

Eythorne and the Kent General Baptist Association.

AN informing and exhaustive article in a previous number of these *Transactions* on "Early Days at Eythorne" by Dr. Whitley, while it pricked some traditional bubbles, set before us in the light of truth the figures of James and John Knott and consequently made them more human and interesting. I have recently come across some references to James Knott and his friends which give us another glimpse of the Eythorne General Baptist Church in the old days, and it may not be out of place to refer to them as supplementing Dr. Whitley's article.

On 16 May 1717 "at the Meeting of the Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ in & about East Kent (Professing the principles of y^e Doctrine of Christ mentioned Hebrews y^e 6th 1: 2 & y^e Doctrine of General Redemption) . . . Holden at the House of our Bro: Will^m Tucker called Soulton" arrangements were made for conducting the business of regular Association meetings. The churches mentioned are Canterbury, Dover, "Hyth and Folkston," Eythorne, Deal, and Bardon. From Eythorne there came to the meeting,

James Knott,	Elder	
John Russel	}	Representatives
John Crump		

Arrangements were made for a regular interchange of ministers and it was resolved to meet twice a year in May and October. The next meeting was to be held 'at the meeting house at Deal.' "It was agreed y^t our Bro' Knott should preach a Sermon at y^e same time or on his failure our Bro [David] Simpson" [elder of Dover].

The Eythorne church met at this time in three divisions or, as the minute book of the East Kent Association puts it, in "three meetings Holden at Eythorn Wingham-well, & in the Isle of Thannet." At the next Association meeting John Russel and Will^m Tucker appeared as representatives of Eythorne but Knott did not turn up. Accordingly, "It was agreed y^t our Bro^r Simpson taking with him our Bro^r Will^m Tucker or some other Bro^r shall inquire of our Bro^r Knott his reasons of not coming to this meeting to preach a Sermon as agreed nor yet give our Bro^r David Simpson timely Notice thereof and to render y^e same to our next meeting of this kind."

James Knott appeared with Tucker and John Bush at the next meeting, which was held in the meeting house at Hythe, 8 May 1718, and "gave y^e reason of his not coming to y^e last meeting (*viz*) that about 2 Days before y^e time when as y^e said meeting was to be holden he was taken lame of one Side, by which Suddain Seizure he was prevented from coming to Deal to preach a Sermon and of giving Notice to our Bro^r David Simpson—which reason is by this meeting accepted." It was arranged that Knott should preach at the next meeting, at Canterbury, "or if he possible cannot to give timely notice to our Bro^r William Kennett." Neither elder nor representatives turned up from Eythorne however at the next meeting and an entry concerning one of the Eythorne members seems to betray a lack of sympathy between some of

that Church and the Association with its Messengers. Here is the record:—

“The Letters that have been sent from Thomas Norwood to Bro^r [Samuel] Ongley and Bro^r Jarman and from Bro^r Jarman to Thomas Norwood were read before this meeting and also Bro^r John Hobbs and Bro^r John Bush brought the following report from Thomas Norwood as he spake it to them at Sandwich the twelveth day if this instant October [1718] (viz) Bro^r John Hobbs discoursing with him about the nature and authority of y^e Office of messengers He made light of it and said that Bro^r James Knott did the like.

And it was agreed that Bro^r David Simpson and Bro^r William Kennett shall go to Bro^r James Knott and carry him Copies of the Letters that Thomas Norwood hath sent to Bro^r Ongley, and Jarman and let him know that this meeting thinks them very scandalous and notoriously dishonourable to religion, and y^t they think that Thomas Norwood is worthy of being publickly disowned from being a member of the Church of Eythorn at the several meetings holden by the said Church and that y^e s^d Letters be publickly read at y^e doing of y^e same and that in order hereunto he be forthwith admonished if they think fitt and also that these two Brethren shall inquire the reasons that Bro^r James Knott nor no representatives came to this meeting from Eythorn and to exhort him to stir up himself and the church he belongs to to make their appearance at the next meeting.”

When the Association met next, on 7 May, 1719, at Monkton “at the house of our Bro^r John Bush in the Isle of Thanet” Knott with John Crump and John Bush appeared for Eythorne. “Stephen Lasey,” Elder of Deal was appointed “moderator” of the meeting. It was “agreed that our Bro^r James Knott With our

Brethren David Simpson and William Kennett shall go to Thomas Norwood and admonish Him in the name & fear of the Lord to acknowledge those evils he hath been guilty of in Reflecting upon our Brethren Samuel Ongly, Searles Jarman and others and give Gospel Satisfaction which if he do the Church will accept of him but if he continue obstinate that they shall & will proceed against him according to Gospel Rule (*viz*) to Declare him out of the Communion of the Congregation."

Another agreement of this meeting in which Knott was concerned dealt with the supply of the Isle of Thanet the ministers of Deal were to take it once in eight weeks "Bro^r Knott once in Eight weeks. The ministers of Hyth & Folkstone once in Eight weeks. They of Canterbury five times in Eight weeks and to begin on the 17th day of May next" [1719].

The autumn meeting in this year was held at Dover, 20 October, Knott turned up with Tucker and John Towns representing Eythorne and its branches. It was "agreed (all means having been used with Thomas Norwood to bring him to give Gospel Satisfaction as agreed and proving still unsuccessful) that Bro^r James Knott shall publicly declare Him out of communion of Eythorn congregation the next time He goes to the Isle of Thannet to Break Bread." Fresh arrangements had to be made for the supply of the meeting in the Isle of Thanet owing to the deaths of Samuel Ongly the Messenger, "Bro^r Parramour" one of the preachers, and William Kennet of Hythe since the spring. James Knott, the ministers of Deal and of Canterbury, were each to supply there once in eight weeks and it was resolved "that Bro^r David Rutter and Bro^r Robert Willson be Earnestly desired and requested to Supply that meeting at other times as formerly."

The next Association meeting was held at Deal

26 May 1720. James Knott turned up with Thomas Manser and John Bush from his church.

“It was certified that Bro^r James Knott had proceeded against Thomas Norwood as agreed the last meeting.”

At this time the East Kent Association dropped its autumn meeting and when it next met 18 May 1721, at Hythe, there was no representative from Eythorne. The meeting deputed Searles Jarman and David Simpson “to visit Bro^r James Knott and to enquire the reason.” Next year at Canterbury [3 May 1722] John Bush and John Kingsford represented the Eythorne church. It was reported that Knott in reply to the question as to non-attendance “answered that they were occasionally prevented but [did] not design to leave of sending Representatives to our future meetings.” On 23 May 1723 the Association met at Eythorne. James Knott is entered in the minutes at Elder and John Crump and John Bush appear again as representatives. In 1724 May, 14 at Dover, Knott appeared with Bush and John Hatton representing his church; these two represented Eythorne again at the Association meeting at Deal, 6 May 1725, but Knott was not present. Bush had the confidence of the churches as this minute testifies:

“It is agreed that Brother Edward Morris [Elder of the Hythe & Folkestone Church] and Bro^r John Bush shall represent these five Churches at the general Assembly to be holden at Glasshouse Yard Goswell Street London on wednesday in Whitsun-week next.”

James Knott now disappears from the minutes. At the meeting in Canterbury, 11 May 1727, Rich^d Chilton appears as a representative of Eythorne, I think he came from the Isle of Thanet branch. At

Wingham, 15 May 1729, there was still no elder of Eythorne but John Hatton, Will^m Kingsford, and John Bush came as representatives. At this meeting it was resolved "that the *Ministers* belonging to the Churches shall meet together at Ramsgate in the Isle of Thanet to consider how the several Churches may be Supplied in the Ministry, on Tuesday the tenth day of June next." There is no record of this meeting, in fact a break now occurs in the Association Minutes probably owing to the death or removal of Bro^r Thos Mercer, who, since 1717, had kept the minutes and did "ingross y^e Same in a book to be kept for that purpose."

Dr. Whitley shows why Knott's name disappears at this period. He was disowned by these churches for 'immorality,' at a meeting at Wingham, in 1725.

The next entry in the Association book of the General Baptist Churches in East Kent is dated 11 October 1734. Meanwhile in 1732 the Eythorne church had been divided into regularly constituted churches for the several places of meeting at which groups of its members had worshipped. This step was long overdue. We consequently have a fresh arrangement and the meeting is described as "holden at Canterbury . . . 1734 by the Messengers Elders and Representatives of the said Churches *viz*

	Rich ^d Drinkwater	}	Messengers		
	Rob ^t Mercer				
	and from				
Canterbury	{	Will ^m Browning	}	Represent ^{vs}	
	{	Step ⁿ Philpot			
Dover	{	Rob ^t Pyall . . .	}	Elder	
	{	John Prescott		}	Represent ^{vs}
	{	John Sanders			
Hyth and Folkston	{				

Isle of Thanett	{ John Bush Rich ^d Chilton	} Represen ^{vs}
Winghaven als Wingham	{ John Kingsford John Ladd	Elder Represen ^{vs}
Stelling	{ George Ash Will ^m Mackney	Elder Represen ^{vs}
Eythorn	James Knott	Repr ^{ve}
Deal	{ Stephen Lacy Stephen Broadley	Elder Represen ^{vs}
Tong	John Pantry	Represen ^{ve}

Dr. Whitley, quoting from the old Eythorne Church Book, tells us that James Knott on expressing repentance was "restored" in 1732. I do not think he was restored to the Eldership. He was restored to communion but not to office. He is here described not as elder but only as "representative" and this meeting took steps to supply at Eythorne without mentioning Knott.

"It is agreed that Bro^r Rich^d Chilton and Bro^r John Bush shall one Lords Day, in six Supply Ministerially, the Church at Wingham and Bro^r John Kingsford and Bro^r John Sanders shall do the same to the Church at Eythorn."

Unfortunately there now comes a gap of 34 years in this Association Book during which time the proceedings were no doubt entered elsewhere. The next entry is headed:—

"Aug. 9 1768 An Association of the Gen^l Baptist[s] held in their meeting house at Canterbury."

And the record is for all the General Baptist Churches in Kent, eighteen in number, not all of which

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were however represented at the meeting. Eythorne sent

Mr Jn ^o Knott,	Elder	} repr ^r
Mr Tho ^s Harvey		
Mr Step ⁿ Bradley		

This must be the John Knott jun. who was ordained as "elder" of the Eythorne church 18 September 1758. From the report on the state of the churches we can see how those which sprang from Eythorne were faring. Let us look at the record, taking the mother church first. The scribe sets it down thus:—

"Aythorne nothing in perticuler as from y^e Church. Mr Knott demands the ministers constantly changing and a fund to be rais'd to discharge the expense thereof."

The Isle of Thanet sent

Mr Tho ^s Piety,	} repres ^{ts}
Mr John Griggs	
Mr W ^m Foord	

"Mr Piety relates they are in want of a Minister & aply hear for asistance and they are redy to assist any pe[r]son that shall setle with them; [they have] but one Deacon & him aged & lives 6 miles of and Recomend their choosing one officer if not two."

Wingham sent.

Mr Jn ^o Kingsford	} repres ^{ts}
Mr Rob ^t Quested	
Mr Tho ^s Chapman	
Mr Edw ^d Kingsford	

"Mr Kingsford Represents They have no Elder, they have one Deacon & proposes to choose two more & Recomends Singing as a likely means to revive a spirit of religion, and Mr Kingsford is of opinion it would be useful to Revive their former Conferances."

Stelling was represented by

Mr Stepⁿ Philpott Elder

Mr Phill Griggs

“ Nothing in perticuler to them related.” The Association requested John Knott, and Mr [John] Geere of Hythe church, to assist Dover in finding a suitable minister and choosing officers. Mess^{rs} Kingsford, Philpot and Chapman were “ desired to persuade ” Isle of Thanet “ to choose Officers in their church.” Knott’s suggestion of exchanges was met by the following resolution.

“ It is recomended to Mr Knott & Mr [William] Ashdowne for East K^t and Mr [Daniel] Dobel [of Cranbrook] & Mr [John] Boorman [of Headcorn] for West Kent to make an estimate to lay before the next Association of the expenses that will attend the Ministers changing their places of meeting in order to diversifie the ministry.”

The following minute is of interest: “ The Elders & representatives are desired to enquire of their several Churches if they approve of Mr Wm Ashdowne & Mr Knott for the Office of Messengers.” John Knott signs these minutes of 1768 with twenty-three others. He did not attend the Association meeting at Headcorn, 9 May 1769, but he is referred to in the minutes as “ John Knott of Baison.”

We also find the minute “ In relation to the Choice of Messengers it is the opinion of this Association that as it consists of Kentt onely that they are not properly authorised to choose Messengers for the whole Body of Baptist[s].” No objection of this sort was raised in earlier times so far as I know, and it may be the churches felt there were special reasons for proceeding cautiously in regard to ordaining Knott and Ashdowne to that office.

At the meeting at Canterbury 3 Oct 1769 John Knott attended as elder of Eythorne. There is no indication of any difference with his old brethren. It is recorded that "with relation to a supply of ministry in the Island Broth^r Knott and his Assistance [assistants] propose to Suply there once a month and Bro^r John Kingsford once a month."

But at this meeting the case of Bessels Green came up. John Stanger who had gone there as assistant to the respected and venerable elder, Samuel Bengé, had caused difficulty by forming a party-following, getting himself appointed Elder and endeavouring to oust the majority from the old meeting-house. John Colgate brought the "case" up as representative of the church. The record runs "The Case of Bessells Green too difficult to determine for want of being more perticularly acquainted with the whole affair. But we think a Minority have no right to Chuse an Elder. With relation to the affair of Messengers visiting or writing without being called to it in Answer to which we think a Messenger have a right by advize or Council any where or any when to give advice and counsell in any religious affairs." John Knott signed the minutes but the name of James Fenn of Deal is not there though he attended as representative, not as elder of that church.

The next Association meeting was held at Headcorn, 8 May 1770, Knott turned up with three companions Tho^s Harvey, Vincent Ladd and Stephen Broadley. From Bessels Green came Samuel Bengé the elder with John Igglesden and John Colgate. They again brought a "case" for consideration. In regard to the Messengers the minute for this year runs "Our Messenger M^r Dan^l Dobell is desired to inform the Sussex Churches that it is the desire of this Association to meet them in Association at Tunbridge

Wells¹ in order for the Choice of Messengers." Any hope of electing John Knott to that office was passing. John Boorman of Headcorn was eventually chosen as Messenger. He appears in that capacity in 1772. As to the Bessels Green affair the decision was as follows:—

“Whereas a Charge by Mr Stanger and others have been brought against Brother Daniel Dobell for sowing discord among the people at Bessells Green and in his office being over-bearing as a Messenger it is the opinion of this Association that the Charge is not supported.”

I judge that the sympathies of Knott went with Stanger and his party for neither he nor the three representatives of Eythorne sign this minute.

At the next meeting of the Association at Canterbury, 14 May 1771, Eythorne church was not represented and its name is dropped from the list. The reason being that Knott, as well as Stanger, had severed his connection with the old General Baptists and joined the New Connexion of General Baptists. In 1785 Eythorne took the further step under Thomas Ranger of entering into fellowship with the Particular Baptists. The church at Deal which had withdrawn from the Kentish General Baptists did not follow Eythorne in this step. It went back to its old love before this date and was represented by James Fenn, now classed as Elder, and Stephen Carter at the Association held on 2 May 1780 at Headcorn. Curiously enough “Vincent Lad” and “Step^h. Bradly” two former Eythorne representatives sign the minutes of the preceding year at Canterbury. It looks as though they were not content with the trend of events at Eythorne and had come amongst their old friends once

¹ This joint meeting was held July 24, 1770.

again to see how things were moving. Fenn was even nominated in 1780 as a possible man for the Messenger's office. He continued in fellowship with the old General Baptists, and in 1794 we hear of "Bro^r James Fenn intending to go shortly" to America. His name then drops out.

There is one more glimpse of Eythorne in this Association Book which we may note. It occurs in connection with the old meeting house in Sandwich. The Deal friends reported at the Association meeting at Headcorn, 3 May, 1803, that in accordance with the recommendation of the Association they had re-opened the "Sandwich Meetinghouse . . . but that after they had preached there a short time, the place was much damaged, by some evil-disposed persons, since which, there has been no preaching there." Accordingly the Association "request that our Friends who were appointed to attend to this business last Association, would endeavour to prevail with the Church at Eythorn, to unite with us, in repairing this place as soon as possible; & to adopt such measures relative to the carrying on of the worship of God there in future as shall appear to them most proper. We also think it necessary that means should be used to bring those persons who committed the Depredations to Justice."

Next year, 24 April 1804, the Kentish Churches associated at Chatham where a "New Meeting House" had lately been built at a cost of £884 6s. 6d on land leased for 99 years. "A Sermon was preach'd by Bro^r W. Vidler from the Epistle to the Ephesians 3 Chap 3 & 4 verse[s]" This was William Vidler the universalist-unitarian Baptist formerly of Battle in Sussex.² Among the minutes of this meeting the following occurs.

² See the article by Butt Thompson on Vidler, in Vol. I. of these TRANSACTIONS.

“ We observe that our Friends of Deal have had an interview with some of the acting Members of Eythorn Church, who seem dispos'd to unite with them in putting the Meeting House at Sandwich in a state of repair, but as yet nothing decisive has been done—but we hope it will be determin'd on in a short time, as to the offenders by whom the place was much damag'd they are not yet brought to Justice.”

In 1805 it was reported at Canterbury that “ The state of Sandwich Meeting House is in the hands of friends to whose immediate exertions we leave the Business.” Presumably these friends were members of Eythorne church and no further reference to the matter occurs. A movement in the direction of Calvinistic doctrine was making itself felt among the Baptists of Kent at this period. It presented itself to the minds of the old General Baptists in the light of a reaction and threatened their control of some of the old Meeting Houses; yet they faced the position with admirable Christian temper and no word of bitterness on the subject mars the record of their Association Meetings. When it was reported in 1813, at Cranbrook “ with respect to the Case of Yalding Meeting House . . . that the Trustees have permitted the Calvinist Baptists in that Neighbourhood to occupy it for their public services ” they did indeed advise the Trustees to reconsider the subject and arrange for the payment of a yearly rental to be made. Next year at Smarden it was recommended that the “ Yalding friends . . deposit their Church book in the hands of Mr [Robert] Pyall [messenger of Headcorn] he being the senior Trustee,” but they did not proceed further in the matter. They had learned to respect sincere religious conviction though it might be of a different complexion from their own.

WALTER H. BURGESS.