

THE JOHNSONIAN BAPTISTS IN NORWICH

Few people in Norwich had heard of the Johnsonian Baptists and even fewer knew that a congregation of this sect once met in the former Pottergate Street Baptist Chapel in St Margaret's parish. It was therefore hardly surprising that when public interest was revived in this chapel, which was destroyed in the Second World War, it was not through any curiosity concerning the beliefs of those who worshipped there but through the philanthropic and horticultural activities of their last minister, Henry Trevor, 1819-97, whose Plantation Garden had been rediscovered in 1980 and was being restored by 'The Plantation Garden Preservation Trust', which was specially formed for that purpose. Henry Trevor was minister of the chapel from 1862 to 1897.

ORIGIN OF THE SECT

The Johnsonians were a sect that separated themselves from other Baptists to follow the teaching of John Johnson, 1706-91, of Liverpool. He was a high Calvinist minister who held some unconventional views. He taught that 'faith is not a duty which God requires of man, but a grace which it is impossible to convert into a duty. Faith cannot, therefore, be required of any man and want of faith is no sin. It is not the soul of man which believes but the principle of grace within him. The business of ministers is not to inculcate moral duties but to preach the Gospel.'¹

On the doctrine of the Trinity, the Johnsonians appear to have adopted the 'Indwelling Scheme', with Calvinistic views on justification and atonement. This scheme is an ancient theory which alleges the pre-existence of Christ's human soul in union with the Deity, thus constituting the *Logos*, the wisdom and power of God by whom the worlds are made, and the whole dispensation of providence administered. The Indwelling Scheme appears to have been based on Col.2.9, 'In whom dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily'. It assumes that the human soul of Christ was not created at his conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, but to have existed before his incarnation in union with the Godhead.²

One young member of his congregation who was greatly influenced by his teaching was Samuel Fisher, whose family had come to regard Johnson not only as their minister but also their close friend. When Fisher grew up he became a Baptist preacher and was connected with a church in Nottingham. In 1762 he went to preach at St Mary's Baptist Church in Norwich. Although he was just twenty-one years old, he made a good impression on the congregation and shortly after received their call.

The following entry was recorded in St Mary's Church Book:

At a Church Meeting held July ye 29th 1762, the Church invited Mr Fisher to preach amongst us in a constant way for one year, and proposed to raise him Forty Pounds for the year to render his life as comfortable as they could: his answer was in the affirmative, that he was satisfied.³

In October that year Fisher married Rebecca Brodie, the widow of a wealthy Mansfield draper and hosier, at Mansfield Parish Church. Rebecca, who was thirty-eight years old, already had ten children but little else is known about her. None of St Mary's church books contain any reference to her and she was only mentioned once in Fisher's correspondence when Johnson enquired after her health.⁴

Fisher had a successful ministry for several years and this was reflected by an increase in St Mary's membership. Meanwhile he continued to correspond with Johnson. Evidence that Johnson's doctrine had begun to appear in his preaching was shown in 1766 when he had a sermon published entitled *The Doctrine of the Spirit's Indwelling*.

The following year he had a publication entitled, *The True State of the British Nation, or the danger and duty of sinful people*. In this he stated his concern about the increasing evils of the time and that God's laws and authority were being ignored by the people in their daily lives. He therefore warned that they would soon feel the wrath of God among them. He continued saying that they should be thankful for the many blessings they had received and gave King George III and his government the credit for this. He then listed the evils which called for censure and reform. Among them were immorality, Sabbath breaking and neglect of God's word.⁵

However, Fisher was not without his critics, and opposition to his ministry was shown in 1773 when a pamphlet attacking his character and doctrinal beliefs was published. It was entitled *A Friendly Epistle to Neighbour Samuel Fisher, an inhabitant of the City of Norwich, by Timothy Harmless*. In it he was accused of threatening to leave St Mary's if he did not get an increase in his salary whenever he asked for one. The writer continued that Fisher could harangue the people for over an hour as well as anyone and this showed what a man of parts he was. For this he was much admired by some people who held him in high respect, but others did not, they thought his sentiments were very dangerous and contrary to the faith of the Gospel. Even some of his 'Substantial friends' were concerned about the liberty he had taken with the doctrine. Fisher therefore was advised to consult them before he lost their support as that would be worse than all the evil that had befallen him throughout his adult life.⁶

Fisher replied with a pamphlet of his own in which he appealed to the public.⁷ In defence of his character he stated, 'Whoever is the author of slander and invective, usurps the place of Justice, awards judgement, and inflicts personal punishment; a most unnatural judge, governed by his own evidence, decreeing in wrath, and condemning without hearing'. He implied that he knew who Timothy Harmless was, 'Timothy has, it is thought, more than sufficiently exposed himself'. He continued saying that he would ignore the scurrilous abuse which appeared on every page of Timothy's epistle, nor would he get into a prolonged dispute with him but would leave it to the impartial judgement of the public. He then proceeded to state his case. The pamphlet concluded with a declaration, signed by fifteen members of his congregation, which stated that all the accusations made against

Fisher were false and vouched for his good character. It was published in Norwich on 11 July 1773.

Johnson was also concerned about this attack on Fisher and published a pamphlet in his defence in London entitled, *A serious address to Samuel Fisher, of Norwich, concerning the errors charged upon him by the fictitious quaker stiling himself Timothy Harmless*.⁸

There seemed to be little doubt that hidden under the pseudonym of Timothy Harmless were a number of Fisher's congregation who disagreed with his teaching and wished to have him removed from their ministry. However, those who opposed him did not have long to wait as he was finally dismissed by the Church at a Church Meeting on 16 January 1774.⁹ Ironically it was not for his doctrinal views that he was dismissed but for his morality. He was publicly separated from the Church 'for the crime of Adultery', having admitted his guilt. Later that year Fisher asked to rejoin the membership of St Mary's and requested an opportunity to address them. This was granted in December and he stood before the Church and 'Declared his Repentance'. At the end of the meeting the members declared that they were not satisfied with Mr Fisher's repentance and his request was denied.

The doctrines of Johnson appear to have been responsible for many of Fisher's problems and Johnson himself visited Norwich to see if he could help him. In a letter to a friend the following year he stated that he was concerned about the people in Norwich and did all he could to be of use to them. However, he did not have much success, for he added, 'I suppose I was too faithful'.¹⁰

JOHNSONIAN CHURCH FORMED IN NORWICH

Fisher remained in Norwich and in May 1774 he was preaching to seven followers in the Great Parlour of a house belonging to John Hervey, a carpenter, in the parish of St Michael Coslany. By November he was holding his meetings in the 'Woolroom and Chamber' of his own house in the parish of St Mary's Coslany.¹¹ In 1778 several members of St Mary's Baptist Church left over some disagreement, 'in respect to Sentiment and Church discipline', declaring that they had no intention of returning to the church. It was stated in the church book that one, Brother Keymer, was already assembling with Mr Fisher.¹² Their names were listed and among them was George Barber who was later responsible for building the Johnsonian chapel in St Margaret's parish. That year Johnson wrote to Fisher and congratulated him on the formation of a new church in Norwich. This marked the beginning of the Johnsonian Baptist congregation in Norwich. As the numbers increased, however, Fisher needed larger premises and in April 1779 he rented a warehouse and stable in St Clement's parish in which to hold his meetings.¹³ His occupation on the licensing certificate was recorded as that of a hosier. This was his main source of income at that time as his small number of followers would not have been able to support him.

It is not known when Fisher and his followers began to meet in St Margaret's

parish but they took over a building in the 1780s which had been built by the Methodists. It was in St Margaret's Lane, now Three King Lane, which links Pottergate Street with St Benedict's Street. In 1790 a new chapel was built there by George Barber. It would seem from the licence that Barber, a Norwich Silversmith and Jeweller, had built the chapel at his own expense.¹⁴ It was called St Margaret's Chapel and was situated on the east side of St Margaret's Lane with its entrance in Pottergate Street. It was briefly described some years later as 'A small neat building of brick, the inside of which is well fitted up, and there is a brass branch hanging from the middle'.¹⁵ There was a small burial ground on the south side of the chapel. Eventually the chapel became popularly known as Pottergate Street Chapel.

Meanwhile Fisher, freed from the constraints of St Mary's, had been able to develop his Johnsonian beliefs. He planned to publish Johnson's discourses but the latter died on 20 March 1791 before Fisher could do so. Fisher preached a funeral sermon in St Margaret's Chapel entitled 'The Christian Warefare, or the Character of a Gospel Minister'. By this time the St Margaret's congregation were known as Johnsonian Baptists. Fisher eventually published Johnson's letters in 1796.

FISHER'S PASTORATES IN NORWICH AND WISBECH

In 1787 Richard Wright, the minister of the General Baptist Chapel in Ber Street, Norwich, had befriended Fisher. Although he thought John Johnson was 'to a high degree bigoted and dogmatic', he collaborated with Fisher in 1790 when they agreed, most remarkably, to preach six months, alternately, at St Margaret's Chapel and at a chapel in Deadman's Lane, Wisbech, in Cambridgeshire.¹⁶ This arrangement lasted until 1794 when the Wisbech congregation made it clear that they wanted Wright as their sole pastor. This was partly because his teaching had moved towards Unitarianism and the congregation consisted mainly of Unitarians and Universalists.¹⁷

Fisher, who for some time had been upset by the Wisbech congregation's attitude towards him, made no attempt to assert his rights at the chapel. However, he still had followers in Wisbech and a new chapel was built in Ship Lane, later Upper Hill Street, to accommodate his Johnsonian congregation. He became their minister in 1794 and held the pastorates at Norwich and Wisbech simultaneously for several years until his death in 1803.¹⁸ Since the chapels were some sixty miles apart it would have been no easy task for him to satisfy both congregations. Perhaps the deacons played a leading role in the running of the chapels, and this could have given them the experience which would have enabled them to become pastors later.

At this time there was a great deal of support for the aims of the French Revolution in Norwich, and Mark Wilks, a Baptist minister in the city, was a strong advocate of the Revolution. In July 1791, before crowded congregations, he preached two political sermons in defence of the Revolution. These had a marked effect in Norwich.¹⁹ For some years this support remained widespread in the city and county, and was of some concern to the Government. Fisher, however, held

opposite views and once again showed his support for the Crown and Government in 1794, when he was said to have received the thanks of the Prime Minister after he published a sermon entitled *The Duty of Subjects to the Civil Magistrate*.²⁰ In this he gave several reasons why people should obey the laws of the country, among which were 'No particular form of Government is prescribed in the New Testament, but Christians were commanded to obey the Magistrates'. He urged that, whatever motivated the Government in the war, it was possible to obey God by submitting to the Constitution of the Kingdom and the orders of the State, and by showing humility and contrition in the confession of our sins we could beg God's forgiveness for the sins of the Nation.

His loyalty to the King and his Government was shown again in 1798. The country was under the threat of a French invasion and in order to help pay for measures to combat this a subscription was opened in Norwich. Although most dissenters were opposed to giving aid to the government, Fisher's congregation at St Margaret's gave £20 'in acknowledgement of privileges enjoyed under the mild government of his present Majesty, and their utter detestation of French liberty and all its concomitants'.²¹

Samuel Fisher, the founder of the Norwich Johnsonian congregation, died on 27 April 1803, and his passing was marked by a tablet on the east wall of the interior of St Margaret's chapel. The *Norfolk Chronicle* printed the following short obituary, 'On the 27th ult. died at Muskam, near Newark, Nottinghamshire, the Rev. Samuel Fisher, aged 61, many years pastor of the Baptist Church in St Margaret's in this City [Norwich] and of that in Ship-Lane, Wisbech, - who was a bold contender for the faith, instructed his fellow believers to fear God and honour the King'.²²

Samuel Fisher died at the house of one John Reynoldson who recorded in 'The Church Book belonging to the Society of Baptists at Newark upon Trent' that Fisher was the sole minister of that Church 'and those standing in communion with us'. He also stated that 'the Churches at Norwich, Wisbech, Newark, Chesterfield and Liverpool have sustained a loss, which the Chief Shepherd alone can repair'.²³ On Fisher's death, however, John Reynoldson took over that responsibility.²⁴

Fisher was reported as scholarly and singularly eloquent, sometimes moving his congregations to tears. Even those who disagreed with his views had to admit that he was a very able and powerful orator.²⁵ However, he was never in the best of health and suffered from bouts of illness. In spite of this, he was said to have 'an affable and agreeable disposition' and there is little doubt that he played a key role in the formation of the Johnsonian Baptists.

FISHER'S SUCCESSORS

After Fisher's death the Norwich and Wisbech chapels appointed their own ministers. In the absence of any church books, other than the births and burials register, the nature of St Margaret's Baptist Chapel's constitution is unknown. Fisher was away from Norwich at the time of his death and it appears that, as deacon,

George Barber had been officiating in his absence. Barber succeeded Fisher as St Margaret's pastor but his ministry was short and uneventful and had barely lasted four years when he died in 1807, aged fifty-nine. He had, however, made a useful contribution to the Johnsonian cause in Norwich, having supported Fisher when he served as deacon and having built St Margaret's Chapel.²⁶ According to St Margaret's Burial Register he was 'buried in the upper end of the left aisle in St Margaret's chapel' on 22 March.²⁷

Mary, Barber's wife, is thought to have come from the Wisbech area and she was nineteen years his junior. It is possible that her maiden name was Beakley and she may have been related to John and Sarah Beakley whose children's births were recorded in St Margaret's register between 1792 and 1799. They lived at Walsoken, a village one mile east of Wisbech. It would seem that Mary died in childbirth when their daughter Mary Beakley was born on 25 March 1789. According to St Margaret's burial register she was buried in the 'Protestant Dissenters Burying Ground in Wisbech, Isle of Ely' on 2 April 1789. Her death was registered two years later by Samuel Fisher when the burial register was begun in April 1791.²⁸

The pastorate at St Margaret's chapel seems to have been vacant for about two years after Barber's death. During that time William Pell, a deacon, recorded the births and burials in the chapel register. Then in 1809 Samuel Sly, a Norwich Watch and Clockmaker, became pastor, a position he was to hold for over thirty years until 1840, just over a year before his death in 1842. His parents, Samuel and Amy Sly, were formerly members of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, where seven of their children's births were registered between 1773 and 1784, including Samuel's.²⁹ He carried on his business from a shop in White Lion Street in Norwich but little is known about his lengthy ministry. It was during his pastorate, 1828, that the Johnsonian congregation was recorded as numbering one hundred members.³⁰

The next pastor was Joseph Gray, a Norwich cabinet maker and upholsterer, who lived in Dove Street in the parish of St John Maddermarket where his business premises were. His first wife was Mary Beakley, the only daughter of George Barber, by whom he had six children. In the early 1830s Gray and his family moved to Heigham Grove. Heigham was the fastest growing suburb of Norwich and he was responsible for building several houses there. By 1845 he had retired from cabinet making and in the Census of 1851 described himself as a 'Landed Proprietor'. His wife died in December 1848 and was buried in St Margaret's Chapel's burial ground. Within three years Gray had married Martha, a woman fifteen years his junior. In the Religious Census of 1851 he recorded the numbers attending the chapel's three Sunday services as: morning 60, afternoon 64, and evening 50. He also stated that there were no Sunday scholars.³¹

In 1857 Joseph Gray sent the St Margaret's Births and Burials Register to the Non-Parochial Registers Commission at Somerset House. On the accompanying 'Certificate or Statement' he confirmed that the chapel had been founded in 1778. This register contains both births, 1789-1848, and burials 1791-1856, and seems to

be the only surviving book belonging to St Margaret's Chapel. However, it does give some idea of the ties between St Margaret's Chapel and the Upper Hill Street Chapel in Wisbech. Apart from starting with Samuel Fisher as their joint pastor, at least one birth and one burial was entered in the registers of both chapels. It is also interesting to note that when Joseph Gray entered the burials for Mary Beakley Gray, December 1848, and Lucy Trevor, March 1849, the signature of Robert Reynoldson appeared in the margin beside these entries. In the margin next to his entry for Walter Trevor, January 1848, the signature of Robert Dawbarn is written. Robert Reynoldson was the pastor of the Wisbech chapel for over forty years and may have been the son of John Reynoldson who had the oversight of the Johnsonian churches. Robert Dawbarn was a deacon at the Wisbech chapel. These entries could suggest that the Wisbech pastor acted as an overseer to St Margaret's Chapel.³²

HENRY TREVOR, BUILDER, HORTICULTURALIST, PHILANTHROPIST

Another link with Wisbech was established about 1835 when Joseph Gray's firm took on a young apprentice named Henry Trevor from that town. Trevor's family was well known; his grandfather, Dr Samuel Trevor, was a surgeon in Horncastle. Henry was born on 20 December 1819, the son of John Trevor, a Wisbech farmer, and his wife Dorothy, née Scott of Grimblethorpe Hall in Lincolnshire. When he was old enough, Henry chose to follow a career in craftsmanship instead of the yeoman or professional occupations of his father and grandfather.³³ It is possible that his family attended the Wisbech chapel and his choice of Norwich and Joseph Gray's firm for his apprenticeship may have been no coincidence. Trevor became a skilled craftsman and, after completing his apprenticeship in 1842, set up his own business in Norwich at 5 Post Office Street, later Exchange Street. This included cabinet making, upholstery and carving and gilding. The following year he married the widowed daughter of Joseph Gray, Mary Beakley Page, who already had three sons.

In those days his firm's apprentices lived on the premises and to ensure they received suitable religious instruction Trevor kept a portable pulpit there from which he would preach to them.³⁴ When his eldest stepson, John Joseph Page, was fourteen, Trevor took him into his business and by the time he reached adulthood he was proficient enough to become a partner in 1864; the firm became known as Trevor & Page. This enabled Trevor to devote more time to his other interests which included building, horticulture and St Margaret's Chapel.

Henry Trevor went to live in Heigham and played his part in the development of the area. Apart from building his own house, which he called 'The Plantation', he built several others, including a terrace in Chester Place.³⁵ Indeed, it was once said of Trevor that he was a 'Builder and pioneer whose name should not be forgotten'.³⁶ For much of his building work plans were drawn up by Edward Boardman, an architect, who built the Unthank Road Baptist Chapel a short distance away.³⁷

When the Trevor family first moved into 'The Plantation', much of the land was taken up by a disused lime quarry extending over two acres and about sixty feet in depth. Henry Trevor was a creative man who had enough vision to see that this apparently useless land could be landscaped and turned into a productive garden. After much hard work and at great expense the site was transformed into a fine garden with Italian terraces, fountains, gravelled walks and a large Palm House.³⁸ He employed several gardeners and George Woodhouse, the head gardener lived on the site with his family.³⁹

Trevor loved flowers, particularly chrysanthemums, and was a member of the Norfolk and Norwich Horticultural Society. He regularly entered chrysanthemums in the Heigham Horticultural Society shows and on several occasions sent displays to the Wisbech Chrysanthemum Society. It was said that he once sent his gardener to Japan in search of new varieties and he was away so long Trevor feared for his safety.⁴⁰ He saw flowers as gifts from a loving Father and he wished to share with others the delight they gave him. He was never more happy than when his beautiful garden was crowded with holidaymakers. His grounds were always open to public use and charitable functions were held there. All sections of the community who wished to make use of his garden were welcome and at the time of his death it was said that there was hardly an institution or church in Norwich which had not at some time been helped by him. He sent his plants to decorate their special occasions and, although a strong Nonconformist, he gave a Church of England Society just as much consideration as a Baptist one.⁴¹

Henry Trevor was appointed pastor of St Margaret's Chapel, by now popularly known as the Pottergate Street Chapel, after many years service as a deacon, when Joseph Gray died in 1862. During Trevor's pastorate the chapel's membership varied in number, rising from twenty-nine in 1864 to sixty-nine in 1874 and declining to thirty in 1886.⁴² It was surprising, considering the large number of children attending the Sunday School, that so few went on to join the chapel's congregation. Little is known about the running of the chapel, but the congregation used a hymn book especially printed for the Johnsonians and published by Gardiner & Co of Wisbech in 1873, *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for Divine Worship*. It was printed by Winks & Son of Leicester and contained 969 hymns.⁴³

TREVOR'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

In the Religious Census of 1851 Joseph Gray had stated that St Margaret's Chapel had no Sunday scholars. Trevor sought to rectify this when he became pastor. He took a lively interest in the welfare of children and started a Sunday school at the chapel, of which he was superintendent. This became generally known as the Pottergate Street School. An insight into how it was run is found in a letter by former teacher, Edwin B. Southwell, who taught there for fifteen years from 26 July 1875.⁴⁴ Reminiscing, he stated that the school, as he first knew it, was little more than two converted cottages adapted as far as possible to serve the purpose. It was

equipped with a library. There were fifty scholars on the register and the staff consisted of himself and seven women, among them Trevor's daughter.

The school began on Sunday mornings just after 9 a.m. and continued until 10.30 a.m. when the scholars were ushered into the chapel. Mr Trevor conducted the service and the harmonium was played by Mr Larkman whose wife led the singing. There was usually a small number of adults in attendance and the presence of the scholars helped to brighten up the proceedings, which for them, Southwell feared, were somewhat boring. The boys in his charge were assembled immediately below the pulpit in full view of the preacher. It was difficult to keep them quiet as they were restless and inattentive the whole time, but he thought that understandable as they had already spent over an hour in the schoolroom before the chapel service began. He continued, 'It was always with a real sense of relief to hear the final Amen pronounced and the scholars dismissed'. In the afternoon the school began at 2.30 p.m. and finished at 4 p.m. when the day's work came to an end.

Sometimes staff meetings were held when ideas to promote the school were discussed. At one such meeting it was decided that the school should try to 'encourage a love of music'. Concerts were arranged and conducted by a friend, and the harmonium was played by a former scholar. The older scholars sang songs and the concerts were very successful, as were the lantern lectures. Southwell worked the lanterns which burnt sperm oil - 'The smoke from which, to say nothing of the smell, left the atmosphere of the room at the end of the entertainment in a deplorable condition'. However, nobody cared as the exhibition of pictures 'was accepted by all as ample compensation for any such inconveniences'. Tea meetings were held occasionally for parents and school friends and these were also popular. They were followed by addresses given by people involved in Sunday School work from other churches, such as the Revd T.A. Wheeler, minister of Unthank Road Baptist Church. There were, of course, Sunday School Treats. He could remember one at Catton Park and another at the Plantation, Trevor's garden; to qualify for these scholars had to be regular in their attendance at the school.

Attendance steadily increased and outgrew the accommodation. One Sunday afternoon Trevor informed Southwell that he intended building a new schoolroom on a piece of waste ground on the Pottergate Street site. They therefore decided to form themselves into a Building Committee. However, Trevor then said, 'In his dry humourous way that he preferred a committee of two only, with one member absent - it was so much easier to come to decisions and get on with the work'. The schoolroom was built and put in the hands of six trustees, one of whom was Southwell himself. It was ready for occupation in 1886, a permanent record of Mr Trevor's interest in all Sunday School work.

Following the opening of the new schoolroom, there was a rapid increase in the number of scholars, with up to three hundred names on the register. A large number of new books were added to the library and these were freely drawn upon by the scholars. Southwell added that there was a Clothing Club mainly supported by the

parents and a large bonus was added to the subscriptions by Mr Trevor, 'to encourage habits of thrift'. Mrs Trevor managed the club, receiving subscriptions at her house. The money subscribed and the bonus were paid yearly in December.

The scholars were also encouraged to purchase monthly periodicals and many were subscribers. The bookseller allowed a large discount on all such purchases and the money accruing was used in the following way. At the end of each year the scholars were asked to bring the magazines they had bought to the school. These were then checked to see that they were complete before being sent to the binders. The discount money did not quite cover the cost of binding but the difference was usually made up by friends of the school. The day of redistribution was early in the New Year at a special assembly of scholars and friends. A large number 'of gorgeously bound books were displayed' on a desk. After singing and listening to a suitable address by some friend, the books were returned to their owners. When the school was dismissed the scholars could be seen proudly carrying their 'Treasures' home.

By this time the numbers of male and female teachers were about equal and Southwell proceeded to name those he could remember, eleven in all, among them the three Misses Guyton all devoted to their classes and the school. Indeed, he thought it would have been difficult for the school to have carried on without them. All the teachers were 'Constant in attendance' - Southwell qualified this by adding that he should say 'Or by substitute', for to inform Mr Trevor that you were going on holiday and would be absent was somewhat of an ordeal. With a pained look of surprise he would say, 'Holidays - never heard of such a thing in my time'. He was mollified when informed that a suitable substitute was to cover the absence.

Over the years Henry Trevor held the Presidency of the Sunday School Union and was also involved with the Sunday School Continental Mission. In his declining years, however, he felt the pastorate of the chapel and superintendence of the Sunday School were too much for him and he decided to resign both. When the deacons of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, met on 19 September 1890, the Revd J.H. Shakespeare reported that Trevor wished to hand over his chapel and Sunday School in Pottergate Street to St Mary's.⁴⁵ The property was already in trust to members of St Mary's and two gentlemen in Wisbech, and Trevor wished to see the transfer take place in his lifetime.⁴⁶ His idea was that St Mary's should take over the educational work of the school, and whenever possible he would train the young for Christian life and service in the church. St Mary's deacons agreed on 6 February 1891 that Trevor would still support the beneficiary clubs and other works of that description among the scholars, and St Mary's would bear the cost of a caretaker, cleaning, gas, water rates, taxes and incidental expenses of the school, estimated at twenty shillings a week.⁴⁷

It was to Henry Trevor's credit that his Sunday School was described at the time as, 'In many respects, a model institution for the city'.⁴⁸ When St Mary's took charge of the school there were 433 scholars and 21 teachers.⁴⁹ In January 1895

a Mr C.J. Clarke became superintendent of the school which was known as St Mary's Sunday School Mission Room. For a while St Mary's continued the work of the school but found it was not possible to maintain the supply of teachers. Therefore in 1898 the Pottergate Street Sunday School was handed over by the trustees to a Baptist Mission run by a Mr F.J. Fenn. The Pottergate Street Chapel was closed in 1900 and the Sunday School became affiliated with Unthank Road Baptist Church, Norwich, in 1915. However, due to the depopulation of the surrounding area numbers began to fall, so the work was moved to Unthank Road and the Pottergate Street premises were closed. The chapel building was destroyed in the Second World War air raids of 1942 and the schoolroom was used for industrial purposes.⁵⁰

HENRY TREVOR AND ST MARY'S BAPTIST CHURCH

Trevor had been closely involved with St Mary's many years before he transferred the responsibility for chapel and Sunday school in Pottergate Street. Several times he represented St Mary's when he served on committees of the Norfolk Association of Baptist Churches. He also assisted the church when an Alteration Committee was set up with a mandate to enlarge St Mary's. Acting for that committee in 1885 he purchased property adjoining the church for £750. This enabled the church to be enlarged the following year, when an organ was built and additional school premises were added. In his latter years Trevor regularly attended St Mary's services although he never actually became a member of the church.

St Mary's congregation, like other Nonconformists in Norwich, was very much involved with the Liberal Party. In November 1885, when a general election was due to begin, St Mary's minister, the Revd J.H. Shakespeare, preached a sermon entitled, 'The Duty of Christian Men in the Present Political Crisis'.⁵¹ Jeremiah James Colman, Treasurer of the Norfolk Association of Baptist Churches, was a Liberal candidate in this election. However, Henry Trevor was not involved with electioneering in any way. He held somewhat unusual views concerning the right attitude of Christian men towards political questions: 'Let the potsherd of the earth strive with the potsherd of the earth', he would say.⁵² In spite of this, he took a deep interest in all public questions and his judgement could be keen and penetrating, but he never voted in his life or went to a public meeting. He was not a public man in the conventional sense but strongly supported the religious movements which fell, in his view, within his own province.

Henry Trevor died on 26 May 1897 following a stroke. He was in his 78th year.⁵³ It was said at the time that he had lived a quiet, unostentatious, useful Christian life and would be long remembered for his general kindness. He gave a large amount of money to charity privately, the only condition being that his gift should not be mentioned by anybody. Trevor had thought of himself as a steward, and dedicated his influence and wealth to the glory of God and the service of man. It was his unshakeable belief, as he had been heard to say many times, 'That a

selfish life must be a miserable one, and that the way to be happy was to make others happy'. A memorial sermon was preached in St Mary's Baptist Church on Sunday, 30 May, by the Revd J.H. Shakespeare.⁵⁴ Shakespeare stated that Trevor had been a member of an obscure sect, the Johnsonian Baptists, which he supposed was 'Now - extinct'. Trevor had identified with them at an early age. He had believed in a free and full Gospel and the sermons he had enjoyed most were those which concerned the universal call of Christ for everybody. 'He believed that the will of God was salvation, pardon, and eternal life'. Shakespeare referred to Trevor's untiring work with the Pottergate Street Sunday School and how important the little chapel had been to him with its burial ground where some close to him were interred.

Interments in the Pottergate Street Chapel's burial ground had ceased and Trevor was buried at the Norwich City Cemetery in the family vault where Joseph Gray, his father-in-law, had been buried in 1862. This contrasted with many of his friends and contemporaries who were interred at the Rosary, the Nonconformist cemetery. J.H. Shakespeare officiated at his funeral on 31 May which began at 'The Plantation',⁵⁵ giving a brief address to the assembled mourners who, besides members of the family of the deceased, included some intimate friends, men from Trevor's firm, his servants, and George White and William Blyth representing St Mary's Baptist Church. Mrs Trevor did not attend the committal. The cortège left the house preceded by five men, including William Woodhouse, Trevor's head gardener. The coffin, which rested on an open car, was covered with wreaths and flanked by ten bearers, men from his firm. A large number of mourning coaches and private carriages followed. At the cemetery gates the cortège was joined by nearly a hundred employees of Messrs Trevor & Page who had been given the afternoon off to attend. An address was given at the graveside and the proceedings were brought to an end by singing 'Rock of Ages'.

Trevor had appointed two friends at St Mary's, Harry Pearce Gould and Ernest Egbert Blyth, as executors to his will.⁵⁶ He left several legacies, among them £100 to St Mary's Baptist Church, £100 to Norwich Sunday School Union, £50 to the Norwich City Mission, and £50 to the Norwich Blind School. He also remembered the Guyton sisters, his loyal Sunday School teachers, who received £150 between them.

CONCLUSION

Except for one instance, it would seem that the Norwich Johnsonian Baptists were rarely called by that name but were usually referred to as Calvinistic or Particular Baptists.⁵⁷ Indeed, in the 1851 Religious Census for Norfolk, Joseph Gray referred to the St Margaret's congregation as 'Baptists'.⁵⁸ This tended to obscure their true identity and Underwood assumed that the sect had become extinct by 1851.⁵⁹ However, both the Norwich and Wisbech congregations existed long after that date, the Wisbech chapel continuing until late into the twentieth century.

Although Samuel Fisher has been credited with the formation of the Johnsonian Baptist congregation in Norwich, the part played by those who left St Mary's Baptist chapel to join him should not be overlooked. They formed the nucleus of his congregation, two of them becoming pastors, one of whom was responsible for building the chapel in St Margaret's parish. From the time Fisher held the joint pastorates of the Norwich and Wisbech chapels until the Pottergate Street chapel closed a century later, there was a close relationship between the two congregations, and family ties may account for some births and burials being entered in the registers of both chapels.

It was customary for the Johnsonian Baptists in Norwich to appoint their pastors from men who had served their chapel for many years, first as members of the congregation and then as deacons. Once appointed, a pastor served for life or until he chose to retire. Two of the chapel's pastors each served for over thirty years and another over twenty years. None of these pastors were college trained, but businessmen, and this may have prevented the congregation from being influenced by the latest theology. Whilst J.H. Shakespeare stated that the sect did not take a narrow view of the Gospel, he did concede that their theology was 'austere in its unworldliness but large in love'.⁶⁰ It is clear that one devoted man took it upon himself to keep the chapel going and create a large Sunday school. Henry Trevor was a successful businessman which gave him the means to finance the causes which were important to him. The chapel did not survive long after his death, but the legacy of his Sunday school was to continue for some years, and the rediscovery of his Plantation garden has revived interest in him and in the chapel in which he served God.

NOTES

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| 1 | A.C. Underwood, <i>A History of the English Baptists</i> , 1947, p.135. | 14 | <i>ibid.</i> |
| 2 | Edward Deacon, <i>Samuel Fisher, Baptist Minister of Norwich and Wisbech 1742-1803</i> , Bridgeport, Conn., USA, 1911, p.44. | 15 | P. Browne, <i>The History of Norwich</i> , 1814, p.165. |
| 3 | St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich: First Church Book 1691-1778. MS 4282 Norfolk Record Office. | 16 | Maurice F. Hewett, Unpublished typescript MS 4259/61, 1945, NRO. |
| 4 | Deacon, <i>op.cit.</i> , pp.30-1. | 17 | Ann Lys, <i>The Dawbarns of Wisbech</i> , The Wisbech Society 50th Annual Report, 1989, p.30. |
| 5 | <i>ibid.</i> , pp.7-8. | 18 | C.B. Jewson, <i>Jacobin City</i> , 1975, p.139. |
| 6 | <i>ibid.</i> , pp.8-9. | 19 | A.D. Bayne, <i>A Comprehensive History of Norwich</i> , 1869, p.637. |
| 7 | <i>ibid.</i> , pp.9-10. | 20 | Deacon, <i>op.cit.</i> , pp.24-5. |
| 8 | <i>ibid.</i> , p.11. | 21 | Jewson, <i>op.cit.</i> , p.88. |
| 9 | St Mary's First Church Book. | 22 | <i>Norfolk Chronicle</i> , 7 May 1803. |
| 10 | Deacon, <i>op.cit.</i> , p.13. | 23 | Deacon, <i>op.cit.</i> , p.33. |
| 11 | Diocesan Supplementary D 15/1/2, Register of Meeting Houses 1751/1810. Microfilm 505 NRO. | 24 | Hewett's typescript. |
| 12 | St Mary's First Church Book. | 25 | Deacon, <i>op.cit.</i> , p.33. |
| 13 | Diocesan Supplementary D 15/1/2. | 26 | Diocesan Supplementary D 15/1/2. |
| | | 27 | St Margaret's Chapel (Baptist) Norwich, RG 4/1785: Births and Burials Register. Public |

- Record Office.
- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich: Register of Births 1758/1837, MS 4284. NRO.
- 30 *Norfolk Tour* Vol.2, 1829, p.1269.
- 31 1851 Census of Religious Worship (Norfolk) Microfilm, Local Studies Library, Norwich City Library.
- 32 St Margaret's Register.
- 33 *Eastern Daily Press* (hereafter EDP), Mr Trevor and Mr Page, 29 March 1955.
- 34 *Ex fonte: The Journal of the Plantation Garden Preservation Trust* (hereafter JPGPT) No.9, Norwich, 1988, p.18.
- 35 EDP: *Round about Heigham Grove*, 30 April 1925.
- 36 *ibid.*
- 37 JPGPT, No. 14, Winter, p.6.
- 38 *Guide and Map: Plantation Garden Preservation Trust*.
- 39 1881 Census Return, Norwich, Heigham. Microfilm, Local Studies Library, Norwich City Library.
- 40 John Watson, JPGPT No.10, 1989, p.10.
- 41 St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich: Magazine, July 1897, p.40.
- 42 *Baptist Handbooks: 1864, 1874, 1886.*
- 43 Hewett's typescript.
- 44 Edwin B. Southwell: Letter dated 16 September 1929. St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, Library: Box File No.9 (2).
- 45 St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich: Deacons' Minutes FC6/5-10. NRO.
- 46 St Mary's Baptist Chapel: Year Book 1890/91, pp.47-8.
- 47 St Mary's Baptist Church: Deacons' Minutes, FC 6/5-10. NRO.
- 48 St Mary's Baptist Chapel: Year Book 1890-91, pp.47-8.
- 49 *ibid.*
- 50 Hewett's typescript.
- 51 Kenneth Hipper, *Rev. J.H. Shakespeare 1857-1928*, Norwich, 1983, p.9.
- 52 *St Mary's Magazine*, No.19, July 1897, p.40.
- 53 EDP: 27 May 1897.
- 54 *St Mary's Magazine*, No.19, July 1897, pp.39-42.
- 55 EDP: 1 June 1897.
- 56 Will No 325, Norwich Probate copy. NRO.
- 57 *Norfolk Tour* Vol.2, 1829, p.1269.
- 58 1851 Census of Religious Worship, Norfolk.
- 59 Underwood, *op.cit.*, p.135.
- 60 *St Mary's Magazine*, Vol.11, July 1897, p.41.

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MEETINGS OF THE BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Annual General Meeting for 1999 will take place on 13 May at the Welsh Chapel, Eastcastle Street, London W1 at 6.30 p.m., with refreshments available from 6 pm., and business will be followed by the Lecture at 7 p.m. Dr D. Densil Morgan, Warden of Bangor Baptist College, will speak on 'John Miles and the future of Ilston's past: Welsh Baptists after three and a half centuries'. This lecture, which is sponsored by the Baptist Union of Wales, will be repeated on Tuesday, 15 June 1999 at 7 p.m. at Capel Gomer, Swansea, when the president for the evening will be Sir Glamor Williams.

We still await confirmation of arrangements for the Society's meeting during the Baptist Assembly at Bournemouth in April 1999, when we hope to focus on the history of the European Baptist Federation.