

TWO ORDINATIONS AT BRIDLINGTON IN 1737

The Calvinistic Baptist church in Bridlington was founded in 1698.¹ The first record in the church book is of the formal establishment of the church and appointment of Robert Prudom, 'teaching elder'.² The church grew numerically under the ministry of George Braithwaite,³ who moved to the Devonshire Square church in London in 1733. Some four years later, Braithwaite returned to Bridlington to preside at the ordination of Richard Machin. The transcripts of the ordination of Machin and deacons of the church appear consecutively in the records.

The service was held on a Saturday at a meeting of the church. Alvery Jackson of Barnoldswick⁴ and John Sedgfield⁵ of Tottlebank also took part. The proceedings followed a pattern, familiar in the main to many ordinands today. It began with the singing of part of Psalm 132⁶ and a prayer. A representative of the church was next examined by Braithwaite and then Machin gave an assurance of his doctrinal orthodoxy to the assembled church. At the request of Machin and the church, and after explaining precisely the purpose of it, the three ministers shared in the act of laying on of hands on Machin and solemnly ordained him to the pastorate of the church in prayer. The charge to the minister followed, the rest of the Psalm was sung, a charge was delivered to the church and the meeting ended in prayer.

Machin came from the Limehouse church, where David Rees was pastor.⁷ He was a 'ministering brother', that is, approved by the church to preach.⁸ It is probable that Braithwaite and Machin knew of each other through attending the Baptist Board in London.⁹ Machin died in Bridlington in 1743.¹⁰ The presence of Jackson and Sedgfield suggests that the Bridlington church at this time had closer connections with the Yorkshire & Lancashire churches than with the Northern Association with whom it had been historically linked.¹¹ A letter was sent by the church to the 1737 Northern Association meetings giving by reason of excuse for absence the settlement of their new pastor.¹²

One question put to the Bridlington church was whether Machin was in full membership with them, to which the answer came in the affirmative. It is not clear when he had started to minister to the church, although a letter of recommendation from the Limehouse church is dated 22nd May 1737.¹³ What is plain is that the call to be set apart as pastor had to come to a full member of the church. Ministry was recognised from within the church membership and was not imposed upon it. It was the church members who assented to the choice of Machin by raising their hands. Only with this acceptance could he be set apart. The presence of the other ministers in the service witnessed to what the church was doing.¹⁴ The laying on of hands was a demonstrative act, which did not confer any special qualities or pass on authority in itself. Ordination was to the pastoral charge of the Bridlington church and not a 'once-for-all' setting apart to ministry among Baptist churches.¹⁵

The next day, after service, the meeting house having been cleared of worshippers who were not members of the church, Machin and the other three ministers shared in an act of ordination for new deacons of the church. The church book does not explain how the choice was made. They were all male. Again, the call to serve was issued by the 'brethren' (it is not clear whether this included sisters) and the candidates shared in the same act - the right hand of each pastor being laid on each candidate's head and prayer offered. This even applied to the deacon who had been serving for some years. The formal

ordination of deacons by ministers from other churches was not a regular occurrence - possibly the church took the opportunity of the presence of the three to make a completely new start to the ministry of the church.

The text below is from the Bridlington Church Book, June 1737.

At ye Church-meeting at ye Meeting house in Bridlington Jun ye 4th 1737. By virtue of ye abovesaid letter Mr. Richard Machin was received into full Fellowship & Communion with this Church after w[hi]ch ye said Church unanimously called him to ye Office of Pastor or Elder in ye said Church in ye presence of Mr George Braithwaite, Mr John Sedgfield & Mr Alvery Jackson Pastors of ye several particular Churches of Jesus Christ meeting near Devonshire Square in London, Tottlebank & Broughton in Lancashire & Barnoldswick &c in ye west of Yorkshire when ye publick meeting for ye solemn setting-apart-or-ordination of ye said Mr. Machin to ye office of Pastor in this Church, was begun in singing some verses of ye 132 Psalm & succeeded by Mr.Sedgfield going to Prayer: after ys [this] Mr.George Braithwaite spoke somewhat of ye great and solemn work of the day as now proposed then proceeded to ask ye Church in ye name of himselfe and his Br[ethre]n Ministers Account.

Quest 1. For w[ha]t Cause has ye Church desired our Company and Presence here at ys time? - To w[hi]ch Br. James Hepburn¹⁶ being appointed by ye Ch[ur]h to answer in her name such Questions as shou'd be proposed on her account answered.

Answer. That ye may be witnesses to ye Churches Act in Calling out & setting apart our Br Mr Richard Machin to ye Office of pastor in ye Church.

Q2. Is Mr Richd Machin a member in full Fellowship & Communion wth ye Church.

A. Yes, he is.

Q3. If ye Chh is free & desirous to constitute and appoint Mr Rich'd Machin to ye solemn office of Pastor over 'em, on his Compliance with their Call & Act, they are desired to signifie it by lifting up of their hands.

In Answer to ys ye Church did unanimously lift up their hands, After wch Mr. Braithwaite turning to Mr Machin said.

Brother Machin, Do you Comply with ye Call & Act of ye Chh & consent in Fear of ye Lord, to take Pastoral Care & Charge of them.

To wch he answered I do.

It was then added by Mr Braithwait.

It will be very agreeable yt you give us some short acct of your Principles & ye Doctrines by wch you hope to feed this Flock of Christ.

In answer to wch Mr Machin delivered his sentiments abundtly to our satisfaction under ye three heads

1. of God 2. of Nature 3. of Grace wth ye proper Enlargements upon each of 'em.

Then Mr Geo. Braithwaite reciting ye solemnity of ye Churches Act in her thus constituting her Pastor before God, Angels and men, after some short remarks on ye Imposition of ye Hands of ye Presbitery or &c, as wt, we conceive no Office-Power as Spiritual Gifts or Graces are convey'd by, but a decent way of pointing out ye person ordained & set apart to Office, expressed his own & ye rest of his Brn.Ministers desires yt ye Pastor and Church may be mutual Blessings and Comforts one to another, faithfull, honourable & successfull here, & jointly Rejoice & be Happy in the Day of Christ, wch desire is expressed by our continued Prayers & (at ye Pastor & Churches desire) ye laying on of hands. Mr. Braithwaite, Mr. Sedgfield & Mr Jackson at ye same time laying their right hands on Mr. Machin's head, Mr Jackson

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proceeded to pray over him: then Mr.Sedgefield preached on Ministers Duty from Acts 5.20 wch was followed by singing some more verses of ye Psalm: after ys Mr. Braithwaite preached ye Churches Duty to their Pastor on 1 Tim 5.17 and concluded ye Meeting in Prayer.

At ye Church-Meeting in ye Meeting House at Bridlington June ye 5th 1737 The Order in Which the Deacons were set apart was as followeth.

Lords-day June 5th 1737 being the day next following the forementioned solemnity publick service being over and the Auditory dismissed ye Brethren stay'd and signified their desire (by Br.George Nessfeild the onely acting Deacon of late Years) to the Pastors present the Churches desire of their assistance in the ordination of Br.Robt.Sedgefield, Br.Marmaduke Slumber and Br.Michael Cannome with him the said George Nesfeild to the office of Deacons in the same Church. Upon which Mr George Braithwaite asked the Church.

Q1. Whether they had solemnly called the Sd.Brethren to that Office.

It was answered they had after which the said Mr.Braithwaite asked the said Brethren seperately whether they Accepted the said Office to which the Church had called them. They answered they did, then Mr. John Sedgefeild spent some time from Act 6th to display the Office and Duty of a Deacon, after which the said Mr. John Sedgfeild with the Imposition of the Right hand of Every Pastor present on the head of Br.George Nesfeild, prayed over him. Then in like manner Mr Geo. Braithwaite Br.Robt.Sedgfeild, which was succeeded by Mr.Alvery Jackson praying over Br.Marmaduke Slumber and the whole concluded by Mr.Rich'd Machin's praying over Br.Michael Cannome - the hands of the pastors being on the head of ye Deacons during the time each was prayed over.

NOTES

1. *A Brief History of Bridlington Baptist Church* by R. H. Brennan.
2. The manuscript is still in the possession of the church at Bridlington.
3. George Braithwaite, born 1681 near Hawkshead (then in Lancashire), was baptised by David Crosley at the Cripplegate church in London in 1706. He ministered with the church at Hawkshead and Torver, whilst not being called to be pastor. He disagreed with the church over mixed communion and left to be pastor at Bridlington (leaving his cottage and land to them, which still serve as meeting house and burial ground at Hawkshead). At Bridlington, he added 62 members to the church and the fellowship moved to larger premises. He was there from 1712 to 1733. In 1719 he refused a call to Broadmead, Bristol, with the presidency of the Academy there. He died in 1748.
4. Alvery Jackson was pastor at

- Barnoldswick from 1718 to 1763. A moderate Calvinist, he disputed with John Brine and John Johnson of Liverpool. After he died, his daughter married Abraham Greenwood, subsequently pastor at Oakham in Rutland and friend of Andrew Fuller.
5. John Sedgefield was not related to Robert, the deacon. Brought up at Rawdon, he served at Liverpool (1719-25) and Tottlebank (1725-65). Recipient of monies from Particular Baptist Fund while at Liverpool. The circumstances of his move to Tottlebank are recorded in the church book (MS in Angus Library, Regent's Park College).
6. At a time when even singing of Psalms was not universally accepted, it is interesting to note that Alvery Jackson was a champion of congregational hymn singing and wrote hymns himself.
7. Rees was pastor at Limehouse from 1706 until his death in 1748.

8. Contained in the letter of recommendation preserved in the Bridlington church book.

9. *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, Vol.5, pp.202-218, give records of the Baptist Board meetings. Machin and Rees were never present together at the same meeting. Machin appears to have attended his last meeting on 1st April 1735.

10. In his time at Bridlington he baptised six persons. On 22nd January 1745 the Baptist Board considered an application for financial relief from his widow.

11. Representatives from the Newcastle and Hamsterley-Rowley churches had been instrumental in the formal establishment of the church and messengers from the church usually attended the association meetings (*Records of the Northern Baptist Association 1699-1726* MS in the Angus Library).

12. Letter recorded in the Bridlington

church book.

13. Letter preserved in the Bridlington church book.

14. In 1716 the Midland Association commented to the church at Bewdley: 'We allow that every Church of Christ hath an Independent Right to elect and appoint their own Officers, yet the advice and help of the ministers of ye Sister Churches for the Ordination of them is expedient and makes the matter much more beautiful'. (*Midland Association 1715-1754* MS in Angus Library).

15. A statement explaining in full was made at an ordination at Salendine Nook in 1743, in which Alvery Jackson, also took part. (*Baptist Quarterly*, 15, p.205).

16. James Hepburn was one of the original members of the church. After the death of Robert Prudom, Hepburn served the church for four years until it was decided that they could not call him to the pastorate.

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REVIEWS

K. D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Clergy in England and Wales, 1800-1930*, Clarendon Press, 1988. 244pp. £25.

Readers of this journal have already had opportunity to benefit from Professor Brown's extensive researches into the lives of Free Church ministers. Careful scrutiny of Year Books, Obituaries, Biographies and Autobiographies feeds into a remarkably complete analysis of clerical life and service which will long serve as a rich mine to be quarried by all posing questions about the context and substance of the careers of our ministers. Here are tables on their occupational and social backgrounds, their geographical and national origins, on references to ministerial conversion and the age when that change was experienced; in this Baptists stand near to Primitive Methodists in revering such an experience and apart from Congregationalists and Wesleyans who were increasingly reticent in their testimonies. Further tables analyse the training of ministers, the percentage with degree-type qualifications, the wastage in college years, the quality and experience of the educators. The age at the commencement of pastoral ministry is tabulated, as is the number of recruits from the manse; thereafter we trace the cause of ministerial losses by age cohorts, by reason of emigration, denominational or college office, death, disease or change of denomination. At the same time the analysis shows the percentage of those required to stay in ministerial harness after normal retirement age because of the lack of financial means. Statistics are also offered on length of pastorates,