

## ANOTHER BAPTIST VICAR?

### EDMUND SKIPP OF BODENHAM

In his study of *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (1983), after some illuminating pages on 'the great matter of tithes', Dr B. R. White points to six Baptists who 'held paid appointments within the English church establishment of the 1650s' and were ejected at the Restoration, and notes that other clergy were ejected who became Baptists subsequently.<sup>1</sup> Even if, following the judgment of A. G. Matthews in *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934), one or two names may be added, it is a tiny number. The identification of an incumbent who was not ejected in 1660-2 because he was no longer in a living, but who was probably a Baptist during part of the time while he held one, is thus of interest, particularly since it is apparent that he had serious scruples over tithes. The man in question is Edmund Skipp, Vicar of Bodenham, Herefordshire, from 1647 to 1657.<sup>2</sup>

In 1655 Skipp published an attack on the Quakers entitled *The Worlds Wonder, or the Quakers Blazing Starr*. Two leading Quakers quickly replied. *Antichrists man of War, Apprehended* (1655) was published by Richard Farnworth,<sup>3</sup> with 'Something in Reply to Edmond Skipp's Book'<sup>4</sup> by Humphry Smith<sup>5</sup> following.

The occasion and nature of the controversy was as follows. On 21st February 1655 Farnworth, with another Quaker, Thomas Goodaire, had a dispute at Chadwich<sup>6</sup> (an outlying part of the parish of Bromsgrove) with two members of Baxter's Worcestershire Association, Henry Oasland, Curate of Bewdley, and Andrew Tristram, Vicar of Clent. Farnworth wrote an account of the dispute early in March, before he left Chadwich, and published it under the title *The Brazen Serpent lifted up on high, or Truth Cleared* (1655). On 28th March, while still in Worcestershire, he met with Edmund Skipp's *Quakers Blazing Starr*, and 'was constrained to stay a few dayes to return an Answer thereunto'. During April he accordingly composed *Antichrists Man of War*. Before the month was out, he went over into Herefordshire, which he found 'dead and dark'; but 'a few pretty hearts there is', he wrote to Margaret Fell on the 26th, 'that was of one Skipp's hearers'.<sup>7</sup>

In its defence and justification of Quakerism Farnworth's *Antichrists Man of War* is similar to other controversial pieces by him. It differs in this, that Skipp is repeatedly charged with 'as it were going a begging to the people called *Baptists*'. Skipp had been 'telling the Baptized people thou had a Communion with a society of people which is now, as thou sayes, wholly broke off from thee', and was now 'flattering the baptized people'.<sup>8</sup> Such behaviour, Farnworth believed, was indefensible. Grounds for regarding it as the first step back into spiritual darkness had presented themselves to him very recently. Shortly before the dispute at Chadwich, while on a visit to Birmingham, he had heard that Robert Gurdler, the postmaster there, was 'formerly ... a teacher among the water baptized people' but was now 'turned to the priests again'. Always ready for a skirmish in Truth's defence, he had invited Gurdler, in a letter written on 13th February, to come to the White Bear to dispute with him; but, although he had stayed in Birmingham till he joined Goodaire at Chadwich on the 21st, and had meanwhile held three meetings in 'Derittend', Gurdler had not appeared.<sup>9</sup>

In the piece 'in Reply to Edmond Skipp's Book', which follows Farnworth's tract, Humphry Smith also pours scorn on Skipp as being 'necessitated to fly unto the Practices and Truths of other men, to wit, *Baptists*',<sup>10</sup> but his tone is different. He had known Skipp well, and was grieved that they had been parted.

Humphry Smith was born in 1624 at Stoke Bliss in Herefordshire, and had spent his childhood in that county at Little Cowarne,<sup>11</sup> in a house which still stands. He was for some time a preacher 'in the Pulpits', 'preaching great and high things daily'

and 'admired by many Hundreds'. Latterly, however, he was 'brought to be silent', and after a final meeting at his birthplace 'gave up that Preaching'. But even in what he now regarded as unregenerate days he claims that he always 'denied all their Gifts and Rewards'. In particular he declined 'a free Gift towards Maintenance, which might have been worth a Hundred Pound a Year or more', which 'one Justice ... was proposing'. Not only tithes, that is to say, but the hireling ministry in general was abhorrent to him.

Skipp also had scruples, but was without the strength to be true to them. 'After Edmund Skipp had thrown off his Tythes, and convinced of much more, which he was waiting to throw off too, he then told me not long before he left us, That he had not Faith to carry him through, neither could he believe; but he was confident, *That the Devil would steal all that he had from him again*; the which is now too true.' This was Smith's gravamen. He reminded Skipp of conversations they had had, at Clifton-upon-Teme and elsewhere. 'And then thou wast convinced, that thou must leave all, even Glebe-land too, and so live on thy own Land ...'.<sup>12</sup> Skipp's pitiful inconsistencies are drawn out by Smith in a memorable passage.

when thou by thy own Relation to me, went from one Parsonage to another, and that not without thy Gown (as thou callest it) upon thy back, that thou hast looked upon it as it was indeed Antichristian; and then after at *Bedinham*, thou didst sue the poor People for Tythes, to my knowledge ... though the Light let thee see Tythes to be contrary to Christ, yet then lived contrary to the Light in thy own Conscience, as thou wast made to confess in my hearing, and hundreds more, that thou hadst acted in it contrary to thy Conscience two years; and before that time thou didst confess unto me, and to others ... *thou layest groaning under the burden of thy Tythes; yet thou resolvedst to keep them another year*, yet I had thoughts to the contrary, and was made to tell thee at *J. B.'s* house in Hereford on the sixth day, *that thou wouldst e'er long roar against thy Tythes like a Lyon*; and on the next first day after it was so, and thou wast made to acknowledge the Lord in it, and sent thy Man with those few words to me: Brother Smith, the Lord hath done a strange Work in me this Morning, and I shall alter strangely this day therefore pray earnestly for me and make what haste thou canst to come unto me.<sup>13</sup>

When Humphry Smith reproaches Skipp with having 'left us', this does not necessarily mean that Skipp was once a Quaker. The mould of Quakerism was not yet set. Antipathy to tithes could draw men together, but when the Quakers were found desirous of abandoning not only compulsory maintenance of the ministry but the separated ministry itself, others soon went their own way again. It was a seeking time, with much movement.

In May 1653, for instance, the two Members for Herefordshire in the Nominated Parliament, both of them supporters of the radical party in it which was opposed to tithes, Wroth Rogers, the Governor of Hereford (and like Smith and Skipp in being a preacher),<sup>14</sup> and Captain John Herring were joined by Walter Merrick of King's Cuple, near Ross-on-Wye, and Morgan Watkins of Wigmore in a letter to Cromwell.<sup>15</sup> In September 1654 Herring welcomed two Quakers to his home in Hereford, and 'the Governor and his wife was there';<sup>16</sup> and in January 1656, when two other Friends came to the city, they held meetings first in John Barber's home (one of the places where Smith recalled conversing with Skipp) and then in Herring's;<sup>17</sup> but later that year Herring was reported to be 'clear fallen' and turned an enemy to the truth.<sup>18</sup> In February 1656, when Thomas Goodaire (Farnworth's

companion in the dispute at Chadwich) and another Quaker came to Ross and held a meeting (attended by John Skinner, the Baptist Rector of Weston under Penyard), Walter Merrick opposed them, but they were defended by Wroth Rogers, 'who was a Moderate man';<sup>19</sup> yet Rogers was so far from being 'convinced' that in the following year he gave another Baptist preacher, Jenkin Jones, a certificate in support of his appointment as Rector of Llanddeti, in Breconshire,<sup>20</sup> where Jones was also 'pastor of a congregated church'.<sup>21</sup> Morgan Watkins, on the other hand, not only twice received visiting Friends in his home, Wigmore Grange, but adopted Quakerism and published tracts against those who opposed it, such as Vavasor Powell.<sup>22</sup> Over the maintenance of the ministry Powell himself did not follow a straight course: Thomas Richards finds him 'hopelessly inconsistent'.<sup>23</sup>

Powell was a leader of Welsh Puritanism, but his influence extended into Herefordshire, indeed the home of one of his elders, John James, was at Leintwardine.<sup>24</sup> Here, at Tripplenton Hall, the Quaker message was delivered more than once in 1655;<sup>25</sup> and in 1659 James was still regarded by Friends as, like Wroth Rogers, a 'moderate' man.<sup>26</sup> But in Herefordshire it was John Tombes who held sway, both from Leominster, where he was Vicar, and from Ledbury, where he was Master of St Catherine's Hospital (he was also for a time Rector of Ross),<sup>27</sup> and Tombes had no scruples over support by the State. By the year 1653 there were already four churches in Herefordshire, two in Gloucestershire, one in Worcestershire and one in Monmouthshire which were 'all due to the labours of Tombes'.<sup>28</sup> One of these Herefordshire churches was at Weston under Penyard, where Skinner was Rector; one of those in Gloucestershire was at Netherton, where Richard Harrison ministered; and Tombes, Skinner and Harrison together comprise half of the six Baptists ejected in 1660-62.

Leominster is only five miles from Bodenham; Ledbury is further, but the Skippes were a Ledbury family.<sup>29</sup> With Tombes so close in two directions, it is hardly surprising if, in this maelstrom of opposing forces, the Vicar of Bodenham went 'a begging to the people called *Baptists*'. Skipp's tergiversations seem human enough. We need not suppose that they cost him nothing. The State-supported itinerant, William Erbury, went through 'months of mental stress' before he brought himself to 'lose a hundred a year' and to become 'an Independent indeed'.<sup>30</sup>

That Skipp became a Baptist we know, for in 1659 he put his name to a broadside entitled *A Declaration of Several Baptized Believers*.<sup>31</sup> Two years earlier he had ceased to be Vicar of Bodenham. It looks as though his scruples against tithes had returned and eventually triumphed: whether before or after he became a Baptist we have no means of telling.

## NOTES

1. Pp.88-91, 102-3. The six Baptists ejected: John Tombes, Henry Jessey, Paul Hobson, John Skinner, Richard Harrison, William Kay; in the index Netherton, Northumb. (cf. s.v. Harrison) is a slip for Netherton, Glos.
2. Walker Revised, ed. A. G. Matthews, Oxford 1948, p.194, s.v. John Pember, the sequestered Vicar, who at the Restoration regained the living (cf. Calamy Revised, ed. A. G. Matthews, Oxford 1934, s.v. Samuel Smith II). Both works have recently been reissued.
3. For Farnworth, see DNB; ch.III ('Didactic Enthusiasm: Richard Farnworth') in my *Studies in Christian Enthusiasm illustrated from Early Quakerism*, Wallingford, Pa., 1948; G. F. Nuttall, 'Notes on Richard Farnworth', *Journal of Friends' Historical Society*, 48.2, 1956, 79-84.
4. In the Collection of Smith's works published in 1683 this piece is reprinted (pp.68-92) under the title 'The Wandering-Star Discovered'.
5. For Smith, see DNB; ch.II ('Humphry Smith') in A. W. Brown, *Evesham Friends in the Olden Time, 1885*; H. S. Newman, *Humphry Smith, the Prophet of Herefordshire, 1895*.
6. Chadwich Manor, 3½ miles north of Bromsgrove, still stands, close to the junction of A38 from Birmingham with M5. In October 1655 its owner, Anthony Cole, received George Fox at a meeting attended by some from Hereford as well as from Birmingham and other places. Cole became a Quaker, and in 1659 was approved by Friends as a J.P.; in his will of 1660 he left a

- charity from which in 1913 £3 per annum was being distributed among poor widows. See V.C.H.Worcs., iii.20, 32; George Fox, *Journal*, ed. N. Penney, Cambridge 1911, i.196; *Early Quaker Letters from the Swarthmore MSS to 1660*, ed. G. F. Nuttall, 1952, no.187; *First Publishers of Truth*, ed. N. Penney, 1907, p.276; *Extracts from State Papers relating to Friends 1654-1672*, ed. N. Penney, 1913, p.110 (Chadwich is sometimes spelt Chadwick or Chattan). Fox's statement that Cole gave an Independent preacher 'when he was convicted a 100 a yeere' suggests that Cole may have been the J.P. who offered Smith £100 a year (cf. infra); his further statement that 'this Independent did not stand to y<sup>t</sup> which did convince him & then ye olde Cole tooke away his 100<sup>l</sup> a yeare from him again' suggests that Skipp may have been the Independent; but these are no more than conjectures.
7. *Early Quaker Letters*, no.146.
  8. Pp.5,63; cf.pp.1-2, 64.
  9. Pp.54-7. V.C.H.Warwickshire, vii, 1964, 353, n.75, confirms Girdler's office and mentions a son of the same name who was a prominent local Parliamentarian; Samuel Girdler, who in 1672 was granted a licence for Congregational worship in his own house in Birmingham (*Original Records of Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence*, ed. G. L. Turner, 1911-14, ii.798-9) was probably another son. I have not found any reference to Robert Gurdler (Girdler) in Baptist records, or to the meetings in Deritend in Quaker records.
  10. *Collection*, p.86.
  11. Neither place is far from Bodenham, where Skipp was Vicar.
  12. *Collection*, pp.57, 53, 66, 62, 57. On the possible identity of the Justice, cf. n.6 above. The other places mentioned are 'Margarets', probably Clew St Margaret, Shropshire, then called Margaret Clew; and 'Len.', which is more problematic: it is probably an abbreviation for Le(i)nthal(l), al. Lintile (i.e. Leinthal Earls, a chapelry of Aymestry, or Leinthal Starkes, a chapelry of Wigmore), where on 28th September 1656 a church was formed from Leominster in the home of Joseph Patshall (B.H.S.T., ii.241, vii.5; corrected in *Association Records*, ed. B. R. White, 1971-4, p.41, n.28, from Leominster church book); but it could be a misprint for 'Lem.', i.e. an abbreviation for Leominster. Leinetwardine seems less likely.
  13. *Collections* pp.74-5.
  14. Thomas Richards, *The Puritan Movement in Wales*, 1920, p.146.
  15. *Original Letters*, ed., J. Nickolls, 1743, p.92.
  16. John Camm and John Audland, *The Memory of the Righteous Revived*, 1689, p.49, as Hiring; both Rogers and his wife corresponded with Richard Baxter.
  17. *First Publishers*, pp.114-5.
  18. *Early Quaker Letters*, no.146.
  19. *First Publishers*, pp.124-5.
  20. Thomas Richards, *Religious Developments in Wales (1654-1662)*, 1923, p.225. In 1660 Jones was reported as telling a large congregation at Llanddeto 'fall upon the soldiers (who ... had come to disperse the meeting) and beat them': *Ibid.*, p.395.
  21. *Puritan Movement*, p.159. For Jones, see *Dict. of Welsh Biography*.
  22. *First Publishers*, p.117. A copy of one of Powell's tracts in controversy with Watkins, his anonymous *Sinlesse and Sinful Swearing* (1661), which Dr R. T. Jones, *Vavasor Powell*, Abertawe 1971, p.103, failed to discover, and which is left unattributed in Wing (S 3864), is in the Library of Manchester College, Oxford (Tract vol.7, no.4).
  23. *Religious Developments*, p.227; cf. *Puritan Movement*, p.164.
  24. G. F. Nuttall, *The Welsh Saints*, Cardiff 1957, p.90, n.84.
  25. *First Publishers*, pp.115-6.
  26. *Extracts from State Papers*, p.115.
  27. *Calamy Revised*, s.v. Tombes' influence was also felt at Bromsgrove: the first minister, John Eckels, had been baptised by Tombes at Bewdley: B.H.S.T., i.100.
  28. B.H.S.T., vii.5.
  29. R.C.H.M. Herefordshire, ii (1932).
  30. *Puritan Movement*, p.162.
  31. Wing D 617; 71-659 in *Baptist Bibliography*, ed. W. T. Whitley, i (1916); copy in Congregational Library (now at, and administered by, Dr Williams's Library), MSS Portfolio II a 39.

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*Kenneth Marson (256 Dedworth Road, Windsor, Berks, SL4 4JR) has contributed an article on the Revd Samuel Lillicrop to issue No. 8 of Windlesora, pp.2-8. Lillicrop was a close-communion Baptist minister, born in Crediton in 1795. After conversion and lay ministry in Devonshire, he was appointed minister of Dover Fort Baptist Church in 1839. The pastorate was short-lived, he resigned in 1840 and moved to Victoria Street, Windsor, where he served until 1863. Mr Marson is anxious to hear of any further information on Mr Lillicrop.*

JHYB