

# Minutes of the Monthly Conferences

held by the ministers of officers of the churches in Leicestershire which  
were the nucleus of the

New Connexion of General Baptists.

A N evangelical movement beginning at Ratby in Leicestershire in 1741, became Baptist in 1755. Five years later, distinct churches were organized; "monthly meetings of the ministers were held for mutual advice and assistance; and quarterly conferences met, at each place in rotation." A few years later, they were solicited to join the Lincolnshire Association of General Baptists, but they held aloof till Michaelmas 1769, when the leading ministers went to Lincoln, and met W. Thompson of Boston, with a young minister from Yorkshire, Dan Taylor. It was agreed to form a New Connexion, holding an Assembly of Free Grace General Baptists.

[This was duly established on 6 June 1770, at a meeting in London, attended by Samuel Deacon of Barton, John Tarratt and Nathaniel Pickering of Kegworth, John Grimly of Loughborough, William Smith and George Hickling of Hinckley and Longford, Thomas Perkins of Melbourne, with Dan Taylor, William Thompson, Henry Poole of Fleet, John Buttain of Church Lane, and seven of Kent and Essex.

[As a consequence of this organization, the Leicestershire ministers began to keep minutes of their monthly meetings, which however had been held for

ten years already. The new Assembly speedily divided into two Associations, of which the Southern died as speedily. The Northern by 1772 consisted of the five Midland churches with about 870 members, Birchcliff with 70, Boston with 80. But while the Midland churches were thus the mainstay of the New Connexion, they yet continued their former meetings, which were seen to be so useful that Taylor imitated them in Yorkshire at once, Thompson in Lincolnshire in 1791, Taylor in London by 1799. The minutes of the Midland Conference till 1802 have been lodged with the Society, and those of the Lincoln Conference are being copied. Extracts from the former follow.]

Rules to be observed in the  
Monthly Conference.

Rule 1. The moderator shall open the meeting with prayer.

Rule 2d. Whatever is to be proposed in the Conference shall be committed to the Moderator in writing; and be proposed by him in the best manner he is able: and if at any time any person be desirous to propose any thing that is not committed to writing, this not to be done until all the business contained in the papers be finished, and the[n] not without the consent of the major part of the Brethren present.

Rule 3d. The Moderator shall endeavour to prevent and suppress, all Irregularities; such as wandering from the subject, or two speaking at once, or any thing else that appears to him to be disorderly.

Rule 4th. When the Moderator thinks a matter has been sufficiently debated for that time, the question shall be put, whether it is expedient to drop all further conversation about

it at Time [?], and the matter always to be decided by a Majority of votes.

Rule 5. In all cases of voting when the number happens to be equal on both sides, the Moderator shall decide it, being allowed a double vote.

Rule 6th. The Moderator shall have the liberty to depute, or appoint any person or persons to assist him when he thinks it necessary.

Rule 7th. The Moderator shall always enquire at the Quarterly meetings what the Brethren think of the Discourse that has been delivered; respecting both matter and manner, prayer also included.

Rule 8th. At the conclusion of the Conference he shall resign up his Office, but first appoint some one to succeed him in it, who shall conclude the meeting with prayer. [This was cancelled at a date not mentioned, and instead:—] The moderator to be ye minister of ye place where the Conf<sup>ce</sup> is held.

Rule 9. The Moderator shall always appoint the person who is to preach at the Quarterly meeting: and likewise him who is to open the meeting with prayer, against which appointment no objection shall be made, unless reason satisfactory to the Conference can be given.

[opposite] N.B. At Hinckley Conference June 6th. 1780 [altered incorrectly to 1770]. Article the 9th was thought improper, and the following agreed to instead of it by a majority of twelve to six.

Rule 9. At the Conference next preceeding the Quarterly, the Ministers or officers of the church where the Conference is to be held shall nominate the Person who is to preach,

and also him who is to pray. That the Persons present judge of the propriety of their choice, and confirm or alter as they think proper. And the Persons appointed will be expected to perform, unless they then object, and give reasons for their refusal which influence the Conference to choose others in their stead.

Rule 10. When 5 of the brethren are come together, they shall open the meeting, and proceed to business; and if the Moderator be not there, him that was last in office shall officiate for that time; and the person before appointed to continue for the next time. [Subsequently cancelled].

Rule 11. The Moderator shall chuse a scribe at each Conference, that he may be more at liberty to the other business belonging to the Conference.

July 31 1770 Conference at Hugglescoat Tho<sup>s</sup> Perkins [Melbourn] Sam<sup>l</sup> Deacon [Barton] Fra<sup>s</sup> Smith [Melbourn] John Grimley [Loughborough] Nath<sup>l</sup> Pickering [Kegworth] John Tarratt [Kegworth] Will. Smith Geo. Hickling Moderator Rob<sup>t</sup> Milligain Josh<sup>h</sup> Dunicliff [often entered Donisthorp] [both of Hinckley] Jos<sup>h</sup> Stokes [Coventry?]

This Conference lasted 2 days some persons attended as above with Bro<sup>r</sup> Adcock.

Brother Grimley Moderator

[The names are henceforth omitted; attendance varied from six to fifteen.]

Aug<sup>t</sup> 27 1770 Conference at Hugglescoat

At this Conference it was agreed as many as thought it convenient to go into Yorkshire.

It was also agreed when there, that two should stay about the Hymns; the time fixed for going was the 16 of Sep<sup>r</sup>.

Oct<sup>r</sup> 8. 1771 Conference at Hinkley

At which time some conclusions were come to, about the Hymn Book, and the Money to be raised Advices ask'd and given respecting three disorderly Members. [The credit for compiling the Hymns and Spiritual Songs which appeared at Halifax in 1772 has often been given to Dan Taylor. But the preface is signed, The Compilers. Samuel Deacon was at this Hinkley conference, and published the Barton Hymns in 1785, with a second edition in 1797.]

Nov<sup>r</sup> 17 1771 Conference at Hugglescoat

At which time there was much Conversation about the proper method to part the Long[f]ord Church into two Body's: As also the time when this Important business should be done, which was appointed to be at Longford on Tuesday 13 Dec<sup>r</sup> 1772.

At the same time it was judged right for Bro<sup>r</sup> Yates to be ordained, and the time appointed was 26 of Jan<sup>y</sup> 1773 at Barton.

Apr<sup>l</sup> 6 1773 Conference at Hugglescoat.

At this Conference it was asertained to us by M<sup>r</sup> Cotton secretary to the Commitee in London, that all Licensed Ministers are exempt from serving any Town offices by virtue of their licence. But a Minister is not intitled to settle in any place by virtue of his Licence. [This was incorrect. A minister needed no licence; he was entitled to settle in any place as much as any other man; he could certify any place he chose to quarter sessions, and compel the clerk to record it. Then if he took the oaths of allegiance and of supremacy, and signed certain Articles, he could claim a certificate which exempted him from serving the offices. There was no more discretion lodged with the justices or the clerk of the peace, than with the registrar whose duty it is to register a death.]

May 4 1773 Conference at Barton

It was agreed the reasons that Bro<sup>r</sup> Grimley had drawn up, as objections a Travelling preacher, shou'd not be altered, provided the Association be private; but if pu[b]lic, then that about buying Books to be omitted.

Secondly. Agreed that it would be right for a pastor to desire an offending and disorderly member not to attend at the Lord's table, if they think proper.

Thirdly. Agreed that Bro<sup>r</sup> Thompson of Boston go to the Assosiation at London, and one of us to go to Boston &c &c at the same time. [The last time that the Southern Association is heard of.]

Fourthly. Concluded that two Public Houses be encouraged to make prov[i]sion against the Asso-si[a]tion at Melbourn.

Fifthly. It was agreed that Bro<sup>r</sup> Wyatt should be privately admonish'd for drinking to axcess and afterwards brought to the Church, to confess the crime, and to be restored, provided the Church be satisfied with his conviction and repentance. On the 17 of May the styn [?] was taken, as directed to above, and his Confession satisfactory.

June 29 1773. Conference at Hugglescoat

Query. Has a Church any authority from the Scr[i]pturis to exclude a member for any crime, sup[p]ose the Church beli[e]ves the person to be a sincere penitent? Answered in the Negative.

Query. What ought we to judge sufficient proof of a persons penitency in case of Capital. It was sup[p]osed that this question was too difficult to determine by reason that circumstances being so very different.

July 27 1773. Conference at Barton.

We think that the expence that attended our

journeys to Maltby, and when any Church calls any Minister to assist them, that they shou'd pay the expence, if they be able. [The result was the withdrawal of fifteen members from the old G.B. church there, and the formation of a new one in 1773, a meeting house being built in 1776. Perhaps the old cause fused with the new after 1843, for the returns of 1891 put down Maltby as originating in 1696, and this date is now assigned in the handbook.]

Agreed ye Bro<sup>rs</sup> Grimley and Smith should write an answer to Bro<sup>r</sup> [William] Thompsons letter, and to send to M<sup>r</sup> [Josiah] Thompson in London, in order to inform him of our first convictions &c.

Query. Is a person in the office of a ruling Elder, and ordained to that office, Quallified by virtue of his office to administer the Lords supper, if the Church to which he belongs call him to it? Answer. It was agreed by a Majority, that he is not quallified.

Aug<sup>t</sup> 24 1773. Conference at Hugglescoat.

Agreed for Bro<sup>r</sup> Smith or Perkins, to go to Maltby on Oct.<sup>r</sup> 2 1773.

Two letters read drawn up by bro<sup>r</sup> Grimley and bro<sup>r</sup> Fra<sup>s</sup> Smith, in consequence of an appointment made last Conference. Agreed that bro<sup>r</sup> Grimley's (after some correction) shall be sent to M<sup>r</sup> Thompson of Boston in order to be transmitted to M<sup>r</sup> Thompson of London.

[In Josiah Thompson's manuscript at D<sup>r</sup> Williams' Library may be seen a long note, which it thus appears was based on a careful authoritative statement. Fortunately the other letter was preserved, and was edited by James Smith, grandson of the writer, for the General Baptist Repository of 1836, where it begins at page 132. Both ante-date Adam Taylor by 45 years.]

Oct 19 1773 Conference at Barton

[After three theological questions.] Query. Is it

right to admit and encourage unbelievers to learn to sing among our brethren? Answered in the Negative.

Nov 16 1773 Conference at Hugglescoat.

At this Conference the following things came on for consideration (viz)

Sup[p]ose a Member of any of our Churches shou'd contract an acquaintance with an unbeliever in a way of Courtship and after private admonition, and advice of the Church, he, or she still persists in the affair, even so far as to marry, (but no other crime wou'd be alleged against them) ou[gh]t such a person to be seperated from the Church, merely on that account? Answered in the Negative, only Three n[e]uters.

Some conversation had about Bro<sup>r</sup> Rich<sup>d</sup> Stokes of Coventry, respecting his writing to Maltby people, with a view to visiting them in the capacity and charractor of Minister, by way of approbation and trial, and two letters read over upon the occation, one from the people of Maltby, and the other from Bro<sup>r</sup> Thompson of Boston.

After much deliberation upon the subject it was unanimously agreed to discourage him going down to Maltby. Agreed also at the same time, that a letter be drawn up by bro<sup>r</sup> Hickling, to express the sence of the Conference unto the Maltby people.

*(To be continued.)*