord's Day. Earlier he had been in Bristol and had been ill. He was sorry he had not sufficient time to let Spooner know of his visit to Dudley and allow him to come over from Lichfield and spend the day with him. A nice illustration of the mobility of these men despite the hardness of the times and difficulty of the roads. Spooner had not much longer to live. An item in the Will of Henry Dixon of Netherton made in 1676 bequeathes "my pasture close... the upper part adjoining William Pardoe's ground" to John Dixon. No maps of Dudley are available for that period. I have wondered whether William Pardoe the Baptist preacher might have had a closer connection with Dudley than has usually been thought.

We have tried to see the members of this church in context. I have details of the wills of sixteen members. Hugh Davis, the deacon, is described as a mercer of Dudley in a will made on 14th June 1689. The inventory of goods for sale in the shop as well as personal property in the house was sworn at £534. 14. 2. It included £60. 18. 4 for "tobacco in the loft and ruff". In the kitchen there was "a small Tobacco Inguine with its accessories" valued at £2. His shop held a fascinating variety of cloths, haberdashery and grocery wares. John Newey, the deacon, left goods worth £86, including nine dozen big and little shoes. He was a shoemaker, living and trading at 147 High Street.

William Gilberts of Rowley Regis, who died in 1718, a deacon, had house property in Dudley. He was a farmer, as the detailed inventory indicates. Totalling £310 his household goods and farm tools and stock included "flax, wrought and unwrought. £130. 10. 0." Two others, John Woodhouse of Rowley Regis in November 1702 and William Elwall of Dudley in May 1741 left goods worth more than £100. Woodhouse was a farmer. The largest item in his inventory was £33 for ten cows, two heifers and one horse. Elwall had married John Newey's daughter Elizabeth and seems to have taken over Newey's business. He left £174. 3. 6. The other wills I have investigated were for less than £100 and came from naylor, blacksmiths, a yeoman, widows or unmarried women.

Papers of the Dudley Castle estate lodged in Dudley Central Library were being recatalogued by the archivist in 1974-5 when I was studying the Netherton Baptist Church Book, which is also lodged there. I was allowed to look through the findings of the manor courts for the years between 1706 and 1729. Many of our members are mentioned, often fined twopence for not attending. The court tried to prevent public nuisance, so one was fined ¼d

for leaving a ladder standing in the street. Another sixpence "for laying Cabbits stalks in the back lane contrary to a paine laid last..." A deacon committed this offence and a fellow deacon was on the jury that day. More well-to-do members like John Newey and William Gilberts at their death became liable for a black bill, which I understand was some sort of heriot. The court record for 17th October 1726 shows that one Isaac Bate Snr (not a Baptist) is Mayor and our deacon William Elwall is Bayliffe. Twelve months later there was no change, but a note says that the Sargent and Bayliffe are to drive the wood four times a year, the forfeiture to be £1. 19. 11. The Bayliffe is also to weigh the butter every three weeks. Elwall failed in his duty, and in May 1728 he was amerced for not driving the wood, but was let off with a fine of 13/4. This midemeanour made no difference to the election of Bate as Mayor and Elwall as Bayliffe in October of the same year. In October 1729 Wm. Elwall became Mayor with Wm. Parkes Snr as Bayliffe.

It has been put to me that the Borough of Dudley had no charter, that it was a relatively unimportant place, and that the office of bayliffe or mayor should not necessarily be taken to imply an honour conferred on the holder. Indeed it might have been the case of "You and you and you do this!" Yet I feel that the mayoralty of William Elwall, Baptist deacon and father of his minister, is a warning against making sweeping generalisations about Dissenters being disqualified from public offices. The law as it ran in London in 1729 did not fit Dudley. A possible explanation might be that Elwall engaged in occasional communion. I have no positive evidence, but an entry in St Edmund's Churchwardens' Book dated 10th April 1721 shows he was one of the four churchwardens for the ensuing year.

Here it will be convenient to list the officers of the church:

- Elder. Edward Williams. 1665 until his death in 1707.
- Deacon. Hugh Davis (or Davies) 1665 until his death in 1692.
- Deacon. John Newey. Not clear when he was made deacon. Died 1710.
- Deacon. Richard Hill. 1674 until his death in 1702.
- Deacon. Samuel Buffery. 1702 until 1704.
- Pastor. Samuel Buffery (above) 1704 until his death in 1712.
- Deacon. William Gilbert or Gillbart(s). 1704 until his death in 1718.
- Deacon. William Elwall. 1710 until his death in 1741.
- Minister. Richard Clark of Kidderminster, member of Bewdley Particular Baptist Church, and possibly earlier of Bromsgrove. 1712 to 1719.
- Deacon. Samuel Forrest. 1718. But he was ordained at an Association held at Colten Hall in 1720 by Bro. Hand and Bro. Lea. Died 1744.
- Preacher, and later Pastor. Samuel Elwall, son of William Elwall above. Called to occasional preaching in 1722. In 1722 or 1723 he was set apart to minister more stately. Ordained Pastor 1729. Died 1749.
- Deacon. Jonathan Williams. from 1741.
- Deacon. William Downing. from 1745.

- Deacon. John Bradley. from 1745.
 Deacon. William Reading. No date is given. Baptised in 1727.
 Pastor. William Bloomer. In 1723 the church agreed he should depute for Samuel Elwall whenever Elwall was prevented by ill health. In 1725 he was reprimanded by the church for preaching to a separated group of the Worcester Church without the authority of Netherton Church. In 1726 encouraged to exercise his preaching gift. In 1738-9 prevented from preaching because the Church took an unfavourable view of his marriage. Was made Pastor after Elwall's death in 1749. J. H. Wood gives the date of his pastorate as 1746-1769.¹⁴ He was still alive in May 1772 when Elizabeth Elwall willed £10 to William Bloomer of Cradley, Dissenting Minister.

The church seems to have petered out and closed before the end of the 18th century. All the officers except Richard Clark were home grown. I leave the first officers out of this assessment.

The trustees named in the deed of 2nd November 1753 were:-

--- Jones of Upton in the County of Worcester. Baptist Minister.¹⁵

Joseph Morris, Glasshouse Lane, Goswell Street, London. Baptist Minister.

John Gilbert, Lutterworth. Grocer.

William Downing, Cradley. Nailer.

Joseph Buffery, Cradley. Nailer.

Giles Bloomer, Cradley. Nailer.

William Reading, Kingswinford. Nailer.

Edward Price, Dudley. Bellows Maker.

--- Elwall, Tipton. Brickmaker.

John Bradley the elder, Guornall. Nailer.

John Bradley the younger, Guornall. Nailer.

On the back of this Deed in a rough hand is this:

May 24 in ye year 1768 we the church at Netherton do appoint and chuse for Trustees for the said Meeting House at Netherton.

Jabesh Cox nailer of Cradley. William Oakley of Gornall nailer. Thomas Lilly of Dudley nailer. --- Richard coal grinder of Cradley. Samuel Bradley of Himley nailer. Zacchaeus Bradley of Himley nailer.

So far we have not touched on the difficult matter of locating the early meeting place of the church, other than by reporting the cross heading at the top of the second page of the baptismal roll which says the church met at Netherton or thereabouts. The apparent equivocation may possibly be explained by their having to move about during the periods of repression under Charles II. Certainly the Halesowen Presentments suggest that conventicles were held in Cradley, which is two or three miles south of Netherton. In 1695-97 accounts prove that fifteen shillings was paid

each half year to Hugh Dixson for rent and an occasional six-pence to maids for cleaning the house. It is curious that although search has been made no registration of a Meeting has been found. It should be added that there is a problem in that the county boundaries of Worcester and Stafford double about in the neighbourhood where the church was likely to be meeting, and for good measure Halesowen was an island parish of Salop, very remote from the county town of Shrewsbury during all this period. Yet the church was known to authority for the book contains three closely written pages of "briefs" from 1692 onwards.¹⁶ These appeals must have been circulated by authority or with the help of authority.

A survey of lands and houses in the parishes of St Edmund's and St Thomas in the Borough of Dudley was made by order of Worcester Quarter Sessions in 1701-2.¹⁷ In it in Dudley Foreign, i.e. the outlying part of the parish, there is an item for Hugh Dixon's tenements by the Meeting House. Taking this with the reference to Hugh Dixon in my previous paragraph it seems certain that the reference is to the Baptist Meeting House. Hugh and Elizabeth Dixson were baptised on 15th April 1698. Elizabeth died on 8th July 1729. Her Will in poor spelling and eccentric writing has this bequest: "I give unto my son Hugh Dixon that off all timber in the meeting house with five long [?] in ye house and collar and brake and two saw and one sofa and all that is therein with one great & foyne chaer in ye parlour and ye great bible and a great iron dripping pan". So I picture Netherton Baptists meeting in a building owned by this family, possibly used for business in the week and cleaned for worship on the Lord's Day. Chandler and Hannah in *Dudley as it was and as it is today* (p.39) say "The Baptists had a chapel in a conspicuous position between Dudley and Netherton which is frequently mentioned as a landmark in the court Leat records". On p.141 they quote the manor court records of May 1732. "We do ordain that ... shall remove a necessary house that runs and damnifies the neighbours with ill smells on the publick road leading by the Anabaptist Meeting".

William Gilbert in his Will in 1718 left five pounds for the deacons to use to build a meeting house at Nethertown in the parish of Dudley. A guinea was given in 1718 by an unknown person through the hands of Edward Elwall. In 1725 Samuel Forrest, a deacon, and his wife each gave £5. In 1741 Samuel Elwall delivered £5 towards building a Meeting House for the worship of God in Christ, being the gift of William Elwall. This was lent to Homer Cole by consent of the deacons. Quite intricate arrangements for lending out money at interest are recorded in the book. By 1748 the balance in hand was £36.

The Deeds of the present Messiah Church begin with a Feoffment dated 18th September 1746 transferring a small plot or parcel of ground in Netherton known by the name of Ashen Barbers containing one and thirty perch adjoining the land of Joseph Dixon Clark and Mary Priest and the roadway leading from Blows Green to or towards Dudley Woods or Penznett Chase from Mr James Finch the elder of Dudley, Ironmonger to Mr Samuel Elwall of

Dudley, Yeoman. Elwall at that time was Pastor of Netherton Baptists. He died in 1749. The next document dated 2nd November 1753 states that Elizabeth Elwall of Dudley, spinster, and Daniel Haines and his wife Anna (Elizabeth and Anna being sisters and co-heirs of the late Samuel Elwall) lease the land aforementioned and Netherton Baptist Meeting House standing on it to eleven trustees at a yearly rent of five shillings.¹⁸

The part of Netherton a quarter of a mile beyond "Messiah" is generally known as Baptist End. It is not known when the name was first used and it is not safe to repeat folk lore which has gathered around it.

Despite the acquisition of a building the Baptist cause languished and eventually died out towards the end of the 18th century. Our book records a baptism in 1767. The next was of John Baker baptised by a Mr Taylor in June 1787. Fresh trustees are listed in the book in 1775 and 1796, when the trust was put into the hand of Joseph Green brickmaker and minister of Lombard Street General Baptist Church, Deritend, Birmingham. But that church was fully stretched in pioneering the growing witness at King's Heath, Birmingham and Netherton was allowed to close. A minute of the General Assembly of the General Baptists held at Worship Street, London in 1802 notes that the case of Netherton Chapel, near Birmingham was reported to a committee consisting of Bros Deacon, Evans, Titford and Vidler.¹⁹ Nothing is known of any action taken. A large bound volume of contemporary handwritten notes made by the Reverend James Scott, minister of Netherend Unitarian Church in nearby Cradley, reports the hiring of the Netherton Baptist Chapel by Unitarians who used it between 1802 and 1805 for occasional lectures on Sunday evenings in summer and afternoon services in winter, and for a while for a Sunday School.²⁰ However the Unitarians turned their energies towards a new church in Lye, and again the building was empty. Particular Baptists started in Netherton at Sweet Turf in 1810, possibly earlier. The General Baptist New Connexion reopened Messiah in 1820 and the work continued there until 1979. To tell of that would be another story.

In conclusion we report briefly on the part members of this church played in helping Thomas Newcomen, ironmonger, inventor of the atmospheric steam engine, Baptist minister at Dartmouth, to erect engines, first at Dudley and later in distant places. It has long been known that Newcomen used fellow Baptists to develop his business interests. Humphrey Potter was a deacon of the Bromsgrove Church. He invested money in Newcomen's invention as his Will dated 5th March 1719 shows.²¹ One section of the Will bequeathed the Meeting House which Potter had built in his garden for the use of the Baptist Church to a body of trustees, which included several ministers, notably Thomas Newcomen, Bernard Foskett and John Beddome (then joint ministers at Henley-in-Arden and Alcester). The three witnessing signatories to the Will were Elias Newcomen, Jno. Dunsford, Ezek. Trengrove.²

Elias Newcomen and Jno. Dunsford came on to the Netherton membership roll by letter sometime after 1710 and before the middle of 1712. It is thought that Elias was a nephew of Thomas

Newcomen and that he came from Chard. Chard Baptist Church has no records for that period, so that it is impossible to decide whether his membership had been there. Recently it has been established beyond doubt that John Dunsford came from Tiverton. Newcomen had many contacts with the Tiverton church as the records of the Western Association and the Tiverton Church book indicate. The Dunsfords were the leading family there. Another to assist Newcomen was Joseph Hornblower who was baptised at Netherton on 24th June 1712. Rebecca Hayward, whom he married was baptised there on 22nd of 5th month 1713. We may reasonably suppose that Joseph Hornblower came from the same family as John Hornblow (the spelling in the baptismal list) or Hornbloor (the spelling in the 1698 list) or Hornblower (the 1710 and 1718 lists). Baptised in 1693, he died on 29th April 1744, and was buried in Dudley Parish. Joseph Hornblower later introduced the engine into Cornish mines. Coincidentally he and his family became involved in the promotion of Baptist churches in that county.²²

1979 being the 250th anniversary of Thomas Newcomen's death saw an increase in the interest taken in his life and work. The Council of the Newcomen Society commissioned Mr J. S. Allen, chairman of its Midland Branch to write a revised and enlarged edition of L. T. C. Rolt's *Thomas Newcomen, The Prehistory of the Steam Engine* (1963). This new work and other subsequent papers given by Mr Allen takes account of the link with Netherton. To go into detail would not be appropriate here. Suffice it to say that Mr Allen and his friends believe that the presence of Elias Newcomen, Jno Dunsford and Joseph Hornblower on the Netherton Baptist membership roll soon after 1710 helps them to fix the date of the erection of Newcomen's first engine near Dudley Castle. They were working on it.

This Netherton book was lost between 1845 and 1930, which explains why local historians do not mention it. But some unsigned pieces in *Transactions* and *The Baptist Quarterly* show an acquaintance with its contents.²³ The only published work since 1930 came from Idris Williams in 1954 and is sadly out of focus, the work of a dying man.²⁴ Now the book rests in the archives at Dudley Library. When last I saw it it was in need of expert rebinding.

NOTES

- 1 The church book is in the archives of the Dudley Central Library.
- 2 Wills proved in Worcester Diocesan Courts are in Worcester Record Office. I have found sixteen wills of Netherton members, complete with probate inventories.
- 3 *Baptist Quarterly*, III, p.192, states that the clergy's report to the Bishop in 1669 gave thirty or forty Anabaptists meeting at the houses of George Wright and Richard Whiston at Coulton, near Rugeley.
- 4 Benjamin Hands, one time of Little Saredon between Wolverhampton and Lichfield, in 1717 he was minister to a congregation at Delves, near Walsall and Wednesbury. His funeral sermon was preached by John Sing in 1724.

- 5 Worcester Record Office. 807. BA/2289/10.
 6 W.R.O. 807. BA/2289/7.
 7 Transcript p.68 made by Bromsgrove Baptist Church and B.H.S.
 8 In W.R.O.
 9 Now in Dudley Central Library archives.
 10 W.R.O. 807. BA/2289/7.
 11 D.N.B. states that Spooner was converted through the influence of Pardoe.
 12 *Baptist Magazine*. 1810, p.503.
 13 Laurence Spooner was a General Baptist Messenger based on the Lichfield church. In 1659 he put his name to "A further testimony to Truth", an appeal for thorough reform made to the army officers who in 1659 He and John Cupper signed on behalf of the Lichfield church.
 14 *History of the General Baptists* by J. H. Wood. p.212.
 15 Philip Jones, minister of Upton-on-Severn Particular Baptist Church from 1730 to 1770. Prominent in Midland Baptist Association.
 16 Briefs are charitable appeals. See *Church Briefs; or royal warrants for collections for charitable objects* by W. A. Bewes. 1896.
 17 I believe there may be a copy in Stafford Record Office. I saw a copy made from papers at Wombourne Wodehouse, near Wolverhampton by courtesy of Mr J. S. Allen of Stourbridge.
 18 Deeds held by West Midland Baptist Association.
 19 Whitley. Minutes II, 251.
 20 Seen by courtesy of the trustees of Netherend Chapel, Cradley.
 21 In W.R.O.
 22 L. A. Fereday, *The story of Falmouth Baptists*, Chapter IV.
 23 Trans. II, 106, 253. Trans. VI, 74, 115 (This is hard to reconcile with the church book. Certainly Edward Elwall was not a member). *Baptist Quarterly*, III, 138; XIII, 119.
 24 Idris Williams, *A sketch of three hundred years of Baptist witness in Netherton and thereabouts*, Part I. 1954.

C. S. HALL

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The Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry has recently transcribed the Netherton Church Book, and has copies for sale. The Corresponding Secretary is Mrs C. Gibbs, 14 Woodgate Lane, Woodgate, Birmingham 32.