The G.B. Association in Bucks.


The General Baptists in England date from 1612, when Thomas Helwys brought from Amsterdam a few men hailing from the neighbourhood of Gainsborough. They settled at Spitalfields, and petitioned for liberty to worship. This was answered by throwing the leaders into Newgate prison. But the church held on, and others were formed. They organized in the Midlands by 1651, and a General Assembly was formed by 1654. Its minutes until 1811 have been issued by this Society.

By the end of the seventeenth century a movement, headed by Matthew Caffyn, was leading the Kent and Sussex churches into peculiar views on the personality of our Lord. The churches in Buckingham and Northampton took strong ground against him, and after some trouble in 1696 and a momentary reunion in 1704, they carried a resolution that every member of Assembly should sign a clear statement on the points at issue. This led to the secession of the ambiguous party.

The minutes of the Assembly from 1704 to 1733 have been lost, though we have those of the seceding churches. It is therefore very fortunate that the minutes of the Bucks Association have been preserved from 1721 to 1760. They are, however, far less interesting than might have been expected, and the excerpts presented here contain everything of any general interest.

Those who are studying local history can indeed take the Assembly minutes, these minutes, and the minutes of the Ford and Amersham churches, also published by this Society, and can follow the fortunes of all the ministers and many other brethren; and can watch the gradual extinction of the churches.
The two matters that do seem to deserve attention are the Messengers, and the change of doctrine towards Calvinism.

It was an old custom of the General Baptists that there should be an officer responsible for the evangelizing of a whole district, and available to advise the churches. They based this on scriptural grounds, and found it work in practice. But doubts arose occasionally as to the value of the office, and its functions were considerably narrowed, though it still exists.

During the eighteenth century, the old General Baptist churches found themselves in a state of unstable equilibrium. Many lapsed towards Arianism, and others tended towards Calvinism, as was shown in our volume I at page 181. The closing pages of this Association book mention the latter process, though they hardly illustrate it. It may be added that the formation of new General Baptist churches from Barton and Melbourne, organized in 1770 by a Brittain into the New Connexion, showed a third possibility; but this only arose after this Association ceased.

At an Association of Elders & Repress of ye several Churches whose names are as followeth, which mett in Aylesbury Oct 7th 1723

the Ch of Aylesbury { Bro Sturch Elder
                      ( Bro Fulks & Bro
                      Harding Representat

The Ch. of Foard { Bro Cripps Elder
                      ( Bro John Goodchild
                      ( Bro. Allen Repts

The Ch of Winslow { Bro Wilkins Elder
                      ( Bro Brittain Reprts

The Ch. of Wing  Bro. Cripps Rept

1 It is agreed that there should be a day of Humiliation by fasting & Prayer observed in ye Churches to intreat Allmighty God to continue his present Mercys & in Great Goodness Revive his Seemingly Dieing lamp next Day [query] week or yr 16 of Oct
2ly it is also agreed that there should be another Association hold in this place ye Tuesday in Ester week
John Brittain
Leonard Wilkins
John Sturch
John Cripps
James Britton
Wm Allon
John Harding
John Goodchild
Wm Cripps
Att an Association of Messengers Elders and Brethren Representitives of the Several Congregations of the General Baptist mett together this Seventh day of April 1724 whose names are as followeth (viz)
Bro John Brittain } Messengers
Bro John Cook } {Bro. Jno Sturch Elder
Aylesbury Ch } {Bro. Rich Fulks } Repres
{Bro Harding
Barkhamsted Ch } {Bro Treacher } Repres
{Bro Nichols
Ford Ch. } {Bro John Crips Elder
{Bro Wm Goodchild
{Bro Moses Pool
Wing Ch } {Bro William Fenner
{Bro. William Green
Winslow Ch } {Bro. Wilkins Elder
{Bro. James Brittain Represen
Sundon Ch Thos: Brittain Representitivnes
The Agreements as followeth
1st ye Letter of Bro Hunt Sen be [? entered in] ye Book followeth
The humble complaint of John Hunt Senr against ye
Church of Aylesbury for not doing of Justice between him & his Son John Hunt for altho. J. proved him guilty of ye breach of ye 5th command & also of in Pro. 30. 17 as also ye in Deut 27. 15 wh. proved him to be a stubborn & a Rebellious son, for wch pray see is said in 1 Sam. J. also proved him dishonest in ye he denied me of what was my rights. & he proveth himself void of natural affections in yt he will have no dealing wth me nor none of his own Relations nor Society J. also charged John Harding for giving him ill Council & proved it but ye Church thought neither of them worthy of blame J also charged his Wife of Lying & proved it but she was not worthy of their blame Which hath given them so much encouragement, yt they have abused it in a very shameful manner, for wh J. would have prosecuted them but John Sturch hath kept them from Justice all he could for which J expects satisfaction of him Friends & Brethren J. would intreat you diligently to enquire into this matter for it hath been a very great grief to me & my wife & a great dishonour, & damage to our Family & Profession So ye Lord give of his spirit to guide you in all things wh is ye prayer of yr unworthy Brother

John Hunt

2d Consequent to ye request of Bro. John Hunt Senr Laid before us in his Letter of complaint wch contains a Queary whether Bro. Jno Harding ought to be Esteemed as a Represe"nt and ye same being Considered it passed in ye Affirmative

3d The case depending between ye Church Meeting in Aylesbury & Bro. John Hunt, Senior, being reheard by consent of parties, & Particulars leading to ye Dissension being enquired into after a full debate, the
Association conclude ye Agreement of ye Church mentioned just & valid

4th Agreed that Aylesbury friends & Winslow friends do supply Leighton Meeting once a month

5 Agreed to have another Association Meeting at this place on ye Tuesday next after Michaelmas day

John Brittain
John Cook—
John Sturch
Richard Fulks
John Harding
Jonath Widmer
Leonard Wilkins
James Britten
Wm Green
Wm Fenner
Tho. Brittain

At an Association of Messengers Elders & Representative of the Several Congregations of the General Baptist met together this sixth day of October In the year of the Lord 1724 whose names are underwritten—it is agreed as followeth

Bro: John Cook Messenger

Aylesbury Ch { Bro. Sturch elder
               { Bro. Richd Fulks
               { Bro. Maiden
                   Repres——
Barkd Ch { Bro. Thos. Sexton
               { Bro. Iossios Sale
                   Represt
Ford Ch { Bro. John Cripps elder
               { Bro. John Goodchild
               { Bro. Daniel Rider
Wing Ch Bro Richd Bird Represt——
Winslow { Bro. Leonard Wilkins
         { Bro James Brittain
Sundon No representative
Agreed that there be an Association held at this place the Tuesday in Easter week next

John Cook
Leonard Wilkins
Jonath. Widmer
James Britten
John Cripps
Richard Fulks
James Mayden
Thomas Sexton
Richard Bird
John Goodchild
Daniel Rider

At an Association of Messengers Elders & Representatives, of the severall Congregations of the General Baptist mett together this thirtieth Day of March In the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred & twenty & five—it is agreed as follows

Bro. John Brittain Messenger

Aylsbury Ch. { Bro Sturch Elder
  { Bro Richd ffulks
  { Bro Wm Rolph } Represt.

Barkhampd Ch { Bro. Jonath. Widmer } Elders
  { Bro. Thos. Sexton
  { Bro Fra Tristram
  { Bro. John Treacher } Repres—

  { Bro. Cripps—elder

Ford Ch. { Bro. Pool } Represent
  { Bro. Jo:ny

Winslow { Bro. Leo Wilkins } Elders
  { Bro. James Brittain

Wing Ch. Bro Thos. Tayler Repres

Sundon { Nihil

Wickham
1st Brother Brittain represents ye General want of Ministers & of little success of those ye are employed

Agreed yt a Day of fasting & prayer be appointed in all ye Severall Congregations belonging to ye sd. Association upon this account as likewise in Respect to protestant Interest abroad between this & this Day month & every Congregation to appoint ye most Convenient Day

2dly Bro. Allen’s Case to be represented by a Letter to ye Several Congregations of the Baptist persuasion in London to procure wt assistance they see fit.

3dy Concerning ye case of the Church of Christ at Wing; desiring a supply for their meeting, which was agreed to for once a month by Aylesbury friends

4 Agreed that a letter be sent to the Churches of Christ Meeting at Wickham Ammersam & Sundon to invite them to the next Association Meeting at this place. & that Bro. Jony, Bro Thos Brittain & Bro: Widmer doe write the same

5 Agreed that the next Association be held at this place the Tuesday after Michlmas day next

Bro. Thos Brittain ordered to transcrib letter [? and send an] account to the Churches in Bedfordshire & [? ask for] contributions

John Brittain James Brittain
John Sturch Thomas Tayler
Richard Fulks
William Rolf
Jonath Widmer
Thomas Sexton
John Treacher
John Cripps
Moses pool
Robert J·o·ny
Leon Wilkins
At an Association of Messengers elders & Representatives of the several Congregations of the General Baptist met together this fifth day of Oct in the year 1725—

It was agreed as foll—

Bro: Brittain Messenger—Nihill

Bro Sturch Elder

Aylesbury Ch { Bro. Rolph } Represent
{ Bro. Stone } No Case

Barkhamst

Bro. Widmer } elders
{ Bro. Sexton
{ Bro. Wheeler } Represent
{ Bro. Dooley

fford Ch

{ Bro. Hunt } Represent
{ Bro. Jony

Bro Hunt presented case Against Aylesbury Ch & elder

Winslow

Bro Fenner Representative desires assistance in the meetings

Sundon { Bro. Thos. Britain } Represent
{ Bro. Cook

Amersam { Bro. Beck } Represent
{ Bro. Sexton

Wickham Bro. Hobbs elder

Bro. Saml Wright Represent

1 The first Case presented by Bro. Hunt [something illegible] relating to his son Daughter & Aylesbury Church

Bro. Hunt & Bro: Sturch are agreed in [illegible] & amicable manner

2 Also agreed that Aylesbury doe Suply Laiton once a month as formerly

3 Agreed that this Association takes it very kindly from the Churches of Wickham & Amersam that they have
joined with us in this Association, & that they are desired to continue their friendly assistance in such meetings for the future
4 Agreed that the next Association meeting be held at Aylesbury on Monday in Easter Week . . .
5 A Case being proposed concerning such persons as may be likely to become servicable in the work of the ministry—how Churches should proceed in such cases.

Agreed that the Church to whom such persons belong [? exercise] their Authority in calling such persons to exercise their gifts

John Brittain
John Sturgh
William Rolf
henry Stone
Jonaths Widmer
Thomas Sexton
Joseph Wheeler
Joseph Dooly

John Hunt
Robt J:o:ny
William Fenner
Thos. Brittain
Thomas Cook
Danll Beck
Henry Saxton
Joseph Hobbs
Sam: Wright

Aylesbury April 11th 1726
This Day was held· An Association of the Severall Churches under named by their Elders & Representatives with Bro. John Brittain Messenger

Aylesbury Church {Bro. Sturch Elder
Bro Rolph Represent

The Church of Barkhamst. {Bro. Widmer elder
Bro Trustrum
Bro Josiah Sal[e
Repr

The Church of Ford {Bro Cripps elder
Bro John Hunt
Bro John Goss
Repr

The Church of Winslow {Bro. Wilkins Elders
Bro Britain

The Church of Wing {Bro Green Represent Suply
The Church of Sundon

Ammersem  { Bro: John Randall } Rept.
Church  { Bro: Henry Hobbs }
The Church  { Bro: Hobbs Elder }

at Wickham  { Bro: John Veary Represt }

1—The case proposed by the Church of Barkhamstead whos whether the present state of the Church upon the account of that coldness & want of zeal toward God & Religion & love towards one another, doth not call for aday of humiliation, by fasting & prayer

Agreed in the affirmative . . . & that such aday be kept the Churches on such aday as best suits them between this & Whitsuntide next

2 A question proposed by Bro Cripps relating to the case of several friends that formerly belongd to the Church of fford & afterwards Joynd with friend Gosse & now offer to return to the communion of the Church aforesaid—

Whither they Church may receive them to their communion again & upon what terms . . .

Agreed that it is the opinion of this Association that they ought to be admited: provided there be no disorder since their suspension

3 The suply desired by the Church at Wing,
Agreed that Aylesbury friends suply for the half year ensuing & formerly

4 Agreed that there be an Association held at this place the Munday after Micklmass day next; & that better order be observed in keeping the aforesaid meeting for the future. (viz) that all persons keep in the meeting while business is doing & speak one by one

Also that it begin at ten o'clock

John Brittain
Jonath, Widmer  John Sturch
At an Association of the Baptised Churches at Ailsbury on Monday Ap. 29 1734

Joseph Hobbs Messenger

Ailsbury  Bro Jno Sturch Eld—
          Wm Partridge Rept

Ford       Bro. J:no:ny
          Bro. Allen
          Bro Goodchild Rept.—Alp
          Bro Hunt

Barkampsted  Richd Butler Eld
             Bro. Jno. Treacher rept

Leighton   Edward Bagley Rept.
Sunden      Bro. Richard Carter Rept.
Amersham    Danll Beck Rept
Winslow     Jos. Jenkins Eld
Wickham     Jos. Hobbs as above

after seeking the Lord By prayer it was agreed
as followeth

Agreed that Warmstone be supplied as before
Agreed that Sunden be supplied as before
Agreed by this Association that the second article of
the Union of the Assembly 1731 be entirely expunged.
Agreed that it is the opinion of this Association that
Bro. Hobbs, Jenkins & Butler be appointed to go to the next assembly wch will be held at White's Alley London on the Wednesday & Thursday in the Whitsun week and that the assembly be desired to express their sentiments about the Doctrine of the Trinity in their own words.

Agreed that this Association be adjourned to the second Monday after Sept 29 1734

Joseph Hobbs Mess
John Sturch
Joseph Jenkins
Richard Butler
John Treacher
John Hunt Senr
Wm Allen
Robt J:o:ny
Richard Carter

* * * * *

At an Association of the Baptiz'd Churches Agreed [at the beginning of 1740]
After Seeking the Lord by prayer &c Agreed that the Messengers office be consider. &c
Agreed & a judged not Scriptural nor proper to ordain a person who is a ministering Bro. to the office of an Elder tho' other ways Qualified—If his wife is not joined in Communion & a proper member of that Church of which he is to be an Elder &c
Agreed that no Elder or Minister marry out of Communion &c
Agreed that Aylesbury & Sundon be supplied as usual

Signed by us

Henry Hobbs
James Hall

(To be concluded.)