

Blockley & Campden Baptist History.

THE BAPTISTS IN CAMPDEN AND BLOCKLEY

This record leads from the beginning in 1792 up to 1871 for Blockley and 1878 for Campden

Transcribed & Formatted

From many pages of long hand notes supplied by
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By

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Blockley & Campden Baptist History.

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PRELUDE.

1.

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Seventeenth Century Dissent in Campden & Blockley

Campden and Blockley are two neighbouring North Cotswold communities, somewhat isolated from the main currents of religious discussion and not especially typical of the places where dissent—religious or political—thrives.

Yet the Baptists were strong elsewhere in the Cotswold's in the mid-seventeenth century, and their influence and the influence of other dissenting sects, could have been important in the early development of these two local churches. The Cotswold's were by no means insulated from the turmoil of religious controversy before the Civil War, nor during and immediately after the Commonwealth. There were strong Baptist churches at Moreton-in-Marsh, Hook Norton and Bourton-on-the-Water during this period, and nearby places like Lemington, Willersey and Chipping Norton, as well as Bourton-on-the-Water itself, saw notable examples of religious dissension and dispute during the Commonwealth and immediately on the Restoration. At a later period the Baptist cause in Bourton-on-the-Water was particularly strong. During the eighteenth century, under the sixty-year ministry of Benjamin Beddome, the Church there claimed over 200 members.

From their foundation at the end of the eighteenth century, the Baptist churches in Blockley and Campden were always closely connected. A dissenting congregation existed in Campden during the seventeenth century, and this was transformed into a Baptist church in 1785. For long periods in subsequent centuries, however, the non-conformist cause in Campden has been rather weak. In Blockley, although there were dissenting individuals, there was no dissenting church until the end of the eighteenth century, but Blockley Baptist church, led to a great extent by the silk mill owners, became remarkably strong during the first half of the nineteenth century, when the silk industry in the village was at its height. By the middle of the century too there was a strong Primitive Methodist Society in Blockley. Both causes fell away sadly with the later slackness in the silk trade and consequent migration from the district. Although the Baptist Church in Blockley continued for almost another hundred years, and experienced several periods of revival, it never quite regained its old vigour.

Eventually, after long association and mutual help, including a few years of group ministry in the middle of the present century, the Blockley Church closed and in the 1970's its small surviving membership finally united with Campden.

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The Campden church sometimes claims a history dating back to the Commonwealth. If what is meant is a Dissenting church, rather than specifically a Baptist church, a more or less continuous existence since the seventeenth century can certainly be established. A Dissenting chapel was built nearly three hundred years ago somewhere on the same plot of ground that is occupied today by the Baptist chapel, the manse and its outbuildings and the former graveyard. That much is certain. However, the Society meeting on the site has not always been one of Baptists. Rather it seems to have been taken over by a Baptist Minister by invitation from other Dissenters a little over 200 years ago.

Religious dissent in Blockley, too, began much earlier than the founding of its first Baptist chapel, or than the rise of the silk trade. It, too, began during the political and religious upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century - though there is no evidence of a dissenting church actually meeting in Blockley. As Icely has shown, the troublesome and much troubled vicar of that parish, George Durant (in spite of help he seems to have given to some Parliamentarians during the Civil War) was arraigned twice in 1646/7 before the Worcestershire committee investigating scandalous or insufficient ministers, and his living was sequestered in favour of another Worcestershire man, Giles Collier, earlier vicar of Hornsey, Middlesex. For reasons that are unclear, Durant seems later to have been put in Newgate prison, where he died in 1657 and was buried in St. James's, Clerkenwell.

Giles Collier, Durant's Commonwealth replacement, was, rather unusually, recognised as incumbent of Blockley after the Restoration and he accepted the Act of Uniformity in 1662. He remained as vicar until 1678 and during the whole of his incumbency he ran a successful private boarding

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school from the vicarage. His decision to conform in 1662 seems to have caused problems for at least one other Worcestershire incumbent, for Edmund Calamy says of Thomas Bromwich, vicar of Kempsey, that ‘when Bishop Morley came to the Town and Mr Collier of Blockley had conformed, he was over persuaded to take the Declaration... but before he came to profess his assent and consent openly, and fully to conform, he was cast into great Distress of Conscience and went no further.’

Giles Collier’s acceptance of the Prayer Book and the episcopacy would probably have been accepted by the Presbyterians among his flock, but it would not have suited all his parishioners. There were those who did not follow him into post-Restoration conformity. As Iccley mentions, Giles Collier reported fairly tolerantly in 1664 that:

There are some few Persons in the Parish reported Anabaptists and some others Quakers, that hold not communion in the publique Worship of God amongst us. But in regard we are not utterly without hope of their amendment, we present not their names.

A few years later, for what has become known as the Compton census of 1676, Collier returned just 14 Protestant dissenters for Blockley, from a total adult population of that time of 336. Only two names seem to be known among these early dissenters, Edward Warner, a fuller and owner of the ‘French’ fulling mill in Blockley, and John Norris, who lived at Pye Mill. Both of them were Quakers, and both founding members of the Friends Meeting House in Broad Campden in 1663. Indeed they, together with four Campden men, bought the meetinghouse from the owner, one John Hitchman and his wife Prudence, who also seem to have been Quakers. There they, and possibly other Blockley Quakers, worshipped. There was at that time, and had been since the early days of the Commonwealth, an important Baptist church at Moreton-in-Marsh, and one would suspect that the ‘Anabaptists’ among this group of dissenters were members of that church, and worshipped either there or in the home of one of their number.

It appears then that it was the Quakers in Blockley who first joined in worship with a congregation in the parish of Campden. The Meeting house they built in Broad Campden is now, in the late twentieth century, again the focus of a strong community of Friends living in the locality. What eventually happened to the few ‘Anabaptists’ it is impossible to say, though the names appearing near the end of the next chapter may include some from later generations of these families?

In Campden the situation in the seventeenth century seems to have been different. For most of the Civil War the town was under Royalist influence and the lords of the manor of Campden were always Royalist: it is said that, given their financial involvement with the Sovereign since the days of Sir Baptist Hicks, they could hardly be other. But Campden was a commercial, trading town in a county subject to much skirmishing between the two sides. Given that nearby villages like Weston Sub-edge and Willersey had Puritan Ministers ejected on the Restoration, and that there was a Baptist Church as nearby as Moreton, it would be surprising if the religious ferment of the early seventeenth century had passed the town by, and there were not a fairly strong Puritan feeling here, too. But evidence is scanty. One well-known Puritan divine, Robert Harris, was born in Broad Campden in 1578. He went for a time to Campden Grammar School, where he had a rather unsatisfactory time, before going to Worcester and then to Magdalen Hall, Oxford, and later becoming President of Trinity College, Oxford, where he died in 1658. One story of Robert Harris is of how he came back to Campden to preach, soon after his graduation.

“but such were these times that in the greater town he did not know where to procure a bible for the reading of his text. At length he was directed to the vicar there~ the bible could hardly be found, being not seen some months before; at last it was found and the preacher furnished...”

The apparently lax vicar at that time was John Jennings, vicar until 1616. The position of William Bartholomew, the vicar of Campden from 1636 to 1661, seems ambiguous. Christopher Whitfield describes him as a Puritan, and blames him for the first suppression of the Dover’s Games (though Dover’s Hill itself is in Weston Subedge parish where the incumbent was indeed a Puritan).

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Rushen says "He was such an ardent Puritan that he was strongly suspected of Presbyterianism at the start of the Civil War, in the early years of his ministry." But both of these statements seem doubtful. On the petition of some townspeople in 1647 - during the Long Parliament - he was the subject of an investigation by the committee in Gloucestershire having "power to proceed against scandalous ministers" His successor alleged that he had been harassed, though not sequestered, during the Commonwealth and had spent £200 on his defence. Then, immediately on Charles II's Restoration he preached and had printed a sermon fulsome in its praise for Lady Juliana (then lady of the manor) and implicitly Royalist. He was described on his tomb in Campden Church as "a hammer of the Sectaries of the orthodox religion of the Church of England an intrepid advocate (even in the worst of times) of the Carlist party." He may have been a bit of a *Vicar of Bray* figure~ but the clergy came under the most severe pressures throughout the period, and without more evidence one should suspend judgement.

Certainly, there is no question of the Campden incumbent suffering ejection. He died in 1661, to be succeeded by his son-in-law, Rev'd Henry Hicks (or Hyckes) a native of Shipston-on-Stour, and at various times vicar of Ebrington and rector of Stretton-on-Fosse, as well as vicar of Campden. Hicks has the reputation of being an intolerant man who saw it as his duty to root out the 'persistent sectaries'. He died in 1708 and, according to Bigland, the inscription on his tomb, now destroyed, called him "an orthodox son of the truly apostolic Church of England and fearless protector against all adversaries, whether false Catholics or recent innovators".

There are other indications of Puritan support in Campden in the mid-seventeenth century. It appears that even William Harrison, Lady Juliana's famous steward, may have been a Presbyterian, for at the time of a robbery at his house in 1659 he and his household were 'at the Lecture', which Andrew Lang calls for Puritan form of edification'. And some years the antiquarian Anthony Wood -a well-known opponent of dissenters - described later Mrs Harrison in a note as 'a snotty covetous Presbyterian'. If the Harrison's, in their fairly influential position, were openly Puritan at about the time of the Restoration then it is likely that there were other people in the town who would wish to retain their beliefs and to worship God in their own way. Iceley's report that in 1662 "a group of Baptists was 'formed into a church' in Chipping Campden - perhaps by Thomas Knight ..." cannot be confirmed, and Iceley does not give his source for the assertion. As we have seen, however, a group of Quakers was meeting in Broad Campden as early as 1663 and continued to meet thereafter.

In the Compton Census of 1676, only 15 Non-Conformists are reported in Campden (out of an adult population of 790). This is in proportion to the population less than half of the reported strength in Blockley. It may be compared with 11 out of 176 for Broadway, 16 out of 300 in Alcester (where there had been a Baptist Church during the Commonwealth, and conventicles of both Baptists and Presbyterians had been reported three years earlier) 20 in Moreton-in-Marsh and Bourton-on-the Hill, 29 in Longborough, 36 in Shipston, 55 in Stow, 77 in Chipping Norton and as many as 96 in the strongly dissenting village of Bourton-on-the-Water. Nearer Campden, ten Non-conformists were returned for Ebrington, seven for Mickleton, 14 in Lower Lemington and 14 in Aston Subedge (out of a total adult population returned in Aston of 70). There are many doubts about the reliability of this Census and the varying interpretations to be given to its figures, but the implications are fairly clear. Campden was even then fairly strongly Conformist.

In 1672 King Charles II began granting indulgences to licensed groups of dissenters to meet in prescribed places. Several applications were made concerning Campden. The first was by an agent named Stephen Ford (himself an ejected Vicar of Chipping Norton) for houses in Broadway and in Campden as meeting places for Mr Thomas Worden, a Congregationalist. The second, by a different agent, was for a meeting place in Campden. again for Thomas Worden; and a third application was for 'the house of Samuel Horsman of Cambdon in Gloucestershire' to be used as a Congregational meeting place.

Samuel Horsman's application for a meetinghouse seems to have been granted. The fate of Thomas Worden's two applications for Campden is not clear, though a licence was granted to him 'to be a Congregational teacher in his house at Broadway, Worcs.' Thomas Worden was well known in

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this area: three years earlier, at Chipping Norton, a group of 20 or 30 Independents were said to have been meeting, 'their teacher not certain, but often one Worden. formerly a shoemaker'; at Whichford, near Brailes, in the same year there were said to be 20 or 30 'Anabaptists and other Sects' meeting under the leadership of James Willmer, Thomas Whateley [*earlier ejected as vicar from Sutton-under-Brailes*] and 'one Worden'; and again the same year Worden was preaching 'in his own house' as far away as Foregate Street, Chester. John Stanley writes of him:

In 1667 he made a great stir in Oldbury by his preaching. The Lord Keeper sent to the Lord Lieutenant to inquire into the matter. An enquiry was made and many witnesses examined. Yes, crowds gathered to hear him. The chapel was filled to overflowing. Perhaps a thousand people were there. His text was "Thy Kingdom Come" and his theme "That they should pray for the coming of Christ in Glory to receive his working and suffering Saints". This smelt of Fifth Monarchy. Lord Windsor's soldiers tried to arrest him but he slipped away through the crowd and was next heard of in Birmingham. Between the lines we read that Worden was an ardent, fervid, fearless evangelist, and it is curious that his memory should be well-nigh perished..."

Perhaps Thomas Worden was too notorious a man for him to be allowed to set up a preaching house in Campden. One wonders who would have been his hearers. It would be interesting generally to know the kind of people the early Campden dissenters were. As for Samuel Horsman, he seems to have been an apothecary and a capital burgess of the borough, and he owned a number of messuages, cottages and other properties in Campden. Both Rushen and Whitfield note that Samuel Horsman, a burgess, was one of three persons summoned for the Borough in the Visitation made by the Heralds in 1682/3, but was later disclaimed "as no gentleman of blood, ancestry or arms". It is doubtful whether either of his fellow burgesses (John Eden and Robert Taylor) had any more claim to gentle breeding than Mr Horsman, and one might suspect the disclaimer could have had more to do with his non-conformity than with his ancestry.

He died in 1701, his religious faith being still evident. His will, rather than the usual perfunctory phrases of the period, contains the words: "Firstly I commend my soul to the hand of Almighty God, my Father, trusting in his mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ my Blessed Saviour and Redeemer..." After small legacies to his two sons, Richard and Timothy, and two silver spoons left to a granddaughter, he bequeathed the residue of his estate to his executors, Thomas Perry, his brother-in-law and another local dissenter, and Michael Johnson, a yeoman of Childswickham.

Samuel Horsman's name may indicate the 'respectability' of some of the early dissenters. Other names appear in lists of those 'presented' for absenting themselves from the established church during the 1670's and 1680's, although it is not clear which of these are Quakers and which Anabaptists, Presbyterians or Independents. These names include Prudence Hitchman, Philip Hitchman and his wife, Thomas Davis and his wife, John Symons and his wife, and William Darke (all certainly Quakers); Thomas Perry and his wife, Thomas Bonner, William Days and his wife (whose family remained members of the dissenting church until the middle of the following century) Richard Toms and his wife, William Russell, and a number of others.

It is clear then that, small though it undoubtedly was, a group of Protestant Dissenters was meeting in Campden, certainly as early as 1672. The likelihood is that there has been a congregation here ever since, composed partly of Campden people, partly of those from villages round about.

There is one other important name of the late seventeenth century. *The Nonconformists' Memorial* of the contemporary writer Dr Edmund Calamy notes that Mr William Davison – 'a warm and useful preacher' - was at about this period pastor of a congregation at Campden. According to Calamy Mr Davison had earlier been ejected from his living at Notgrove under the Act of Uniformity. He then went to live at Tewkesbury, but, says Calamy, had his goods plundered while there. "His house was his prison", says Calamy, "he not daring to flit abroad because of the writ *de excommunicato capiendo*".

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In fact it appears that he had only been Vicar of Notgrove for a few months when he was ejected, having succeeded on the death of the previous Commonwealth minister, Rev'd William Dickens. He was an M.A., having been educated at Trinity College, Cambridge.

He probably came to Campden about the time of the 1689 Act of Toleration. It was certainly later than 1672, for in that year Mr Davison had been granted a licence to preach "at Tewksbury, in his own house" under Charles II's indulgence. A. G. Matthews reports that he was in Campden in 1690 and received £26 a year for his services. And at the Quarter Sessions in 1689 a Dissenters Meeting House was registered at Chipping Campden, with the Minister being named as William Davidson. It is not known where this was, though it is possible it was on the site of the old meetinghouse in the present Baptist Church yard.

Calamy reports that Mr Davison died on Christmas Day 1711, and according to Matthews he was buried at Campden on 28th December. The will of William Davison of Chipping Campden, Minister of the Gospel, was proved at Gloucester on 27th March 1712. It seems that he still held considerable land on lease at Walton Cardiff, near Tewkesbury and 9 acres of meadow called Widdenhams at Hasfield, just west of the Severn. A daughter and son-in-law had also given him the rents and revenues from some leasehold land at Daventry, Northants - possibly to compensate him for the loss of the goods Calamy mentions. He left all his property to his three sons and three daughters. Calamy also says that William Davison had a son "many years pastor to a congregation at Winchester". If so, this may have been his youngest son Hilckiah, to whom 'for his pains' in helping with the execution of his will, Mr Davison left 'all my study of books and papers, and also half the rents and profits of the land at Daventry'.

Thus we get some glimpses of a group of dissenters living in Blockley during the 17th century though worshipping in Campden and elsewhere; and at least two congregations of dissenters in Campden - the Quakers at Broad Campden and a second group in the town. We do not know much about the latter, but the indications suggest they were either Independents (Congregationalists) or Presbyterians. There may have been both for a time, for in 1695 another house - that of Mary Wills - was registered at Gloucester Quarter sessions as a Dissenters' Meeting House for Presbyterians. Whether this replaced the house registered in 1689 or was additional to it is not known.

It seems probable that this group of Dissenters included some fairly substantial Campden townspeople. Several were burgesses or other well established people. On how many of the congregation came from neighbouring villages like Paxford, Blockley, Ebrington or Aston Subedge at this time, or what kind of people they may have been, there is little or no evidence.

The Eighteenth Century Dissenting

Congregation in Campden

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After William Davison's death there are some years about which little seems to be known of the congregation of Dissenters meeting in Campden. However, from the second decade of the eighteenth century a lot more information begins to be forthcoming, both about the ministers and about the members of the Dissenting church.

Firstly, in 1715 Samuel Knight, a Dissenting Preacher of Chipping Campden, took the Oath of Allegiance and the Abjuration Oath before the Quarter Sessions at Gloucester. (These were Oaths required to be taken by all Dissenting Ministers under a number of post-Restoration Acts). Then in 1724, a certificate was presented to the Bishop of Gloucester:

That some of His Majesty's protestant dissenting subjects called Presbyterians do intend to hold a meeting for the worship of God in a New House built for that purpose in the parish of Chipping Campden which they desire may be registered in the Bishop's Court according to an Act of Parliament of William and Mary

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Nehemiah Griffiths, James Williams and Samuel Coombes signed by Samuel Knight, minister, and the certificate.

This "New House" was used thereafter almost continuously as a Meeting House, first by this group of dissenters and subsequently by the Baptists in Campden, right up to the time a new Chapel was built in 1872. Indeed, in confirmation, Rev James Hinton of Oxford, who knew the church well, writing in 1821, says 'the present meeting-house was erected in 1724'. We will return to this building later.

It seems that Samuel Knight, the minister who signed this application, was Davison's successor in this Campden church. His name leads us to a second connection between the dissenters of Blockley and Campden. It also lays the foundation, not only of the close ties between dissenters in the two places, but also of the complex interconnections of the dissenting silk throwsting families of Blockley.

For Samuel Knight seems to be the same man who according to H. E. Icely had married Maria Whatcott, the daughter of Henry Whatcott Blockley's first Silk Throwster, in 1714. He later moved to Blockley from Campden and, again according to Icely, built himself a Silk Mill on the Cole Brook, afterwards moving into the Manor House.

It is of some interest that Samuel Knight's father-in-law, Henry Whatcott, is said to have been in trouble with the established church almost thirty years before his daughter's marriage, having been accused of marrying his deceased wife's sister; and it has been suggested that he may have joined the dissenters as a result - although there is no clear evidence of this.

Samuel Knight seems to have died sometime before 1729, for in that year his widow, Mrs Mary Knight, appears as the first Blockley name in a new list of members of the dissenting church Campden under a new minister, Rev Peter Peyton. She seems then to have been receiving some income from the Church, or possibly to have inherited a loan made by her husband; for there is a reference in a later Campden church book to:

"...a Letter of Attorney from Nehemiah Griffith of Rhuaby (*sic*), Flintshire, Giles Whatcott of Blockley, Simon Ansell of Broadway, empowering Peter Peyton to receive the rent of Mr Richard. Smith, mercer, let on houses on the premises belonging to the meeting house, dated 4th August 1730, and also to pay the interest for money upon bond to Mrs Mary Knight."

Giles Whatcott, Mrs Knight's brother, had succeeded to his father's mill at Blockley three or four years after his sister's marriage. He was one of those granting this power of attorney; and he later bequeathed a sum of £50 to the minister of the Campden church a sum that in 1783 was still being held in government securities.

The Whatcotts of Blockley, then, were early supporters of the Campden dissenting church. But before tracing the consequences of this for the progress of the church, let us go back to 1724 and the new meeting house. By an indenture of 1729 we know something more about the site of the new meetinghouse. Clearly, the church already owned the whole of the property (the burgage) on which the Baptist Chapel, Manse and graveyard still stand today. It is described in a later renewal of the trust deed as:

All that messuage, tenement, garden and orchard and backside .. late in the possession of William Smith, mercer, deceased and then in possession of Richard Miles, grocer, lying between the house heretofore of Dorothy Godwin and afterwards of John Humphries in the southwest side and the dwelling house heretofore of William Smith, baker and afterwards of William Randall, baker, on the north side ...'

and also the:

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... edifice ... erected for a meeting house for the use of the congregation of dissenting protestants at the upper end of the orchard belonging to the same messuage [and] ... with a way or passage to and from the meeting house through the entry ... and up and down the backside garden and orchard six feet wide and... a passage at the south end of the meetinghouse and likewise without the house for a passage on the west side of it.....

In fact the house garden and orchard standing at the High Street end of the site (where the present-day chapel stands) were then let to tenants. The meetinghouse itself stood immediately inside the gate leading to Back Ends, with in later years a small graveyard alongside. The passageway led (just as it does today) from High Street all the way up to and around the meetinghouse. In later years other cottages seem to have been built on the site, and the mid-nineteenth century census returns show dwellings in what was known as Chapel Yard, some of them inhabited by families identifiable as members of the Church.

Kelly's Directory for 1870 says of the meeting house, apparently not quite accurately in terms of the date: "The present Baptist Chapel (formerly Presbyterian) is a small and ancient building, erected in the time of the Commonwealth", and it refers to "some cottages forming part of the endowment". The late George Badham, who died in 1944, was old enough to remember the old meetinghouse and to have attended Sunday school there, in the last years before it was demolished. He is said to have drawn a picture of it later in his life—unfortunately no longer to be found. He is said to have reported that before the present chapel was built, lanterns were usually hung from the windows of the cottages to help light the passageway on dark evenings.

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As for the others who applied for the 1724 certificate, (Nehemiah Griffiths, James Williams and Samuel Coombes), it is not possible to identify any of them for certain. Nehemiah Griffiths' name occurs in the letter of attorney cited above, but there is no other reference either to him or to James Williams. The third applicant may have been the "Samuel Combs of Cow Honeybourne" who was a member of the church in 1729, and is reported to have died in June 1731, other members of the Coombes family from Honeybourne remained members of the church until the 1750's at least.

By 1729 the congregation owned a second property one consigned by Mrs Mary Johnson for the use of the Rev'd Peter Peyton and his successors, with reversion and income to the trustees, It is not clear where this house was, though successive tenants are named in the trust deeds. Just possibly it could have been on the site of the house near the chapel, Mrs Mary Johnson, a widow, was a member of the church when Peter Peyton took over the pastorate, and she remained a member until her death on 12th April 1743, She seems to have been one of the Ballard family and in her will, proved at Gloucester on 19th May, she made bequests to her cousins, John Ballard, Henry Ballard and Thomas Walford and to Mary Ballard, her executrix "who now lives with me", Her indenture of 1729 is in fact ratified and confirmed in her will.

Mary Johnson may have been a relative (possibly the widow) of Edward Johnson, the founder of Johnson's charity for the poor in Campden. She bequeathed a silver salver to Mr John Martin, mercer, who, according to Rushen, administered that charity for many years.

So, clearly, there was care and commitment about this time by members able to support the church by grants or bequests of property, the church seems already to have had quite strong support, much of it apparently due to Samuel Knight and his connection with the Whatcotts of Blockley.

In Blockley there were more marriages to come, bringing in more important supporters, Samuel Knight had three daughters, two of whom married Blockley dissenters who became connected with the Silk Throwing industry and with the church at Campden. The eldest, Martha, married a newcomer to Blockley, Joseph Peyton. Joseph had recently arrived from Southwark, where he had been a Stationer, in partnership with a younger Whatcott he built yet another Silk Mill, on ground where the Blockley waterworks now stand, He died as the result of an accident in 1761. Joseph

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Peyton's daughter Martha in turn was later to marry Campden's great Baptist pastor, Rev'd Elisha Smith.

Another of Samuel Knight's daughters married Samuel Spilsbury, member of another Dissenting family from Campden, who later took over his father-in-law's Silk Mill on the Cole Brook in Blockley. The third daughter rather spoiled the sequence by marrying the son of Dr Erasmus Saunders, the then Blockley Vicar. Her husband later became Vicar of the established church in Leicestershire, though the family maintained its connections with Blockley.

These close family connections between the leading silk families, and between them and religious dissent in Blockley persisted for nearly 150 years.

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Non-Conformist worship has had a more or less continuous history in Campden on the same site since 1724. Rev'd Peter Peyton was pastor from July 1729 until 1732, when he seems to have died. From a note made by Rev'd Elisha Smith in a later Church Book it appears that he hailed from Kidderminster and that he 'took the oath of allegiance at the Quarter Sessions of Worcester 2 Oct 1722'. It was at Kidderminster in the middle of the seventeenth century that Richard Baxter, the noted Presbyterian writer, lecturer and divine, had his first Church. One might wonder if Mr Peyton may have come under the influence of Baxter or his successors: the names of a John Peyton and a Richard Peyton—possibly one of them his forebear—appear among the 263 signatories to the invitation to Richard Baxter in 1647 to return to Kidderminster as Minister there.

From the few indications we have of his short stay in Campden, Peter Peyton seems to have been an exceptional man. He bequeathed 99 Books of Divinity to the Church for the use of his successors, and these remained in the church library and were referred to in all the trust deeds, for at least 120 years after his departure.

There is no evidence to say whether Peter Peyton and Joseph Peyton, Samuel Knight's son-in-law, were related. Peter seems to have come from Kidderminster, whereas Joseph was a member of a Stratford-on-Avon family (though he came to Blockley from Southwark about eighteen years later than Peter). The coincidence of two men with this surname entering the same small church is however rather striking.

Peter Peyton's ministry lasted only about three years. When he took over the pastorate his church had thirty-eight members, whose names he listed on a sheet of paper still extant; and to these he added a further seventeen names of people who joined while he was still minister, some of them clearly from the same families. Of his fifty-five members, six lived in Blockley, two in Paxford and two in Aston Magna. Eighteen of them were from Chipping Campden and four from Broad Campden, while the others (more than half) lived as far away as Broadway, the Honeybournes, Ullington, Pebworth, Broad Marston, Quinton, Shipston-on-Stour, Stretton-on-Fosse and Longborough.

Between the end of Peter Peyton's pastorate and about 1770 the names of five other Campden pastors are known. They included a Mr Oldsworth (or possibly Houldsworth) during the 1730's, Mr Job Barrett from September 1738 to about 1757, Mr Liscomb Mauliber stretch from 1757 to 1761, a Mr Alliot from 1761 and David Davis from 1765. Dates are not entirely reliable and references are few. The only one of these pastors about whom any reference has been traced is Rev'd Job Barrett, who was one of the few Campden subscribers to the *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* by the celebrated Campden antiquary, George Ballard. Mr Barrett was married, and his wife, Mary, who died aged 68 in 1755, was buried in the parish churchyard, near the graves of other dissenters. Mr Barrett himself died intestate in Campden in 1757, and letters of administration were granted to his son Joseph, a saddler and ironmonger living in Walsall.

The eighteenth century record is not complete, and there seem to have been periods when no resident minister was present and membership necessarily diminished. For example, when Mr Stretch took over there were only 18 members, and only 13 when Mr Davis took pastoral charge.

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So who were the members of the church at this time? Three of Peter Peyton's successors made some attempt at listing the members of the church during their pastorates, and altogether between 1729 and about 1765 it is possible to identify almost exactly 100 members' names.

Members came from a surprisingly wide area, and the proportion residing outside Campden seems actually to have increased as the years passed. Only about a third (31) of those of whom we have details before 1765 actually lived in Chipping Campden or Westington, and 4 more in Broad Campden. There were 14 members from Blockley, Paxford or Aston Magna, 10 from Pebworth, 7 from the Honeybournes, five from Willersey, five from Broadway, five from Longborough, and other members came from Broad Marston, Quinton, Hidcote, Norton, Ullington, Shipston-on-Stour, Stretton-on-Fosse and Weston-subedge. It is interesting that over 200 years later the growing Baptist congregation at Campden in the 1980's and 1990's comes from much the same catchment area.

It is unlikely that all services were held in Campden. Rather there would have been subsidiary meeting places in some of these villages, probably in the houses of church members. But there must have been a lot of journeying on foot or on horseback from long distances, on the part of both pastors and congregations.

The Blockley names, with their dates of membership are: Mrs Mary Knight (of whom we have already heard) Mary Ricketts, Lydia Lane, Elizabeth Horn, Jane Willis and Rebecca Harris, all already members before 1729 Joseph Peyton (1748) and Mary Willis (before 1757). From the Blockley hamlet of Aston Magna came Widow Hanks (before 1729), Russell's (1730) James Maxwell and Mrs Kettle (both 1742). From Paxford (another hamlet of Blockley parish) Thomas Stickly (before 1729), Ann Guye (1729), William Broadway (1742) and Jane Broadway (1756); and from 'Northidge' (Northwick) Mrs Elizabeth Clark, Widow (1749). In almost no case is the occupation of a Blockley member given, and, apart from the two names Mary Knight and Joseph Peyton none of the Blockley members of the church have had their names inscribed in any history books. They were presumably for the most part poor, quiet and peaceable people, agricultural smallholders or labourers, or domestic servants. The scarcity of family groups among the Blockley members is noticeable, as compared with some other localities. One may assume that some of their families (as also some of the better known dissenting families) worshipped together in the Campden chapel, but that they had simply not committed themselves to membership, or had not been accepted as full members of the church.

In addition to these names, both Thomas Whatcott and Henry Whatcott of Blockley (younger members of the Whatcott family, though then described as Woolstaplers) were Trustees of the Campden meeting room up to 1783, and the silk throwsters Samuel Spilsbury and Thomas Peyton (Joseph's son), and also Joseph Newitt, a Paxford farmer, were appointed trustees in that year, together with others from other parishes.

Despite these last names, the main leadership of the church at this time came, not from Blockley, but mainly from Campden - and from Honeybourne in the early years and Pebworth towards the end of the period. This was not so much because of the greater number of members from Campden, but rather because the Campden residents included a few trades people, freeholders of the borough and important agricultural tenants. In Honeybourne, Pebworth and Longborough there is evidence of long-term connection by generations of the same dissenting families.

Among the names particularly connected with Campden, there is a Mrs Mary Grove of Willersey, admitted in 1758, a widow who later 'married the Rev'd Mr Stretch and removed to Campden'. (The marriage, registered at Willersey, is noted by Rushen). Other Campden names include Days, Tombs (Toms or Tomes), (probably both descendants of families first noted in the 'presentments' in 1684) Wells, Ordway, Stanley, Miles, Cormbell, Hopkins, Willis, and others: Widow Haines of Westington seems to have been admitted a member in 1752, and was still there in 1765.

36 deaths are recorded among these members in the first thirty years of the period; but some peo-

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ple remained members for long periods. William Randall and William Ordway, for instance, both of Campden, and both already members in 1729, remained so for 27 years or more. So did Edward Dixon (or Dickson) of Pebworth and Hannah Whitehead of Longborough. Anthony Whitehead, probably Hannah's husband, was admitted in October 1729, and was still a member in 1765. And John and Angel Days of Campden entered into membership together in November 1730, and were still members 35 years later.

Some of the members of this dissenting church seem to have been buried in the parish churchyard. According to Rushen, Bigland noted the headstones of William Ordway and his wife Hannah, both of whom had been church members in 1729. William died in March 1781, aged 82. He had voted in the 1776 election as a freeholder in the town. Hannah is said to have died, aged 48, on 27th December 1744. Bigland also noted the headstone of Mary Randall, who is said to have died on 26th April 1739 aged 78. Mary was the wife of William Randall, a baker, who in 1738, according to Rushen, gave his son Elisha a house - clearly from the context the house next to the chapel, referred to in one of the deeds quoted above. Elisha's name does not appear in the church records. He died before his father; his headstone is also noted by Rushen as standing near that of his mother.

Curiously Hannah Ordway and Mary Randall are given quite different dates of death in the church records from the dates noted by Bigland and Rushen on their headstones. Since the former were probably written-in some time subsequent to the event, we should probably favour the headstone dates.

Another stone mentioned as being in the parish churchyard is that of William Broadway of Paxford, who was admitted a member of the Campden dissenting church in 1744 and died in 1751, aged 54. Rushen also notes an altar tomb "near the vestry" in the parish churchyard commemorating Richard Tomes. He died on 1st October 1785, aged 40. Though his will described him as a sack-maker, he had been elected a capital burgess as an ironmonger in 1773 and was made bailiff in 1775. He was appointed as a trustee of the Dissenting church in 1782. His widow, Sarah, inherited a life interest in all his property, which was then to pass to their children. Sarah herself died in 1795, and she was buried in the Meeting House. Uniquely, Rev'd Elisha Smith had the funeral sermon he had preached for her printed—the only catalogued copy of which seems unfortunately to have been lost, possibly destroyed in a London air raid during the last war.

It should be added that it does not seem possible to identify any of the above named gravestones in the parish churchyard today. In some cases weathering has made identification impossible. In others the stones may have been removed at some intermediate period.

* * * * *

We have, then, in the last two chapters some evidence of the dissenters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, members of congregations meeting in various places, Quakers in Broad Campden, Blockley Baptists possibly meeting in Moreton (at least until the Baptist cause in that town gave way to an Independent church some time after 1750) and Independents or Presbyterians in Campden. In the Campden dissenting church there is evidence of participation from a wide area, much farther afield than Blockley and its hamlets.

What the precise denomination of the Campden church was at that time is unclear, and it may have changed over the course of the eighteenth century. The few contemporary references to the church, which originate in Campden generally refer to it as a Presbyterian church, as did the original certificate licensing its meetinghouse for worship. Blockley references, however, including those made a little later by Rev'd Elisha Smith, generally imply it was an 'Independent' (corresponding to the later Congregational) church. Joseph Peyton and his family appear to have regarded themselves as Independents, despite the family's close future involvement with the Baptist cause in the two places.

What can be said is that, almost certainly it was not a Baptist church. There are no references in Pastors papers to baptisms, but only to persons admitted. The trust deeds all speak of "the congregation of Protestant dissenters" and of "the Protestant dissenting minister for the time being"; and

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‘Dissenting Minister’ is the form used of Rev’d Job Barrett in the papers granting administration of his estate. Again, the Baptist minister, Rev Elisha Smith, whom we are about to meet, implies in several places that they were not of his denomination. He writes in his Church Book of ‘the former society’ that existed before he came. He writes a short obituary note about Francis Day of Campden, who died aged 71 in 1804, calling him “the last of the old congregation of Independents” and says “he was buried at the church yard where the old dissenters lay”. And on the flyleaf of the same book is a note, apparently written in the last few years of Elisha’s life, as follows:

“E. Smith expects some information might be gained concerning some of the ministers who are mentioned here, in the monthly repository for 1811—in papers signed etc. esp. Toulmin’s Listing of Dissenters, S.5.”

“He is disappointed in not meeting with any information in Toulmin.”

I suppose that if they had been Baptist Ministers, Smith would have known of them. If he, living only a few decades after they had been resident here, could find no further information about them it is unlikely we should be able to. Certainly, Toulmin does not refer to any of them.

However, it cannot be denied that worship by Non-conformists has been virtually continuous in Campden since the third quarter of the seventeenth century—over 300 years—and that it has been on more or less the same site for well over 270 years. Whether it has always been worship in the Baptist tradition is perhaps less important.

A Forty Year Ministry

Rev’d Elisha Smith at Campden and Blockley

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From the late 1760’s until 1782 there are no records of the Campden dissenting church or its minister. It appears that the church may have been in a very low state and without a Minister for a good deal of the time after 1765. This was soon all to change, however.

In the early 1780’s two significant events took place. New trust deeds for the property of the Campden dissenting church were signed in 1783. And just before this—on 8th October 1782—there occurred an unprecedented event: the baptism of five people by immersion in the brook at Pye Mill, near Paxford (appropriately right on the boundary between Blockley and Campden parishes). These two events herald the earliest activities in Campden of perhaps the greatest figure in our story—a man generally recognised to have been evangelically one of the most influential non-conformist ministers this locality has had.

Many generations of children—and I suppose adults—will remember the tedium of Sunday morning sermons at Campden being relieved by gazing above the pulpit in the present Baptist chapel at an inscription, now covered, which went something like this:

SACRED to the MEMORY of

ELISHA SMITH

THE FAITHFUL

Pastor of the Church of Christ

assembling in this place

for thirty-nine years

who died March 29th 1819 aged 65 yrs

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also of

MARTHA, his wife

who died November 7th 1817 aged 63 years

and of three of their children

who died in their infancy.

Remember them who have had rule over you,

who have spoken unto you the word of God,

whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Hebrews XIII 7-8

The tablet was signed by G. Cakebread of Bloxham.

Everyone in the chapel in those days knew of Elisha Smith the Faithful.

Elisha was born in the small village of Brington in Northamptonshire in 1754. His father and grandfather were apparently Woolcombers, and his mother, to whom he was greatly attached, was the daughter of a Schoolmaster. In fact there had been schoolteachers on both sides of his family. After her marriage Elisha's mother inherited a 'fortune' from people with whom she had been in service, and with this money his father set up in business on his own. So when Elisha was two or three, the family moved twelve miles or so south, to the village of Paulerspury. His father there took over a 'lasting manufactory', presumably making wooden lasts for the shoe industry; and in this he had some moderate success.

Elisha was brought up at a very fortunate time and place. In the latter half of the eighteenth century Northamptonshire was at the centre of a warm, vigorous and rapidly expanding movement among the Particular Baptists. It was to be influenced by the moderate Calvinistic theology of Andrew Fuller - a Northamptonshire man and almost exact contemporary of Elisha - and by the advocacy of open communion by (among others) John Collett Ryland from Blockley and Bourton-on-the-Water.

The village school at Paulerspury that Elisha attended was run by Edmund Carey. Carey's son, seven years Elisha's junior, a schoolboy friend and pupil at the same school, was William Carey. Although apparently from a family of the Established church, William was to become one of the most widely renowned Baptists of all time, virtual founder, with Ryland and Fuller, of the overseas missionary movement and eventually of the Baptist Missionary Society. After short pastorates in the east of England, Carey was to spend much of his life in India. Apart from his own missionary endeavours, his work is acknowledged to have inspired the founders of the London Missionary Society and of the Church Missionary Society.

Elisha, the intelligent, enquiring young boy and acquaintance of so many able men, did not hear the call to the ministry immediately. He left home and worked first in Coleshill and then Coventry, where he had a variety of experiences and came under the influence of Mr John Butterworth, brother of the Lawrence Butterworth who was Pastor at Bengeworth, Evesham, for over sixty years. In about 1776 he came home, committed himself, and was baptised at Towcester by Mr Stanger—one of a family of Particular Baptists that had produced pastors since the 17th Century. Some time later he 'went to Northampton to work at my business, that I might have an opportunity of receiving some instruction under Rev'd Mr Ryland'. From the time that Elisha had been a boy at nearby Paulerspury, this John Collett Ryland had been Baptist pastor at College Lane Chapel in

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Northampton. The fact that Elisha studied under him is significant. Ryland was the foremost advocate of open communion, a characteristic of Elisha's own ministry. College Lane Chapel indeed had some predobaptists among its members and leaders. It may well be that Elisha's future career was influenced, too, by the fact that Ryland was a native of Ditchford, a hamlet in Blockley parish, and, according to Icely, had been to school in Moreton-in-Marsh. At one stage in his youth he was a member of Benjamin Beddome's large Baptist church at Bourton-on-the-Water, and he was a student of Bristol Baptist Academy under Bernard Foskett in the 1740's. His son John Ryland, another contemporary of Elisha's, was to succeed him as Pastor of Northampton in 1785, and later to become Principal of the Bristol Academy.

That same year, as Elisha came home and was baptised, Caleb Evans, then Assistant Principal of the Bristol Academy, visited Towcester with Benjamin Beddome, Minister at Bourton-on-the-Water and another former student of the academy. In Towcester, caught up with and having fallen under the regard of this large group of Baptist theologians, Elisha was recommended to Evans and Beddome as a potential student for their academy. On May 10th 1778 he was called at Towcester to 'the solemn and important task of the Ministry'.

And so in 1778 the 23 year-old Elisha Smith entered the Baptist academy at Bristol, the foremost theological college for Particular Baptists of the time, and became one of the growing number of well-educated Baptist ministers in the Midlands and West of England at the end of the eighteenth century. At Bristol Elisha studied classical languages, logic and Divinity, and obviously absorbed much of the philosophy and theology then characteristic of Bristol- a warm, liberal and collaborative teaching that he made very much his own. (For a discussion of the teaching and syllabus at Bristol under Caleb Evans, Principal for most of Elisha's stay, see H. McLachlan's *English Education under the Test Acts* (Manchester UP 1931) pp 93 to 96).

Two years later Elisha visited Shipston-on-Stour and Campden 'on a visit'; it is not clear under what circumstances, though Icely says he came to serve in a lay capacity 'for a few weeks of practical experience'. He found the congregation "very low, not 80 hearers in either of the places", and says he spent a somewhat discouraging six weeks there, though "the hearers increased in both". However, after being invited back by both congregations he returned to Shipston at the end of his four-year course. He found lodging there in June 1782, formed the people into a church and was ordained the following month. The ministers taking part in his ordination he says were Rev'd Mr Purdy, Mr Dunscomb of Coate (Thomas Dunscombe had preceded Elisha as a student at Bristol) Caleb Evans, Lawrence Butterworth of Evesham and a Mr Hiller.

The church at Shipston-on-Stour, the first of his churches, was he says one "professing belief of the duty of believers Baptism, but admitting other true Christians into their communion". The significance of the latter phrase, showing the influence he inherited from John Collett Ryland, and from the liberal teaching of Caleb Evans, will become clear.

For the next eight or ten years Elisha seems to have looked after congregations at both Campden and Shipston-on-Stour, travelling about on horseback, and using lodgings at both places as convenient. No doubt in Campden he began his preaching in Samuel Knight's old meeting house, the trust deeds for which were, as we have seen, renewed just after his arrival. He seems however not to have led a properly constituted church there for two or three years.

Then in 1785, in Blockley Parish Church, he married a Blockley girl, Martha Peyton. Martha was the granddaughter of Samuel Knight, the builder of the Campden meeting house, and she was the daughter of Joseph Peyton, the Blockley Silk Throwster who had arrived from London in 1747, and had died in an accident in 1761 while his children were still young. The couple settled down in Blockley, in accommodation previously occupied by Martha's brother, Thomas Peyton. There they lived for the next 34 years, indeed for the whole of their married lives.

Writing in his diary some twenty years later, Elisha says of this marriage: Fully pleased with her person, conscious of her good temper and her prudence, persuaded that she feared God and kept up family worship, satisfied with the business she was engaged in, I found myself inclined to share her care and increase her joys. By doing so I could serve my friends at Campden. I had a wish to

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introduce the Gospel at Blockley and by business to be able to continue my labours in these parts. Whatever difficulties I may have found, I am still thankful the Lord directed me in mercy both to person and place.

It seems likely that Elisha gave up the care of Shipston-on-Stour within a few years of his marriage. Hinton, who knew Elisha well, in fact gives the date as 1792 and another authority mentions 1793.

A problem for dissenting ministers at this time was always how to earn the wherewithal to live, in conditions where their churches could not afford to sustain them. Coincidentally with his marriage Elisha is said to have entered

“into a large concern of secular business in which he met with such severe losses as to fill him with the greatest anxiety lest the issue might be so disastrous to his worldly circumstances as to bring a disgrace upon the Cause of Christ. He was fearful lest his trials and difficulties were a divine judgement inflicted as a punishment for engaging in business at all”

However,

“The Lord raised up kind friends who lent him such reasonable aid as to deliver him from his embarrassments, and ever subsequently he was remarkably blest with prosperity in his temporal concerns.”

Although the nature of this first business is not clear, he writes in his journal of “an engagement in pottery, of which I was totally ignorant”, and one must suppose it was this that brought him loss. However, for most of his married life Elisha, occupying part of what was known as Peyton House until a change of name to Paxton House, he ran the village stores from his home, premises that have housed the village stores continuously from that time on, for a very long part of this time under Elisha’s own direct descendants. From these very premises Blockley Post Office and stores was still being run today in 2007.

We will look at Elisha’s character in more detail later. He seems to have been typical of the best kind of eighteenth century Pastor, loyal to his small flock over many years, a wise and patient leader, and an evangelical Christian. Baptists at this period are said not to have entered much into affairs outside the church, and this seems to have been true of Elisha, who put all his energies into the care of his flock and the advancement of the church in the area.

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So this young man began his uphill task, first in Shipston-on-Stour and Campden, and later in Campden and Blockley, feeling he was entering on rather barren soil. From the start, he seems to have worked quietly and effectively among his small flock in Campden and their Blockley adherents. The first fruits we know of locally were the baptism of the four people already mentioned at Pye Mill in October 1782. A few more baptisms took place at Court Piece Farm, Westington (or Court Pieces as it was then known) in July 1785 and four others at ‘Mathews’ Garden, Westington in November of the same year. None of those whom he baptised seem to have been members of the earlier dissenting church, and the baptisms marked a new beginning in Campden. Most of the early converts of whom we have names seem to have been Chipping Campden or Westington people, save only three from Blockley parish: Mr Joseph Newitt, a farmer from Paxford; his wife, who was already a Baptist and member of the Chipping Norton church; and Elizabeth Rawlings of Northwick Lodge

In November 1785 a small Baptist congregation at Campden seems to have been formally established, when, as James Hinton says in his later summary of Campden “there were only five communicants and about thirty hearers”. The following is virtually the first entry in Elisha’s church book, a book that contains a record of many of the significant happenings during his ministry:

“On Wed. 9 November 1785, five of the congregation met and invited their Minister to be

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witness to the proceedings. The service began with thanksgiving and prayer, after which they proceeded to give some account of the dealings of God with their Souls and the present state of their minds in the following order, the Minister in the names of the rest asking what might be thought proper.”

[There follows a summary of the testimonies of each of them) “After this account, Mrs Cornmell [one of the five) asked to sign a Covenant with each signifying consent to join with her in Christian Fellowship; each in turn signed. After a few hints of advice, Mr Newitt [Joseph Newitt of Paxford; another of the five) concluded in prayer”.

Two of the five had been among those baptised in 1782, one had been baptised in July 1785, and a fourth was among those baptised at Westington a few days after this inaugural service. The fifth, Mrs Cornmell, who had said she was satisfied with her infant baptism, apparently died very soon afterwards, ‘having never enjoyed the Lords Supper’.

This service of November 1785 marks the beginning of the Baptist church in Campden, but it does not seem to have been the conclusive act. In January 1788 the seven remaining members gave a formal invitation to Rev’d Elisha Smith to be their Minister, “to assist us in the performance of our Duty as a Church in Christ”. His acceptance was sealed at a communion service a few months later:

“It being agreed that they would enjoy the ordinance of the Lords Supper together, they met on Thursday June 12th 1788 for a preparatory service and on the Lords Day following sat down together at the Lords Table with great unity and joy. Mr Richard. Mathews of Pebworth, the only remaining member of the former society, having signed the church agreement, met and united with them”.

Richard Mathews was indeed an old member of the dissenting church, having been admitted into membership as long before as October 1758. He died in 1791.

Most members received into the church right through till 1816, the covenant signed in November 1785, thereafter signed the church agreement. It is an interesting document. The first paragraph is important enough to be quoted in full:

“We whose names are under written, having, as we hope, our hearts touched by the finger of God and being acquainted with each other’s faith and experience, do now in the most solemn manner give up ourselves to the Lord and to one another according to his will, purposing through divine strength to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless, being willing also at any time hereafter to receive into our Society all those who shall appear to have received the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts, whether baptized in infancy or upon profession of faith, not entertaining any lessening thoughts and carefully avoiding all reproachful expressions but embracing them with most sincere and cordial affection”.

The last half of the paragraph is important. It again demonstrates the importance Elisha gave to the principle of open communion that had featured in the covenant of the Shipston church. The principle may have been advantageous, too, in the circumstances of the Campden congregation, given the existing Independent or Presbyterian membership both there and in Blockley.

The exact nature of the “new relation” spoken of in the note on the 1788 meeting is not clear. The phrase may indicate an acceptance of him as Pastor by the old congregation as well as by his new Baptist converts. It may possibly also have marked Elisha’s decision to give up the Shipston-on-Stour pastorate and concentrate as full-time Pastor in Campden and Blockley, though that seems not to have happened formally until a few years later.

Elisha seems to have worked patiently thereafter in building up his church. However only five people are recorded as having been admitted to membership over the next ten years, all of them apparently without being baptised. Indeed, the church book notes no baptisms between 1786 and 1799, and there may possibly have been difficulties, internal or external. facing him and his new

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church. Possibly his business and financial difficulties forced him to give less attention to evangelisation than he could have hoped.

For a few years the main increase in Elisha's church seems to have been from Blockley members. William and Mary Nichols were received in 1792, and Thomas Peyton, Elisha's brother-in-law a few years later. In 1798 Mrs Martha Smith, Elisha's wife, Miss Sarah Peyton, his sister-in-law and two other Blockley women, Sarah Taplin and Sarah Pinson, were admitted to membership. The following year, Sarah Pinson, together with Mary Wilkes of Blockley and a girl called Mary Sheldon from Honeybourne, Elisha's own servant, were all baptised 'in the evening at Mr Haines's pond'. (It is not clear whether this was the pond at Court Pieces or, whether, as seems more likely, a pond in Blockley belonging to a branch of the Haines family that moved to Blockley about this time now believed to be in the mill pond at Mill View, Blockley).

Nevertheless, there are some interesting names among the new members. In 1793 the members received included Peter Haines senior, farmer of Court Pieces, one of the few farms in Campden already enclosed and then owned by the Noel family. At the same time, Sarah Tomes, widow of Richard Tomes, a capital burgess of the borough, became a member. She died two years later, and Elisha Smith published her funeral sermon. Also Sarah Smith, who bequeathed £200 to the church when she died in 1811, and whom Elisha called 'worthy mother in our church ...wholly devoted to God and ready to every good word and work'. Sarah was from Campden. She may have been the mother of the Thomas Smith who married Elisha's sister-in-Law, Caroline Peyton.

Other early members, received in 1798, were Thomas Peyton, Elisha's Silk-Throwster brother-in-law, Mrs Catherine Haines, wife of Peter, and Mrs Sarah Harris, wife of William Harris, who, Elisha writes,

"had long known the Lord, having attended from the beginning. She has a Brother who has been in Mr Westley's Society, a worthy man, many years preaching in America. Name Richard Whatcott".

This gives Campden one of its few direct connections with John Wesley, slight though it may be. Richard Whatcott was one of the six messengers John Wesley sent to the United States to carry on his evangelistic work there. He was a native of nearby Quinton, and was much praised for his devoutness and integrity. After considerable resistance on his part, since it had been contrary to Wesley's wishes, the American Methodists eventually proclaimed him Bishop. There is no evidence he was related to the Blockley Whatcotts. Interestingly, his sister, Mrs Harris, appears to have been illiterate, and she has signed the church register with her mark.

Up to this time, and while he still held the Shipston-on-Stour pastorate, Elisha seems also to have led services in his own house at Blockley. Near contemporary sources attest to this fact. For example Rev'd James Hinton of Oxford, a friend of the Minister, writing shortly after his death, says of Campden and Blockley:

"The two places are only three miles distant, and the late Mr Smith was the affectionate and beloved parent of both interests, which he served and ever regarded as one. At Blockley he first preached in his own house; his labours were blessed; his little flock increased; his heart was generous, and his hand was liberal; in 1792 he aided his people in building a neat place of worship; some years afterwards a gallery was added; and seldom has primitive Christianity been better exemplified than in this beautiful and sequestered village.

And some ten years later a printed notice signed by, among others, Elisha's eldest son, Crescens, reads:

The Church of Christ in this place, of the Baptist denomination, practising open communion, owes its origin to the indefatigable labours of the late Rev'd Elisha Smith, pastor of the church at Chipping Campden. His residence being at Blockley, he was accustomed to preach in his own house till 1792; when, with the aid of a few individuals (and especially of a pious lady resident in the village) he built a small chapel for public worship.

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The erection of this chapel was a most significant step for the Baptist cause in Blockley. It was erected where it still stands (now called the 'little' village hall) at the top of Bell Bank. Probably from the time it was opened, and certainly from 1798, afternoon services were held there every Sunday as part of the pattern of services of the Campden church: for, as Hinton says, he always treated Blockley and Campden as one united church.

However, the road seemed hard to Elisha at this time. **In 1794 he wrote in his diary:**

"We opened our Meeting-House the 30th May 1794. What success the Gospel may have I know not. I sometimes fear the spirit of the World is advancing and religion is low. The enemies of the Gospel have been violent this year, and the scandalous reproaches of the Holy Church party against Dissenters are a means of trying the zeal and faith of many. Have engaged to supply the people at Stow but know little of the state of their Souls. Do not see much of the increase of religion among my people at Campden. It is a day of small things."

This was the period after the French Revolution when the political leaders in England were suspicious of any popular movements, including movements of religious dissent that might lead to a similar happenings in this country. At this time, too, the Baptists may have been meeting some hostility locally from the Blockley vicar, William Boughton.

Nevertheless, Elisha's own faith and zeal were strong enough to win through. As we have seen, in 1799 three Blockley people were baptised "at Mr Haines Pond", a celebration the Minister describes as "most comfortable".

Then, in 1801 a baptistry was constructed in the Campden meetinghouse at a cost of £11.5s. 7d. This seems to have been a great boon, and the Minister notes that on 20th September that year "we enjoyed the ordinance of Baptism in a solemn and comfortable manner. Much people; behaved very decent". The first people baptized there were the same Sarah Taplin who had been received in 1798, together with Elizabeth Brain of Northwick Hill and a Bourton-on-the-Hill member of Moreton Independent church named Hannah Greening. The following year saw three more Blockley women baptized in the Campden baptistry, together with a member from Ebrington, and Mrs Sarah Harris of Campden of whom we have already heard, and who had been a member since 1793.

Thereafter baptisms seem to have been rather more frequent. Over the next 15 years they averaged nearly four a year, and there are records of 72 baptisms altogether during his ministry.

Elisha Smith was obviously sincere in his acceptance of 'open communion', and throughout his ministry there were people accepted into membership without baptism. These included his own wife, his sister-in-law, and his brother-in-law, Thomas Peyton, of whom he wrote in an obituary tribute,

"joined our church in 1798. He retained a regard for infant baptism, but always was candid and seemed most pleased with Baptist ministers. He had known the blessings of religion a great number of years".

The Minister, devout and zealous as he was, recognised these divisions of opinion and gathered into his church all those who wished to worship there sincerely and with faith, a tradition he had brought to Shipston-on-Stour, and which was characteristic of all three churches with which he was connected.

Among his other activities, Elisha was instrumental in helping to establish the Oxfordshire Baptist Association. At a 'double meeting' (a preaching service conducted by two ministers and usually attended by others) in Shipston-on-Stour at the beginning of 1802,

'it was agreed by the Ministers present that an association of the neighbouring churches would be pleasing and profitable and a letter was drawn up and signed by T. Coles of Bourton, E. Smith of Campden and T. Smith of Shipston, and others, and addressed to the

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churches in the neighbourhood requesting their views of the business to be communicated at a Lecture at Blockley in the Whitsun week’.

In fact, because of unfavourable weather at Whitsun, the matter was next discussed at Bourton-on-the-Water in September 1802, ‘when it was unanimously resolved to form an Association of Baptist Congregational Churches in Oxfordshire and the Counties adjacent’.

The formal inauguration of the Association took place in May 1803 in Oxford, and Elisha Smith seems to have been the main speaker outlining ‘the advantages of Association’. Indeed, the first regular meeting of the association took place at Campden and Blockley on September 27th and 28th that year. Among the names mentioned as being present there were Mr Lawrence Butterworth of Evesham, Mr Stennett of Coate, Mr Rawlins of Trowbridge, Mr Bedford of Burlingham, Mr T. Smith of Shipston, and Mr John Smith of Burford. In the following six years the association’s annual meetings were held successively at Chipping Norton, Fairford, Alcester, Coate, Bourton-on-the-Water, and Witney. Then again on Tuesday and Wednesday June 12/13 1810, ‘the Oxford Association of the Particular Baptist Churches was held amongst us’, i.e. at Blockley on the first day and Campden on the second, an event that seemed very satisfactory to Elisha. ‘Upward of 70 persons dined at the George’ on the Wednesday. The churches named as being represented on that occasion were Campden, Alcester, Bourton-on-the-Water, Burford, Chipping Norton, Coate, Fairford, Witney, Oxford and Shipston.

The inauguration of the Association was described in 1821 by another of those there at the beginning, Rev James Hinton of Oxford. He wrote:

The Association ... was formed about 19 years since, at the request of several Pastors previously united in personal friendship ... with a view to cement more closely the bonds of Christian love between their respective churches.

The early composition of this new Association provides an interesting illustration of the evolution of the much older Midland Association. Some 150 years before, Alcester, Bourton-on-the-Water, Hook Norton and Moreton-in-Marsh were founder members of the Midland, and more or less in the centre of the area served by that Association. By 1802, however, the focus of the Midland Association had moved north towards Birmingham and the Black Country. The Bourton church seems to have left the Association about 1790, and it is interesting that Benjamin Beddome’s successor, Thomas Coles, was one of those at the centre of the establishment of the new Oxfordshire Association.

* * * * *

Not only in his temporal concerns, but in his pastoral concerns also, was Elisha remarkably blessed. The small church of seven members of 1788 continued to grow steadily, both Campden and Blockley providing members in almost equal numbers. At no time does Elisha ever state the total number of members currently in his church, and almost the only reference to numbers is after a Baptismal ceremony in 1809 in the presence of a visiting preacher, when he writes, with obvious pleasure “they sat down together at the Lord’s Table. In all 45 communicants”. Although a few of the 45 were not members of this church, much had obviously happened there in the previous twenty years. The congregations to which Elisha ministered would probably have been three or four times as numerous as the number of church members. The church was already strong, certainly compared with the time 25 years earlier when there were five members and, according to James Hinton, no more than 30 ‘hearers’.

One must not, however, ignore difficulties the church went through during this pastorate. There were problems with individual members who were subjected to the discipline of the church. Mrs Mary Nichol’s of Blockley, for instance, was suspended in 1802 ‘until such time as there has been a satisfactory amendment in her temper and conduct, on account of a turbulent behaviour in her family, unfriendly behaviour towards all the members of the church, and her neglect of the Sabbath and of the Divine ordinances’. She was not readmitted until 1807, when she had ‘discovered a more becoming temper and conduct’. After she died in 1818, Elisha wrote of her:

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“...A woman of good understanding and of warm passions, not always under proper government. I believe she often lamented this. At one time she was suspended from the church for her turbulent temper and conduct... .. Since then she discovered more of a Christian spirit. She expressed a deep sense of her unworthiness. On her death bed, said I think my failings do more injury to my children than my virtues do good.....”

Another event that cut Elisha’s heart was ‘the painful necessity of putting away’ a servant of his whom he had baptised just three years earlier, for ‘fornication’ “May God restore her,” he notes in the church book, and in it he copies the letter he wrote to her, which may be quoted for the impression it produces:

‘Much esteemed and pitied Friend, As the unworthy Pastor of the Baptist Church at Campden I am called upon by the Word of God ... and the Voices of our Friends to declare you no longer stand as a member of the Church. May that God whose severe indignation you have deserved by your highly aggravated crime, enlighten your mind as to the evil of your conduct, make you truly to repent and with a broken heart look to that Saviour who once died for sinners and by your future conduct encourage us to forgive and comfort you...’ Is the sincere wish of your grieved but affectionate Friend, E.S’.

Elisha then notes that the young lady in question was married ‘within a few weeks after this’, “appeared penitent, but never happy, yet her walk was consistent. She was much esteemed and trust died happy”. The compassion and sympathy evident in such reactions demonstrates well the character of Elisha Smith.

True, it was not always so evident, for some twenty months after this a curt notice appears in the church book that it was agreed to disown a Campden man for the same offence, and that this was done publicly from the pulpit the next Lords Day after the Service.

There were, however, relatively few cases where disciplinary action was thought necessary, and the warmth of his personality no doubt helped to ensure this was so. This warmth and human sympathy are shown, too, in some of the obituary tributes to members of the church and congregation that he inserted in the church book. He writes of his sister-in-law, Mrs Hannah Figgures, who ‘never joined us as she was not able to travel to Campden’ “Her life was exemplary. I never thought highly of her religion, though I had good hope she might be sincere. She had been long afflicted, and towards the last she gave substantial evidence that God was with her. She was truly convinced of her sin, and of the all-sufficiency of Christ. She was greatly patient, diffident of self, resigned to the will of God. She had become wearied from all the world and was desirous to be in Heaven. I was with her when she expired in peace”.

Of Hannah Newitt, who died aged 21:

“.. had walked in character as a Christian during her illness, which was a decline. She discovered great resignation and humility and departed in peace”.

And of another descendant of the Henry Whatcott—Samuel Knight line:

“Miss Delicia Smith, niece of Mrs Spilsbury, aged 22. Her complaint was a decline. She bore her illness with great humility and patience. Was much beloved by all her acquaintances. Her prevailing disposition was sweetness of disposition, accompanied with great integrity and sincere piety.

Such sentiments seem to epitomise Elisha’s human sympathy, his warmth and his interest in people. Among other tributes are:

“... was a plain honest man, spoke little yet walked close with God...”

“... had always attended and I believe knew savingly the grace of God - ever esteemed her an honourable sincere Christian ...”

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“... He had a confident expectation of eternal happiness - I trust on proper grounds”. [*and of someone he seems not to have liked*]

“Brought up with half the language of Canaan and half of Ashdad, her piety rather a matter of hope than of certainty; was fond of grandeur and with weak abilities she was too much confirmed to the world, though a member of the church at Stow”.

The last is almost the harshest personal comment found in the whole of Elisha's writings.

From Elisha Smith's time the area from which the members of the Campden church were drawn seems much more confined than in the earlier church. The influence of Elisha Smith's work in Blockley is very evident in the changed composition of the membership of his church during his ministry. In the old dissenting church at Campden only 14 of the members came from Blockley parish, as compared with 35 from Campden parish, and only nine of these from Blockley village itself. However during Elisha Smith's pastorate 43 Blockley or Paxford members' names are mentioned as against 45 Campden names. Three came from Ebrington, and one each from Charingworth, Bourton-on-the-Hill and Snowshill.

We have already mentioned a number of these Blockley names. There were in all three members of the Brain family from Northwick Hill, Mrs Elizabeth Brain and her two daughters, both of whom retained their membership after their marriage. There six Newitts from Paxford, of two generations. Other families well represented were the Stanley's, Nichols, Wilkes, and of course the Peyton's and Smiths. Of this last family, Elisha's own wife, his eldest son, Crescens, and his daughters Sarah, Elizabeth, Maria and Charlotte were all received into membership, as well as Crescens wife.

The trustees of the Campden church at this time also included members of Blockley families. Samuel Spilsbury, the Silk Throwster, Joseph Newitt, the Paxford Farmer and Thomas Peyton (at that time described as a Stationer of London) were appointed trustees of the old meeting house almost as soon as Elisha came into the district, at which time Richard Tomes was the only trustee from Campden. Crescens Smith was made a Trustee to succeed these in 1811, at the same time as George Wilkes and Peter Haines, the Blockley farmers, George and William Manton of Campden, and William Haines, farmer from Westington. Another trustee of this time was Thomas Peyton Smith, described as a Brazier. He was also of Campden, probably the son of Joseph Peyton's daughter Caroline, who had married a Thomas Smith of that town.

Some well-known Campden families are represented, too: Stanley, Gibbs, Tomes, Eden, Cherry, Botheridge and Dyde are there. Mrs Keene, widow, from Westington Mill was a member, and six members of the Haines family, some from Court Pieces and some from a branch who had moved to Blockley, were members during his time. Their occupations are rarely mentioned. The Haines family of course were farmers, and so were the large family of Newitt from Paxford and George Wilkes from Blockley. Mrs Keene's family were Millers. Thomas Eden from Campden and William Neale from Ebrington were both labourers, Sarah Atkins was the wife of a Hose Draper, Edward Matthews was a Chandler, Joseph Miles of Charingworth a Sawyer, and John Standly a Stone Mason. Two or three girl members were servants, and one young Blockley man, who died when he was 'upwards of 18 years' was an apprentice Tailor. Thomas Herbert (one of the chapel trustees) was a Brazier, and among other trustees, Thomas Kent and Henry Whatcott were Woolstaplers, Samuel Spilsbury a Silk Throwster, and Elisha Smith's own son, Crescens Smith also became a Silk Throwster. A fair cross section, one might think, of the trades people and working people of the district with possibly a higher representation of the leading commercial families in Blockley than in Campden.

Elisha Smith died in 1819, in his mid-sixties. He had been connected with Campden for nearly 40 years. Content as he was to stay and look after his limited flock in Blockley and Campden, he seems nevertheless not only to have been a devout and successful Pastor, but a lovable and much loved man.

His remains were buried in the old Campden Meeting House yard in the presence of a considerable

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number of his fellow ministers and members of the church, the funeral oration being delivered by Rev'd Gray of Chipping Norton. His long-time colleague, Mr Thomas Coles of Bourton-on-the-Water also preached sermons at both Blockley and Campden to crowded congregations in both places.

Many tributes have been paid to him at that time and since. His memory lived on for a long time, and the many intermarriages between the descendants of Elisha Smith and the other leading dissenters of Blockley meant that it never faded completely from the consciousness of the Blockley church, nor, to a lesser extent did it from Campden. For, as another well-known Blockley Baptist, Mr Charles Belcher, wrote as recently as 1926:

“Mr Smith was a very remarkable man; perhaps it might be said that no one quite equal to him for ability and devotion to the work has ever been associated with the cause”.

Dr Arthur Exell, for several years President of the Blockley Antiquarian Society in his biographical notes on him, quotes some recollections by Dr John Mann, son of a Pastor of the Independent Church at Moreton-in-Marsh:

“The fervour of old Elisha was aided by the deep bass of his oracular voice, and the weight of his judgment, which was much respected by my father as that of a good man, speaking with some of the authority of the ancient prophets. ... Old Elisha was one of a type of Dissenting minister that has now almost disappeared. In my mind's eye I can still see him in his brown wig, in his frock coat, and with his pipe in his mouth - from which, indeed, it was rarely absent. He was so affable that he shook hands with nearly everyone to whom he spoke. ... I never heard him preach, but his kindness and sympathy as a pastor fixed him in the hearts of all when my father felt that his small income at Moreton was insufficient for his necessary expenses, he consulted his friend Elisha about looking for some other place. His reply was characteristic, ‘Bread is given thee and water is sure; be content, brother Mann, and wait for a clear call from Providence’. Honourable and unspotted remained the character of old Elisha to the end of his life”.

More formally, a long anonymous tribute to him after his death gives much the same impression. To choose a few phrases:

“Mr Smith was generally very cheerful and affable in his disposition and deportment. He usually met his friends with a smile His general deportment was marked not only by the strictest integrity and uprightness but by a noble ingenuousness of mind and a disinterested generosity of conduct which rendered him incapable of anything bordering on meanness, selfishness or duplicity”.

“His whole life was distinguished by active benevolence, his hand and his heart were always open to the relief of the necessitous; he did good to all around him as a member of society and especially to those of the household of faith as a minister of Christ”.

“He observed the apostolic precept “follow peace with all men” and imitated the apostolic example, in becoming all things to all men, so far as he could do it without sacrificing the interests of truth or violating the dictates of conscience. A truly Christian candour induced him to put the best construction possible on the views, spirit and actions of others”.

“Thrice a day he regularly retired for secret devotion and there is abundant reason to believe that nothing but very peculiar circumstances of imperious necessity occasioned the omission, and that was of very rare occurrence”.

“As a preacher Mr Smith was judicious, affectionate and experimental. He was not inordinately attached to systematic theology, but he cordially loved and faithfully preached the glorious and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel His sermons were usually composed with great care and diligence, and frequently enriched with striking observations which at once evinced his intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures and with the human heart”.

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The truth of these assessments, as well as some of the sympathy in his character, come through in reading the entries in his Church Book - and from his journal.

Elisha Smith's wife, Martha, had died, after a long illness, some two years before he did. She had borne him nine children, of whom only six - two boys and four girls- survived. His eldest surviving child, Crescens, eventually inherited his grandfather's silk mill, and became one of the leading silk throwsters in Blockley, as well as deacon of Blockley church for many years. His remains were buried in the graveyard attached to the Campden chapel, where a memorial stone can still be seen. One of Crescens' descendants married into the Belchers, another leading Blockley Baptist family, the senior member of which we shall meet in later chapters.

Elisha's younger son, James, at first took over his father's shop, and in later life came to own another silk mill. The shop passed successively to later generations of the same family.

Two at least of Elisha Smith's daughters made good marriages. Sarah married the Campden surgeon, a Dr Greening, and after some years in Campden moved away to Wallingford, apparently just after her father's death. Another daughter, Maria, met and married a young man called Edward Robinson, heir to a paper mill at Overbury which did business with the Smith's shop in Blockley. Among Maria's children were two sons, Elisha Smith Robinson and Arthur Robinson, whose famous Bristol paper-manufacturing firm of E. S. & A. Robinson which they founded, still preserves its name as part of the large conglomerate Dickinson-Robinson group.

The foundation stone of the present Baptist Chapel in Campden was laid by Elisha Smith's grandson, Elisha Smith Robinson: and over the years the Robinson family have been benefactors to various causes in both Campden and Blockley.

These are but few of the many ways in which the influence of Elisha Smith still manifests itself in these two places: none is clearer than in the remarkable growth of the Blockley church in the years after his death, led during much of its growth by members of Elisha's family. The continued, and today thriving, existence of Campden Baptist Church may be said to be due to him as much as to later Ministers. Despite the covering-up and more recent removal of the memorial tablet to his name in the present chapel, and the changes that have taken place on the site since his time, it can be said that without his ministry in this place, there would be no Baptist cause in Campden, with the unique contribution it has made, not only to its members, but also to the town, over the succeeding two centuries.

Blockley after Elisha Smith: New Beginnings

* * * * *

The death of Elisha Smith was clearly a serious blow to both the Campden and the Blockley sections of the Church. He had virtually founded the Baptist cause in the two places and had led it personally for many years with great energy and devotion. Moreover he seems to have left it without a strong formal leadership. Curiously there is no word in any of the entries in Elisha Smith's church book about the election of deacons or other church leaders. The church was very much his own child and he was genuinely the father of his people. This paternal relationship left the Campden members of the church particularly vulnerable; for relatively few Campden resident members at that time were potential leaders. Indeed, of the few male Campden residents who had been received as members by Elisha Smith, the majority were labourers. Only one, for instance, a Chandler, was a burgess of the borough. There were several Campden trustees, but none of them seems to have been a baptised member.

Blockley was different. It was capable of providing strong leadership through the younger members of the Smith family, the Newitts, farmers of Paxford and some other prosperous and better-educated members. This was to prove of great benefit to the progress of the Blockley church.

For some time after Mr Smith's death the Church in both Campden and Blockley continued by the device of receiving supplies, first, as the Campden book states, "till Christmas 1819 from neigh-

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bouring Pastors and afterwards by students from Chipping Norton". Chipping Norton was the location of one of the smaller Baptist academies, directed by Rev'd. W. Gray, the Minister there. He trained a number of successful Baptist Pastors, including James Mursell Phillippo, later a well-known missionary to Jamaica, social reformer and anti-slavery campaigner. Mr Phillippo, a native of Dereham, Norfolk, preached at Campden and Blockley early in 1820, and in his published biography is an extract from his journal for that year noting that he rode to Blockley from Chipping Norton on January 8th, a Saturday when "the weather was intensely cold". On the following (Sabbath) day he "proceeded from Blockley to Campden accompanied by Mr James Knight Smith" {*Elisha Smith's son*}. He continues:

How charming the prospects! I could not but be struck with the romantic scenery, which surpassed in beauty and grandeur all I had ever seen before. Preached from Isaiah liii 3 and 4. I trembled for fear of man, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that I proceeded beyond my most sanguine expectations. Bless the Lord O my Soul!

He returned to preach at Blockley that afternoon, and took tea with Mr and Mrs James Smith. It appears that the relationship between Campden and Blockley at this time (i.e. before the separation) may have been a rather unbalanced one, with the members from Blockley taking the lead in entertainment and introduction of preachers.

Blockley forms an Independent Church

Some time after this, however, and as a further blow to the church at Campden, the Blockley members made a momentous decision. They resolved to withdraw from it and form their own communion.

The following is an extract from the beginning of the first Blockley church book:

In the year of our Lord 1820 a variety of circumstances the details of which would answer no valuable purpose, inducing several members of the Baptist church at Campden residing at Blockley to wish for a separation from that church, in order to form a distinct communion, they intimated that wish to their friends at Campden, who concurred in the proposition and in the desire that the separation might take place in an amicable manner.

This decision was taken in spite of, or possibly because of, an invitation that seems already to have been made to a new pastor, Mr George Jayne, to lead the church at Campden. In September 1820 the Blockley members met together in the presence of Rev'd Thomas Coles of Bourton-on-the-Water, an old friend of Elisha Smith. They "gave each other the Right Hand of Fellowship" each thereafter signing a new Covenant.

Interestingly, this new Covenant followed the exact wording of the Covenant signed thirty-five years earlier by the five founding members of Elisha Smith's Campden church. It repeated the words "being willing ... to receive into our society all those who shall appear to have received the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts, whether baptized in infancy or upon profession of faith ..." Thereafter the description of the church and its minister in the deeds of the Blockley church always contains words such as "the Society of Protestant Dissenters at Blockley of the Baptist Denomination allowing of open communion of Pedobaptists, usually denominated Independents". The principle of open communion was thus reinforced in Blockley, (though not now in Campden, where the deeds continued to refer to the 'Protestant Dissenting Church at Campden') both by repetition in this first covenant, and legally in trust deeds and other documents. The need to continue the principles on which Elisha Smith had founded the church certainly seems to have been in their minds. Possibly, too, some leading dissenters in the village were not yet convinced of the rightness of, or willing to accept, adult baptism as the basis of their membership.

The eleven signatories to this first covenant included William Nichols, one of the earliest members admitted by Elisha Smith, Martin Ecocks and Richard Wadup, both members of the church for some years, Elisha's son Crescens and his wife Maria, and Elisha's daughters Charlotte and Elizabeth. These and the other assembled members then proceeded to choose Crescens Smith as their

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first deacon, and they all signed a letter to their friends at Campden confirming the formation of the separate church and wishing them and their Pastor well.

The separation of Blockley from Campden seems to have been genuinely cordial. James Hinton, in the 1821 paper quoted earlier, writes:

Blockley ... is now the station of a distinct church, in perfect friendship with that of Campden, of which till last year it formed a part. The good man [*Elisha Smith*]

died in his labour, and in the bosom of his friends, who cherish his memory and follow his steps; they have chosen an esteemed brother, Mr Wright, for their pastor and we trust that great grace will rest upon their union.

It was in fact in August 1820, a month before the formal signing of the covenant, that the Blockley members and congregation had invited Rev'd Daniel Wright, at that time minister at Madley in Herefordshire, to the pastorate of the nascent church. He took up the pastorate in the October and stayed for between 13 and 14 years, during which time this small church at Blockley increased remarkably in membership. Seventy-seven new people signed the covenant during his pastorate, so that (after a number of deaths, removals, withdrawals, etc) the Blockley church had between sixty and seventy members when he left. Congregations seem to have been much higher, judging by comments a few years later about overcrowded accommodation. Mr Wright departed in May 1834 for Darkhouses Chapel, Coseley in the Black Country, and subsequently became a well known figure in the Midland Association. As the *Memorial of the Midland Association* states, in its reference to the Darkhouses Chapel, 'Mr Wright was highly esteemed in his day as a humble, saintly man and a devoted Minister of Christ'.

Most of the new members added during this period seem to have been poor, relatively unprivileged men and women of whom little is known. Some, however, were more prosperous. Elisha Smith's son James and his wife were admitted as church members very soon after Mr Wright's ministry began. James was baptised with several other people the following January in the baptistry at Campden by the pastor, assisted by the Campden pastor, Mr Jayne. Mrs Smith was admitted as a 'predobaptist' as were a small proportion of all members for a long period thereafter.

No more Blockley baptisms seem to have been held at Campden after this, and the absence of a baptistry in the Blockley meetinghouse meant that few other baptisms took place in January. In May 1821, however, four people, including 68-year-old John Taylor, were 'baptized in the mill pond at the silk mill in the occupation of Mr Cresens Smith, formerly Spilsbury Silk Mill (*Ed: In 2007 Mill Close*) a convenient place having been fitted up for that purpose'. This pond, at the Silk Mill, seems to have been the place of baptism of many more people over the next half century.

The Church book notes that this 1821 ceremony was "probably the first time the Ordinance of Believers Baptism by immersion was ever administered at Blockley". This may be so, but Elisha Smith's baptism in 1799 of three Blockley people "at Mr Haines's pond" has already been noted, and as we have already concluded that that was probably in Blockley, too. (*Haines's Pond was still a mystery as to its location.*)(*Note by John Malin this has now been established as the pond in front of 'Mill Close', Blockley*

Among the other members received during the early years of Mr Wright's pastorate were Mr & Mrs Edward Banbury, purchasers of the Colebrook Silk Mill, who were admitted in 1822 and publicly baptised in September 1823, immediately after which Mr Banbury was elected as the church's second Deacon. At the same time as the Banburys, William Stanley was baptised and received as a member, of whom ten years later it is said that:

appearing to have respectable talent for the work of the Ministry ... was unanimously called to the work by the church, and having received an invitation to supply Peterchurch, one of the stations founded by the Trustees of Mr Goffs charity in Herefordshire, was publicly recognised as their Pastor.

Peterchurch is of course quite close to Mr Wright's old church of Madley. There are no details of

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events during Daniel Wright's ministry beyond the first two years. All we have from the later period are the signatures added to the covenant, and a parallel listing of members. Nevertheless, Daniel Wright seems to have served the church long and well, and was much respected. As Charles Belcher wrote a century later, "Mr Wright left the church in a flourishing healthy condition and a large Sunday School had been established.

After Daniel Wright's departure, Blockley was without a Minister for over a year. The church was obviously confident, and anxious to have as able a pastor as it was possible to secure. In March 1835 'our attention was directed to the Rev'd Andrew Gunton Fuller, then pastor of the church at West Drayton, Middx'. Mr Fuller bore a renowned name. He was the son, and later the editor and biographer, of the great Andrew Fuller, late of Kettering, the advocate of the same warm and moderate Calvinistic doctrine ('Fullerism') that had been espoused by his acquaintance and contemporary, Elisha Smith.

However, the process of inviting Mr A. G. Fuller was a long drawn out one. He was first asked in March to visit Blockley with a view to settlement, and he came later that month for two Sundays, before returning to Middlesex. "His service having met with a most favourable reception" he was asked to return, and this time he spent three Sundays in the village in May and June. "From the increasing acceptability with which these renewed labours were received", it was eventually decided to ask him to take the pastorate, and an "all but unanimous" invitation was made. He returned for the whole of August, preaching at the opening of a new chapel at Paxford: and then went back to West Drayton for his family. His ministry started officially on 4th October that year.

The "all but unanimous" invitation is interesting. It is made clear in a note that "the only reason the invitation ... was not entirely unanimous was that the senior Deacon [*Crescens Smith*] and one or two others felt a doubt whether the church and congregation could ... contribute sufficient means for the support of his large family".

Mr Fuller's short ministry was one of very considerable achievement. Within six months there had been a net increase in membership of thirty-one people and during the next year membership rose by another fifteen, to 109. The establishment of a bible class 'among the females working in the silk mills' is reported in 1837, from which it appears three had been added to the Sunday school. (It must be remembered that perhaps the majority of female workers in the silk mills at that time were children, of eight years and upwards).

Mr Fuller was clearly, too, an administrative reformer. Within a month of taking up the pastorate, the church decided that the practice of requiring members to make a public statement of their experience before being received into membership need no longer be mandatory, and the "testimony of some one of the brethren appointed to assist the pastor in private conversation with the parties should be admitted as satisfactory". Thenceforth, for almost the whole life of the church the practice continued of, usually, two members visiting each candidate and reporting back to the church on the conversation before a decision to admit into membership was made.

The same month, the new Pastor persuaded the church that: "The form of church covenant ... being considered as not adapted to the understanding and circumstances of the majority of new members and tending to exclude from the membership ... many valuable and devoted Christians", a new and much shorter form of covenant should be substituted for the original 1820 one. This covenant, simpler in intent if not in wording, declared the new members' trust in the merit and atoning blood of Christ, their sincere desire and determination to attend to the ordinances and the social meetings of the church, to promote love and growth in grace in themselves and fellow members and to recommend the gospel to those "who are ignorant and out of the way".

The Ebenezer Chapel

Perhaps the most significant event of all during Mr Fuller's ministry, however, is signalled by an entry dated **Thursday 14th July 1836:**

A new and commodious chapel, the erection of which had long been contemplated to ac-

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commodate the crowded congregation constantly assembled, was opened amidst an overwhelming attendance. Rev'd J. Leifchild preached in the morning ... the Rev'd T. Waters of Worcester in the afternoon ... and the Rev'd J. P Mursell of Leicester in the evening ... Services were likewise held at the old chapel, Mr Waters preaching there in the morning and Mr Blakeman of Evesham in the evening. Mr Price of Coate also preached in the afternoon to a large assembly in the Coneygree. The collections amounted to £1 02 and the proceedings of the Day were highly interesting and profitable.

The services the following Sunday are said to have been 'unusually interesting'. Six people were baptised that morning, and at the afternoon service 'when many friends from a distance united with us at the Lords Table' they and another new member were received into the church and took communion.

This, the Ebenezer chapel, *{Note by John Malin: From the Hebrew Eben-ezer, Stone of Help. Set up by Samuel between Mizpeh and Shen, in testimony of the divine assistance obtained against the Philistines (Source 1 Samuel vii. 12)}* much praised in later years for its architecture, remained as the place of worship of Blockley church throughout the rest of its life, until the chapel was finally closed in 1969. It was said a few years later to be able to seat 500 people, compared with the 200 of the old meetinghouse; and yet in those years it was frequently filled to capacity.

As a small footnote to this opening, the name of the Rev'd J. P. Mursell of Leicester is of some interest. Possibly twenty years before this James Mursell, a young candidate for the Baptist Ministry, had met and formed close bonds of friendship with a fellow student, James Philippo. To seal the friendship they decided to adopt each other's surname. James Mursell became James Philippo Mursell, now minister at Leicester and an outspoken advocate of Liberal causes. James Mursell Philippo on the other hand was admitted to Mr Gray's academy at Chipping Norton, and as we have seen was one of the students from there who came to Blockley and Campden to preach in 1820, some months before either church appointed a successor to Elisha Smith. He later became a missionary to Jamaica and a well-known anti-slavery campaigner.

Unfortunately, six months after these events Rev'd A. G. Fuller was forced to suspend his work because of what is described as a chronic inflammation of the throat. By April 1837 the incapacity had become so great that an offer was accepted from 'ministers in the neighbourhood of Evesham' to supply the pulpit in his place, and this was soon supplemented by offers from Thomas Coles, the Bourton-on-the-Water minister, and others in the Oxfordshire Association. Despite a long period in Jersey, Mr Fuller's health never fully recovered while Pastor of Blockley. The help of neighbouring ministers was maintained, but eventually, much to the church's regret, he announced his intention to resign, at the end of 1837. He did so, and his family left in March 1838 for London. He did not lose touch with Blockley and from time to time he was asked for advice, or appointed to represent his old church at meetings in the capital.

Some names that are well known locally appear among those admitted to the church during the three years of Andrew Gunton Fuller's pastorate. Crescens Smith's two daughters, Ann and Martha, were received after baptism. Several members of the Figgures family were received; and Edwin Smith, a Campden descendant of the Peyton's, who was later to take over his cousin Crescens Smith's Mill, became a member in October 1836. Some newly baptised members at this time were quite young. Martha Smith was only 14 when she was baptised. Ann Bennett was proposed for membership when she was only 13, though her baptism was delayed for some months as a result of allegations made concerning her, later said to be a complete misunderstanding. Youngest of all, Anna Herbert, for whom, 'an objection being made simply on the ground of her youth (12 years old)' a vote had to be taken. (She was accepted by 'a very large majority').

The church having such a rapidly growing membership, it might be expected there would be some difficulties. As Charles Belcher says in his notes on the church written in 1926:

...as the trail of the serpent appeared even in the Garden of Eden, so here also evil was at work. In only six months after the formation of the church one of the members, a woman, was excluded for "habits of intoxication"...

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This woman, excluded by Daniel Wright in the presence of the whole congregation, was in fact one of the original eleven signatories to the first Covenant. Only one other exclusion is mentioned in the incomplete record of that first pastorate. During A. G. Fuller's ministry there are however a number of interesting and varied cases. In October 1835 a Draycott man was reported to have 'on more than one occasion got into worldly company at unreasonable hours and indulged in free drink and disorderly conduct, the testimony of several members falsifying the statements he had made of facts'. He was excluded. A few months later a member who had left the district two years earlier 'and who having disgraced the cause of religion by immoral conduct is now gone to America' was similarly excluded.

The following year a meeting was called by public notice to consider the conduct of a member who had tried to join the Baptist church at Merthyr Tydfil, where he had gone to live.

...probably aware that his Christian character was not in the highest estimation at Blockley, he forged a letter of dismissal ... together with the signatures of the deacons, Messrs Smith and Banbury in which he represents the church at Blockley as speaking in laudatory terms of his conduct. On the back of the letter was an imitation of the Moreton postmark and figures. ... On this painful and revolting business being submitted to the church, their voice was unanimous that he be forthwith excluded.

And the next month another curious case was considered, that resulted in a member being suspended from the church 'for the time being'.

...it appeared that having undertaken a job of draining for a neighbouring farmer at a certain price and according to certain specifications, he took occasion of the absence of his master (and in conjunction with a fellow labourer) to depart from the prescribed plan of doing it whereby he could perform the work in less time and the land in the estimation of his employer sustained considerable injury. It appeared also that during the whole time that this was going on it was studiously concealed from his master who on all occasions of his visiting them found them busily employed in doing it according to agreement.

It is not clear how long the suspension lasted, or what the opinion of the church was of the farmer who reported him. The unfortunate workman seems however, to have been received back at some time, and died twenty years later as a full member of the church.

Mr Fuller's pastorate was undoubtedly a time of achievement, despite its setbacks. He was in Blockley at a time when the final restrictions on the civil activities of Dissenters had been lifted with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and Baptists were beginning to take a leading part in wider issues. So, even during his indisposition, Mr Fuller was able to go as the delegate of the church to a conference in London 'to consider the most appropriate means for the abolition of the church rate'. The Church Rate Abolition Society was the first of a number of such societies subscribed to by successive pastors during the next forty years or so; and it was to London meetings of the Anti-State Church Society (the predecessor of the Liberation Society) that Mr Fuller later represented Blockley. In 1844, for instance, a church meeting resolved that the connection between church and state was unjust, impolitic and unscriptural. It approved the Anti-State church conference then to be held in London and appointed the then Pastor, Rev'd A.M. Stalker, and Mr Fuller, as the Blockley delegates.

Mr Fuller left the church in 1838 with a membership roll of over a hundred and regular congregations of three or four times that number. There was a thriving Sunday school, and village stations were already established in the hamlets of Draycott and Paxford. The new Ebenezer chapel was to be a great asset to the church and the village, although the debt it had created for the church was to remain a burden for some years to come. Most of all, perhaps, and despite the problems he faced, Mr Fuller left in Blockley the same spirit that had characterised his great predecessor, Elisha Smith. This and the strength of its lay leadership meant that the church was ready to go forward to even greater strength in the following decades.

The Blockley Church at its Peak

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1838 to 1848

* * * * *

Blockley finally lost its much-respected pastor, Rev'd A. G. Fuller, in March 1838. The church had suffered a period of anxiety about finding a new Minister, but this was soon to end. A few days after Mr Fuller actually left the village with his family, Rev'd Thomas Smith came from Clonmel in Ireland, and at a church meeting in the middle of April 1838 it was resolved unanimously that he should be invited to take pastoral charge, 'and that Aston Magna in the parish of Blockley be included in his ministerial labours'. Mr Smith replied by letter, accepting the invitation 'subject to certain suggestions *1st* in reference to pecuniary matters and *2nd* the nature of his engagements as it regards Aston Magna'.

These points seem to have caused no difficulty, and Mr Smith began his ministry at the beginning of June, his recognition service being held to coincide with the second anniversary of the opening of the Ebenezer chapel in July. Rev'd Thomas Coles led the recognition service, and other ministers taking part that day included Rev'd Joseph Price of Alcester, Rev'd Dr W.H. Marsh, president of Stepney College and Mr Smith's former tutor, Rev'd Richard Payne of Coate and Rev'd Benjamin Godwin of Oxford. Fourteen other ministers present are listed by Mr Smith in his detailed account of the day. They included Rev'd E. Stephens and Rev'd W. Cherry of Campden, and the Independent minister of Broadway. £23 was collected that day 'to assist in liquidating the debt remaining on the erection of the chapel'.

Of some minor interest are the circumstances of the reception into membership of Mr and Mrs Smith. Both Mr Smith and his wife *{Note by John Malin: née Charlotte Taylor}* had been members of James Hinton's church at New Road, Oxford, of which they had retained their membership. During their absence of five or six years, however, it appears that Rev'd Hinton and most of his congregation had joined the 'Irvingites': the Catholic and Apostolic Church that followed the teaching of the expelled Church of Scotland Minister, Edward Irving. His church having thus been abandoned, the Smiths could not produce letters of dismissal, and were admitted to membership by special resolution.

This was a time of expansion in Blockley. The letter to the Oxford Association that year says 'Our chapel... .. is regularly filled each Lords Day with attentive hearers. Our station in a neighbouring hamlet is also well attended ... truly we can say the fields are white already to harvest. The Sabbath School also affords great encouragement, the number of children is continually increasing and that two or three of their number are at the present time the subjects of religious impression is apparent'.

A little later the membership is put at 120, the *average* number of hearers at 400, with 100 children in Blockley Sunday school and a further 45 at Draycott. Other figures the next year give 350 hearers at Blockley and a further 70 at Aston Magna. At the beginning of 1840 the members at Draycott asked for a regular evening service to be held there to supplement prayer meetings. This was agreed, the pastor sanctioning Blockley members to attend Draycott for the purpose.

The Pastor's control over who was available to help in neighbouring villages is clear on several occasions. At the end of 1838 for instance, the Minister complained of an unauthorised prayer meeting that had been started in his absence 'at the house of Jennings' at Bourton-on-the-Hill during the time of Blockley evening services. He however agreed that it should be continued, and a sermon occasionally preached, but that no more members than necessary should absent themselves from the Blockley service.

The Church began to develop in directions other than strength of numbers. One feature of this pastorate for instance was that on two successive New Years Days special meetings were held for humiliation and prayer, starting at 6.0 am. A further such meeting was held early in 1840 'in pursuance of the proposal of the churches throughout America and Britain, to implore the conversion of the world'.

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Blockley was also the venue of a number of wider meetings. In July 1838 an auxiliary of the Baptist Missionary Society was established, following a meeting attended by a deputation from headquarters and addressed by among others Rev'd E. Carey of London, J. E. Giles of Leeds and a missionary from the Bahamas, as well as by the Blockley Pastor and ministers of Campden, Stratford-upon-Avon, and Evesham. A similar meeting at which some of the same visitors spoke, was held the following year and another in 1840 at which Rev'd Thomas Coles was in the chair. An active branch of the Bible Society was established there too, attached to the Evesham auxiliary, which held annual meetings in Blockley in August over the same period.

There were losses, too. Crescens Smith, founder of the separate Blockley church, and deacon since its formation, had been seriously ill for nearly twelve months when he died in July 1838, shortly after Thomas Smith's recognition service. His body was buried in the graveyard at the Campden chapel, where his father had been buried twenty years earlier. His death was 'improved' a few days later at Blockley by Rev Thomas Coles 'to a very numerous and deeply affected audience'. During his long illness his brother James Smith had been appointed Deacon to relieve the burden on Edward Banbury.

In his time, Rev'd. Thomas Smith, rather less successfully than his predecessor, tried to introduce some administrative reforms. Towards the end of 1839 he made a proposal that tickets be supplied to all members, to be placed in the plate at Communion to certify attendance. On an objection being made 'on the ground of its inquisitorial character' the Pastor withdrew the proposal. At the same time he proposed that he be allowed to appoint what he called 'Superintendents of districts' to help him watch over the spiritual interests of the church and congregation and the neighbourhood, and generally act as pastoral visitors. This he also withdrew after an objection that it was unnecessary, and on the grounds that it required perfect unanimity.

About four months after this setback, Mr Smith gave six months' notice of his intention to resign the pastorate. He seems to have reached his decision as a consequence of some disappointment with the spirit then present in the church. In contrast to the statements made two years earlier, hints of anxiety appear in the church's letter to the Oxfordshire Association, meeting that year in Blockley. In the letter, approved by the church on June 5th 1840, he almost pleads for the representatives of the churches:

to rebuke and correct our coldness and languor. We feel we shall be put to shame before the churches when we tell them of the smallness of our increase, the coldness of our love and the feebleness of our testimony.

He continues elsewhere:

... our state for the last ten months has been such as to call for deep humiliation and great searching of heart ... we fear that formality and heartlessness have characterised our worship - that our love has grown cold, that our prayers have been hindered - and that God has withdrawn his Holy spirit from us. The attendance on our public worship has become less punctual, conscientious and constant, prayer meetings are destitute of the life and power of prayer and the ministry of the word is unattended with any signal blessing. No cases of conversion have been known and the general indifference to religion has been met and counteracted by no adequate devotedness and zeal on the part of the church.

The honesty of this outburst is as striking as its pessimism. How far it genuinely reflects the state of spiritual relations in the church at this time, and what effect it had on either the Blockley members, or the ministers and messengers of the visiting churches is unclear. Certainly no increase in membership was reported that year, and the following year membership fell slightly. Nevertheless, at 120, church membership remained at the highest point it had yet attained in Blockley, and in the whole of the Oxfordshire Association it was exceeded only by the membership of Oxford itself.

Mr Smith left at the end of September 1840 after a pastorate of less than two and a half years, leaving in his church book a departing blessing and commendation to the church.

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And to finish this account of his ministry with yet another footnote, Charles Belcher, in his much later notes on the history of the church, comments as follows:

... it is a remarkable fact that at the present time, February 1926, there is living in Blockley, a Miss Harmer Smith, who worships with the 'Brethren' who is a *niece* of that Mr Smith. ... She is now about 60 years of age, was one of the youngest of a family of 14, and her mother, a Miss Smith, and was much younger than the Rev'd Thomas Smith.

The church continued to meet without a Pastor for some five months after the departure of Mr Smith, until in the New Year Rev'd A. M. Stalker came on a probationary visit. In the February of that year, 1841, it was unanimously resolved that he be invited to take the pastorate 'and that Mr Stalker's labours shall not include preaching at Aston'. Mr Stalker was a Scotsman and had been at Aberdeen before entering the Blockley pastorate, which he accepted on certain conditions (including a request that an annual collection be taken up for Bradford College) and took up his duties at the end of March. His recognition service, like that of his predecessor, coincided with the anniversary of the chapel. Among fifteen ministers reported to have taken part in the service were Rev'd John Aldrey of London, Rev'd J. Edwards of Stratford-on-Avon, Professor A.C. Worth of Horton College (Mr Stalker's tutor), and Rev'd B. Godwin of Oxford, Rev'd Jayne of Roade, who had been Pastor at Campden some twenty years before, and Rev'd Davies, the current Pastor of Campden.

During Mr Stalker's time the debt on the new chapel was still of some concern and in 1841 a penny a week fund was decided on to help reduce it, and collections were arranged at other places. Mr Stalker also instituted some minor changes. After he had preached a series of sermons on the subject, the church resolved to introduce weekly observance of the Lords Supper, and the Pastor reinforced the right of female members to vote at church meetings. Again, towards the end of his ministry the church adopted a rule he had suggested that any member absent from the Lords Table for 13 weeks without reason should be excluded from membership.

The arrangements over the village mission chapels were regularised soon after Mr Stalker's arrival. An arrangement was entered into, and remained for some years, that the pulpit at Aston Magna would be filled on alternate Sundays by the Independent Minister at Moreton-in-Marsh, while lay people from Blockley would supply on the other weeks. Despite encouragement from the Pastor, who, for instance, expressed a hope that Blockley brethren would go to Aston Magna to support them, this arrangement became a little difficult. By the beginning of 1842 Aston Magna was causing concern to the Blockley church, and by the end of that year a crisis seems to have arisen, with mutual dissatisfaction being expressed between Blockley church and a leading member at Aston Magna. The services at Aston Magna seem to have been discontinued some time early in 1843, though they were begun again for a period in mid 1845.

A monthly evening service at Draycott was also instituted during the winter of 1841/2 and continued thereafter. Paxford at that time seems to have been looked after by Campden church.

In later years, after leaving Blockley, Mr Stalker published a number of papers, particularly on the subject of baptism. His only known publication while at Blockley however is a letter to the Oxford Association meeting at Middleton Cheney in 1846 on *The Financial Law of the Church as Taught in the New Testament*. In the course of this he gives an anecdote:

A Pastor, prior to setting out to collect for the debt on the chapel, called the members together, stated why he was to be absent and added that before he started out he was anxious to ascertain whether the members themselves could not contribute more. Brother --- can you not?

No, Sir, I can give no more. You really cannot?

Indeed, Sir, more I cannot afford.

Can you in your conscience say you have given all you can afford? Why, if it comes to *conscience* I don't know that I have.

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And so on, with another brother and another until the sum was raised and the Pastor saved a journey both irksome and unpopular.

One might wonder whether this may have been inspired by his struggles over the finance of the new church building in Blockley.

Membership of the church during Mr Stalker's pastorate seems to have fluctuated around the figure of 120. It reached 123 in 1845 but had fallen back to 112 by 1848. The number of children being taught in the Sunday School rose from 200 soon after he arrived, to 255 in 1845, again falling back slightly in later years.

One of the reasons for the fall in the number of members seems to have been a fairly large number of exclusions of members for bad conduct during this time. The cases illustrate the severe discipline imposed on members by the church at that time.

As early as September 1840 a young woman, following reports unfavourable to her moral character, was found guilty of gross immorality and excluded from the fellowship. The same month a young man who had been accepted as a member only the previous year was found to have 'conducted himself in a manner unbecoming to his profession' and his acceptance as a member was rescinded. Some months later a man accused of drunkenness appeared before the church, acknowledged his guilt, expressed deep sorrow and received a solemn censure from the pastor, being thereupon restored to the communion. At about the same time Eliza Blackford was excluded from the church for highly sinful conduct and apparent determination to persist in it. Three months after this two men were found guilty of intoxication. One of them, 'apparently the subject of deep penitence', appeared before the meeting, confessed, expressed deep sorrow and was restored after receiving censure. He was however excluded six months later, having again been found guilty of drunkenness. His companion failed to appear and was excluded on the first occasion. And at the very end of that same year (1841) a man whose case had been under consideration for about eighteen months was excluded for irregularity of attendance on the means of grace, and indulgence in profane language.

In 1842 two women were reported to be walking disorderly. After investigation that was 'deemed satisfactory', one of them appeared before the meeting and acknowledged her sinfulness. She was however again found guilty of gross immorality about seven months later and excluded. The other woman repeatedly declined to appear and was excluded from the start. The following month another woman who had absented herself was accused of associating with improper company and being guilty of falsehood. After investigation she appeared before the meeting, received censure from the pastor and then received the right hand of fellowship. At the end of that year a third woman was found guilty of gross immorality and excluded from the fellowship.

Further cases are reported in 1846. A woman from Draycott was excluded for disorderly conduct, keeping improper company and an improper house. A few days later a man was excluded for an incident of intoxication 'and improper behaviour thereupon to his wife'. In the middle of the same year a woman who had 'by immorality brought disgrace on her profession' was excluded; and towards the end of the year a woman who had for some months absented herself from the means of grace was excluded after being visited, and the meeting criticised her treatment of the Pastor, presumably during his visit to her.

Early the following year a number of similar exclusions took place, and one notable case concerned the niece of James Smith (a granddaughter of Elisha Smith) who had been employed by him as a Shop Woman. She was accused of repeated intoxication and asked if she wished to confront her accusers. She wrote from a distance replying that she was not willing and so stood condemned. She was excluded, also being found guilty of lying and dishonesty in her uncle's service, and of lewdness. Deep Christian sympathy was expressed on this occasion to Mr and Mrs Smith 'under the severe trials to which their niece's conduct had subjected them'.

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It has been suggested elsewhere that the expansion of the Silk Trade, and the employment in the silk factories of large numbers of single women, many of them strangers to the district, had led to a considerable amount of sexual immorality in the village. Indeed, the contemporary census returns may give some credence to this. It may be that some of the above cases are a reflection of this situation. At this distance in time the frequency of such cases seems much more typical of working class towns than of small country villages such as Blockley had been up to the end of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless the willingness of people to come voluntarily in front of the church to face the accusations shows the hold the teachings of the church had on so many. Several were re-admitted in later years.

Mr Stalker stayed at Blockley for seven and a half years. In December 1843 he had reported to the church meeting that he had twice received an invitation from a church in Preston to visit them with a view. The church declared unanimously that they wished him to continue, and wrote to Preston 1838 to 1848 expressing censure and regret at their conduct in 'seeking to deprive a sister church of its Pastor'. Four and a half years later, in June 1848, Blockley entertained the Oxford Association, and Mr Stalker was elected Moderator of the Association that year, Three months later however Mr Stalker wrote to the Church while away in Edinburgh saying that he was considering a unanimous invitation to the pastorate of South Parade Church, Leeds, and on his return he confirmed his intention to resign. The church expressed regret and thanks for his past services and an affectionate interest in his future welfare. He preached his final sermon on 8th October 1848 to "an overflowing and attentive and affectionate congregation", ending: "And now brethren, in your presence and in the presence of the head of the Church I lay down with much affection towards you and with deep humiliation in the sight of Immaculate Purity, the pastorate of this church", He and his family left Blockley on 25th October 1848, his last entry in the church book reading: "Brethren, my parting advice to you is, have fervent love among yourselves".

The Mid-Nineteenth Century in Blockley

Continued Progress

* * * * *

After Mr Stalker's resignation the church in Blockley had some difficulty in finding a successor. Many ministers, both local and from a distance, supplied the pulpit over a period of twelve months, and two invitations were issued, both ministers however declining. Then in September 1849 Rev'd James Smith, an Independent minister who had resigned his Glasgow church and was living in Blockley, agreed to supply the pulpit regularly, which he did for some four months, and also gave constant advice to the Church. Curiously he was the third Minister named Smith to have been connected with Blockley. He seems to have been a distant relation of the large family of descendants of Rev'd Elisha Smith.

Among those who visited Blockley 'with a view' was Rev'd Edmund Hull, who had served for 14 years at Watford. He came for two Sundays in October 1849, after which it was unanimously agreed to invite him to take charge of Blockley. However, after some time for thought, he decided that 'peculiar domestic circumstances' prevented him from accepting. Early the following year, however, Mr Smith counselled the church that it was desirable for a church unsettled for so long to secure a Minister of known character and experience, and that if such an argument were put to Mr Hull he might now be induced to accept an invitation. It was agreed that Mr Hull's acceptance would give unanimous satisfaction, and after private communications to him he was induced to give the matter further consideration. Finally at the end of January, after prayer and thought, Mr Hull communicated his decision to accept the invitation - a decision received with evident satisfaction and pleasure.

Rev'd James Smith was thus able to give up his burden of supplying the pulpit. As Mr Charles Belcher wrote:

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... leaving in January 1850, he preached a farewell sermon from the text: "I thank my God I baptized none of you". He was a Congregationalist!

Rev'd. Edmund Hull preached his first sermon in February 1850, though for a few months he supervised the church from a distance, travelling as often as possible from Birmingham. He moved to Blockley and 'entered fully upon his duties' in April.

Soon after Mr Hull's arrival some significant decisions were taken that have implications for the history of Blockley in general. Firstly, it was unanimously resolved to sell Elisha Smith's old chapel in Bell Bank to the Primitive Methodists, who had recently become established in the village. Thus the church was parted from one of its roots, a room that still today, though now as a second Village Hall, holds the affection of Blockley people.

The money raised from the sale was used to enlarge the vestry, and at the same time a new schoolroom was provided behind the church. This schoolroom was to house both the Sunday School and a British School that had recently been established by the silk mill owners to educate their child workers. At this time Government grants were available to employers to establish schools for the education of their juvenile employees, and the Silk Throwsters being by the great majority Non-conformist, their decision to finance a British School seemed appropriate. The British School had first met in 1845 in the old Bell Bank Meeting House, but now a new school building, whose facade can still be seen in Chapel Lane, was erected at the back of the Ebenezer Chapel. The British School remained in operation until some time after the passing of the 1870 Education Act, after which it became impossible to maintain it in competition with the Board School established by the Church of England in the village. However, for its first twenty or twenty-five years the British School seems to have been very successful. At a later stage this new school building was supplemented by another, standing in its own grounds opposite Elisha Smith's old chapel in Bell Bank. It was there that the girls and infants met, while the senior boys occupied the school in Chapel Lane.

The cost of the Chapel Lane schoolroom seems to have been met by the Silk Throwsters. The newly enlarged vestry cost £230, of which £50 came from a fund in the possession of the silk throwsters, £100 from the sale of the old chapel and the rest raised by voluntary contributions. All the money had been raised by the time the whole building was completed.

Responsibility for the building of the new Chapel Lane School was given to the well-known Blockley tradesman, Richard Boswell Belcher, who had arrived there in 1847. His autobiography refers to it in the following words about the Church:

"There was a Baptist Church with an able Minister, Rev'd. E. Hull. My dear wife had been baptized many years before and united with it as a member. I had never been baptized, but took an interest in all that concerned the cause. I was made chairman of the Committee for renovating the Chapel. Soon after I was called upon to find a site for a New School room. We could not procure any ground and the project seemed doomed. All at once I bethought myself of the piece of ground behind the chapel and started to measure it. It was 40 feet by 30 inside the walls beside an offset for steps, etc. I and Mr Snell the School Master were the architects, and the result was a fine room with infant's room and Vestry beneath. It was built quickly and paid for on the opening day. There was a large day school as well as Sunday school, well accommodated. On the first Sunday in 1853 I was baptized with four others and became a member of the church. I took an interest chiefly in the secular affairs, financial etc., etc".

Mr Belcher, who was to become one of Blockley's leading residents and a doughty campaigner in the later years of the century, was later appointed Sunday School Superintendent, and later still a Deacon of the church, an office he held almost until his death in 1901. The Church book notes his baptism with three others, and his entry into membership in January 1853.

Membership, which had declined somewhat in the vacant period after Mr Stalker had left, now once again began to increase. As well as some people accepted into membership as predobaptists, and a number of others coming into Blockley from other parts of the country, seven people were

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baptised in July, six in September, four in April 1851 and four more in October. In 1853 152 members were reported, together with 251 Sunday School scholars.

Mr Hull had at least four sons, the two eldest of whom trained as Baptist Ministers. His two youngest were baptised in October 1851 and received as members on November 2nd. A few months after their arrival in Blockley the church at his father's request agreed that his second son, T. Henry Hull should preach in the church, and that they would 'form an opinion of his gifts'. As a consequence of his preaching the church recommended him to consecrate himself to the work of the ministry. He went to Stepney College, London, but died in 1854 when he was only twenty years old. He was buried in the graveyard of the Ebenezer chapel. Both his father and his elder brother published memoirs of his life. His elder brother, Luscombe, became Minister at Kings Lynn, though he too, died when he was only 35. A book of sermons by him was later published.

During this pastorate the number of deacons was increased from two to five. In February 1852, Mr James Smith because of his age and infirmity had requested that more deacons be appointed to help him and Mr Nichols. Mr Banbury, who had earlier given up as Deacon, was asked to resume, and Messrs Edwin Smith and John Reynolds were asked to accept the office, also.

Another change that took place soon after Mr Hull's arrival, on the proposal of Mr Francis Nichols, was to discontinue the weekly Communion Services instituted by Mr Stalker and to substitute a communion on the first Sunday of every month.

In 1855, after five years of ministry in Blockley and for a reason, which has not been recorded, Rev'd Hull expressed his desire to resign, and he left Blockley in July that year. After some visits by other Pastors, Rev'd Joseph Wassall from Basford, Nottinghamshire, was invited in September to come to Blockley. He supplied the pulpit for two Sundays, and, after a unanimous invitation, accepted the pastorate, which he took up early in 1856. Charles Belcher writes of him:

Mr Wassall was a powerful preacher and a good organiser. The present writer can well remember his appearance in the high pulpit, with his florid complexion, red hair and enthusiastic demeanour. It was not unusual to have the body of the chapel and gallery crowded with listeners, and forms occupied in both aisles.

Mr Wassall stayed in Blockley for eight years, until May 1864, when he sailed for Boston, USA. They were eight fairly uneventful years, but as Charles Belcher writes: 'During Mr Wassall's ministry the church seems to have reached the high water mark of its prosperity and blessing'. Membership grew to 155 in 1859, with 310 children in the Sunday School. The main events reported during his ministry were the institution of monthly prayer meetings, and of weekly collections "as the most scriptural principle and most efficient way of contributing to the support of the church's cause". Any surplus accruing from these collections was to be put towards such alterations as were decided on to increase the accommodation in the chapel.

Some glimpses of the life of the chapel in those days can be gleaned from contemporary records. There does not seem to have been a harmonium at that time, and, as Charles Belcher has written:

"It was customary for Mr Banbury to rise in his pew and give out the hymns verse by verse as they were sung. If he were absent, his brother-in-law, Mr Edwin Smith, who sat in the corresponding square pew on the opposite side of the chapel, performed the same office. They also made the announcements, which usually included: Prayer Meeting on Monday evening, and Service, with address by the Pastor, on the Thursday evening, and in the winter months cottage prayer meetings..."

In 1857, presumably because of Mr Banbury's age, Mr Edwin Smith was appointed, "with the aid of a select number of scholars" to lead the singing from the table pew.

In a most amusing talk at the centenary of the chapel in 1936 Charles Belcher expanded these comments, and gave a sketch of the congregation at the time. Unfortunately the manuscript of that

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talk is among papers that have disappeared from the church archives.

During Mr Wassall's ministry the death was recorded of Mr and Mrs James Smith, the senior Deacon and his wife, and of Mrs Banbury, wife of another long-serving Deacon.

Mr Wassall's departure was followed by a few months of supply by students and visiting pastors, during which the church is said to have declined and faced difficulties. However, the name of Rev'd E. J. Middleditch was then brought to the attention of the church. Rev'd Middleditch was Secretary of the Baptist Irish Society, and had formerly been a minister at Frome. He is said to have wished to give up his Irish post and take on a quiet village pastorate. He was invited to preach, and in October 1864 a unanimous invitation was given to him, to which he replied the following month, expressing gratification at the invitation, pointing out that this acceptance meant a pecuniary sacrifice, but saying he was assured that the church would make the sacrifice as small as it could.

Thus began the ministry of one of the best-loved ministers that Blockley church ever had. He came at a difficult time, as the Silk Industry was beginning its long decline and many people were leaving the village. Support for the church was thus in danger of slipping away. The letters to the Oxford Association in 1866, 1867 and 1868 all speak of the depression in trade having affected the church and congregation, although the number of new members received helped to compensate for the drop in population. From this time on the church retained a number of non-resident members, with whom it kept in touch, although they were living in other parts of the country, and in a few cases outside the country. So in 1868 the membership is reported as being 108 resident members and 20 non-residents. From this time on the membership list was carefully gone through each year, non-residents written to, and the attendance of resident members checked.

There were obviously some continuing problems at this time. As one example, early in 1867 the total number of Deacons was brought up to seven. Within two years, however, two of the deacons had resigned, and later both expressed their wish to resign as church members. While one of them was persuaded to take up his place again, the other was eventually excluded from membership, on the grounds of his having been intoxicated. The dissension in the membership is referred to in several of the letters to the Association.

The depression continued to affect the resources of the church, to the extent that in 1868 the deacons had to reduce the stipend of the Minister to £100 a year, a blow he could hardly afford. Other concerns of the church were the problems in the church at Campden, referred to in later chapters, to which Blockley, and Mr Middleditch in particular, gave great support: and the British School, which, though said to have been running efficiently, was some burden on church.

Support for the Liberation Society is first mentioned in 1868:

“because the authority of the church and the cause of spiritual religion require the church to be untarnished by worldly pomp, wealth and power. The present conflict between the State churches and voluntary Christian principles demands the liberation of religion from State patronage and control”,

Attention was paid during this period to the musical life of the church. In 1867 Rev'd J. J. Waite visited the church for a week and gave three lectures on psalmody. This was followed by the purchase of “Psalms and Hymns” at the beginning of 1868, which is said to have been received with pleasure. Later that same year Mr Joseph Cresens Reynolds of Paxford offered a harmonium to the chapel: an offer that was accepted, and a committee was formed to put the matter into effect. This move seems however to have occasioned some disagreement, and Mr G. C. Smith, a Deacon who had for some time been conducting the psalmody, thereupon resigned and declined to take any further part in it.

Mr Smith was one of the two who resigned from the deaconate a few months later, to the recorded regret of the rest of the church, though the two men agreed thereupon to set up and run an adult bible class. The letter to the Oxford Association in 1869 says:

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We have cause for humiliation and deep regret that we are straitened in ourselves. With more harmony and devotedness this report would have been different. We have not suffered from the hostility of foes without. Our weakness has arisen from our spiritual state. We pray to God to bring us all into greater uniformity with his holy will.

In 1871, after some six and a half years of this much loved pastorate, the following entries were made in the Church Book:

On Sunday February 12th our beloved Pastor, Rev'd C. J. Middleditch, preached his last sermon. He had caught a severe cold on the previous day going to see our brother Thomas Rolls. He concluded the evening sermon, which was from the words "Christ our Refuge" in much pain, took to his bed on getting home and never rose from it again. He died on Friday March 3rd after a painful illness of three weeks. From the first he regarded his illness as fatal and spoke frequently of his approaching end, only desiring to live for the good of his church and for the orphan children (a nephew and niece) whom he had adopted.

Few friends could be allowed to see him until his last day on earth when he wished to take leave of all the members of his church. Many availed themselves of this privilege and sadly took the last farewell of their dying friend. His spirit took flight to the unseen world about eight o'clock in the evening.

The Funeral took place on Tuesday March 7th amid every expression of sorrow and respect. Ministers and friends from the neighbouring churches came to follow the Funeral Procession. The members of this church and congregation with few exceptions attended at the Funeral or in the Chapel, which was filled. The Service was conducted by Rev'd E. MacMichael of Bourton-on-the-Water, Rev'd L. M. Stephens, Naunton; Rev'd W. R. Irvine, Campden. The coffin was carried by eight of the members, the Pall was borne by the five Deacons and Mr George Cresens Smith. Such a Funeral was not remembered in Blockley.

On the following Sunday the Funeral Sermon was preached by Rev'd E. MacMichael from Hebrews 13-17 to a very large and attentive congregation most of whom were in mourning. In the evening a sermon by Rev'd W.R. Irvine "mark the perfect man, behold the upright man: the end of that man is peace". Mr Middleditch occupied a very high place in the esteem and respect of all who knew him, and he will be long remembered for his genial kindness, devotion to his duties, and readiness to help and counsel all who sought him. The neighbouring ministers found him to be a steadfast friend and wise counsellor. ... He was 63 years of age.

A letter of sympathy was later addressed to Mrs Middleditch. It contains the following passage: We cannot refrain from expressing to you the high esteem with which we regard our late Pastor, in all respects as Christian Pastor, kindly friend, courteous gentleman, faithful counsellor, judicious adviser. We desire to bear our united and individual testimony. assuring you of a continued interest in our prayers and best wishes that you may be spared many years to watch over the dear children committed to your care, that you may have the inestimable blessing of witnessing them following in the steps of the departed.

Thomas Rolls, a local surgeon, whom Mr Middleditch was visiting when he caught his illness, died a few days after him.

In June that year, Blockley's letter to the Oxford Association meeting at Coate, includes the passage:

.... The chief event referred to will be understood to be the death of our loved and respected pastor, C. J. Middleditch, a man whom to know was to esteem and whom to lose was loss indeed. We feel assured of your sympathy because the loss is not ours only. His absence in this the first meeting (since his departure) of the associated Churches must be felt by all. We miss the genial face, the kindly greeting, the hearty welcome, the wise advice, the generous co-operation, the business tact, the enlarged benevolence, and the Christian sympathy that ever characterised our departed friend.

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Here we wish to record our testimony that the state of spiritual deadness into which we were fallen was not the result of his ministrations among us, we hereby testify that always with earnestness and tears he ever besought men to repent and believe the gospel and used his best efforts to arouse the members of the church to a sense of their responsibility. The causes had been in operation for years and their removal was beyond the reach of man. During the last few months of his ministry we could perceive an unusual earnestness and power, and some few differences that had arisen having to a great extent been healed up we were looking forward with hope to a better state of things; but He who rules all things thought otherwise and differently ordained. After a short illness during greater part of which no apprehensions of a fatal termination was entertained, he was called away to his eternal rest, leaving us disconsolate but not hopeless, cast down but not destroyed. The earthly guide has been taken away but is only to fix our hopes and attention more surely on Him whose words are spirit and life. Our sincere desire, hope and prayer is that throughout the entire churches and in every individual member there may be awakened an earnest prayerful spirit, that so, beyond the immediate sphere of our late pastor's influence a spirit may be kindled that shall cause us all to rejoice, redound to the glory of God and the increase of the Redeemer's Kingdom in our midst.

The sudden death of this much loved pastor obviously shocked the whole church. Not only had he led the Blockley church during a period of difficulty, but also he had been a great influence in the Oxford Association, of which he had been secretary. His particular influence on the Campden church will be seen in a later chapter, As for Blockley, it is evident that, despite its growth, size and leadership potential, there had been difficulties and divisions ever since the time of Rev'd Thomas Smith over thirty years earlier. The admission of this in the 1871 letter may have signalled a resolution that the church would try to heal these divisions. How successful they were in this may appear later. Campden from 1820 to 1870.

CAMPDEN FROM 1820 TO 1870

A Period of Increasing Difficulty

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During the period we have been dealing with in the last three chapters, Campden unfortunately tells a very different story from Blockley. As we have seen, with Elisha Smith's death the churches in Campden and Blockley came to the end of an era. For one thing the close formal association of the congregations in Blockley and Campden in the one church was soon severed. For another Campden lost much of the spiritual guidance and leadership given it by Blockley laymen during Elisha Smith's ministry, and was from time to time forced back on its own rather inadequate resources of faith, talent, money and commitment. The two churches progressed over the next fifty years in rather contrasting ways.

With the departure of some leading Blockley figures like the Smiths the Campden church lost many of its potential leaders. Fortunately, the Newitt's and other Paxford members seem to have stayed with the Campden church for another thirty years after Elisha Smith's death. William Newitt was a deacon until the 1830's, and Richard Keen and Richard Reynolds of Paxford were elders of the church during the later thirties and forties, the Reynolds family remaining associated with the church right up to the beginning of the present century.

After the death of Elisha Smith, the church in both Campden and Blockley relied for its preachers on supplies "till Christmas 1819 by neighbouring pastors, and afterwards by students from Chip-ping Norton". There is some implication that the Church in Campden suffered a decline in support and inspiration during the time without a pastor. It is not quite clear how long this period was. The Campden Church book, apparently written up some years after the event, states that in 1821 Rev'd George Jayne came from Bristol as a supply. "Mr Jayne preached the same doctrines as Campden was used to". He was invited back and was asked to stay for half a year, after which he was invited to become Pastor. According to this source he was inducted on October 25th 1821. Some of these

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dates at least, however, seem to be wrong, probably by a whole year; for in the much more detailed entries in the Blockley church book, Mr Jayne is referred to on January 24th 1821 as already being 'the Pastor of the church at Campden'. He attended the 1821 Oxfordshire Association meetings, and in the letter to the Association presented in the middle of the same year Rev'd James Hinton has the following to say of Campden.

...if it has not been indulged with any peculiar manifestations of the divine presence, some rays at least of the Sun of Righteousness, breaking through the clouds of prejudice and apathy, have rested on the church with salutary influence. ... the spirit of hearing is good, both in the town and the neighbouring villages; and the newly ordained pastor, Mr Jayne, appears to be greatly encouraged in his present prospects. A Sunday school of sixty children has been recently established, and while the seed is thus diligently and plenteously sown, may God give an abundant increase!

It seems more likely, then, that Mr Jayne came to Campden in 1820 rather than 1821. Although the separation of the Blockley members from the church coincided with his coming, his appointment seems to have been a fruitful one. At his ordination service, Rev'd Coles of Bourton-on-the-Water, Rev'd Taylor of Shipston-on-Stour, Rev'd Price of Alcester, Rev'd Mann, the Independent Minister of Moreton and Rev'd Morris of Broadway are all reported to have taken part, and a collection was taken for a recent enlargement of the old chapel. As a statement in the Church Book says, "The congregation was much increased and the Gospel introduced into places it was not before". This seems indeed to have been a time of religious revival in Campden, for during Mr Jayne's ministry a number of houses in Campden were registered as places of worship by Protestant Dissenters. Among them was Richard Taylor's house at Broad Campden, specifically registered for dissenters of the Baptist denomination and Rev'd George Jayne was one of the applicants for the registration. There may have been other registrations in his name, too, in neighbouring villages so far undiscovered.

Mr Jayne, much respected, stayed until June 1828, when he left for Roade in Northants. He was succeeded by Rev'd William Elliott, who resigned in turn in April 1836 'after having laboured among us with fidelity and zeal more than 7 years'. Nothing else is recorded of the ministry of Mr Elliott, who left for Yarmouth and Wellow in the Isle of Wight.

Thereafter there were two shorter pastorates. Mr Elliott's successor was a young Cardiff man, Pastor Edward Stephens, who was first invited on probation until the end of 1836, and was subsequently asked to remain as Pastor, an appointment he held for three or four years. Indeed, in June 1838, under his pastorate a meeting of the Oxford Association was held in Campden. Then for the three years 1841 to 1844 the Pastor was another man in his twenties, Mr W.B. Davies, who lived with his wife in Campden High Street, in a cottage near where the Police Station once stood.

The records of the Campden church for the twenty-five years after Elisha Smith's death, and for long periods throughout the nineteenth century, are rather sparse. The implication however is that the Campden congregation sustained a reasonably healthy growth, certainly under Rev'd Jayne and possibly also under his successors. In 1836 it is recorded that five new members were baptised by Rev'd Fuller of Blockley; four more were baptised the following year, one in 1838 and two in 1839. The minutes of the Oxfordshire Association in 1843 shows that under Mr Davies that year there had been ten baptisms, and although two members had died and three had been excluded, there was a total of 65 members and 75 schoolchildren. Campden at that time was sustaining three village stations nearby - probably including Paxford and Broad Campden, though their exact locations cannot so far be identified. This seems to have been the highest number of members Campden church ever achieved during that century.

But there were losses. From 1836 the records report a number of members being excluded for non-attendance or for immoral conduct, and others beginning to join the established Church (and in one case having their children "sprinkled at the font"). In 1845 a number of former members were visited, and "it was found these persons had gone to other places of worship (the State church or the Wesleyans)". It was then three or four years since the Wesleyan Methodists in Campden had opened their chapel. Early in 1837, soon after he took over the pastorate, Pastor Stephens had seen

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it necessary to write a long letter to the church emphasising the need for united effort by members and pastor in undertaking the work of the Lord. He stressed the duties of members - the need for regular and conscientious attendance on the means of grace, the need for piety, and the need to avoid putting stumbling blocks in the paths either of members of the congregation who may be undecided, or of anxious enquirers. "Be examples. Your conduct must influence them. Let nothing prevent attendance on the means of grace. The sacrifice is small; the benefit great."

There is no indication what caused this admonition, whether it was the frustration felt by a new young pastor, or some more serious lack on the part of the members. Certainly the contrast between the progress at Blockley during these years, by the late thirties Blockley church had well over a hundred members and regular Sunday congregations of 400, and the smaller progress at Campden, is rather striking.

It appears, too, that by the early 1840's the church had begun to lose the wisdom and compassion that had characterised Elisha Smith's theology. There is some implication of uncompromising Calvinism and some lack of charity in the wording of notes of resolutions at Church meetings, including those 'disowning' members for absenting themselves, or for other misdemeanours. This impression is exemplified in the report of an event in 1844, the withdrawal of a member, George Davies, a joiner who later became a cabinetmaker and builder. Mr Davies wrote a letter of resignation to the church, which the deacon transcribed into the Church Book "hoping it will operate on us as a warning against taking persons into the Church without first enquiring into their sentiments". The letter states that the deacon's sentiments:

"and the sentiments of the church, with but few exceptions, are vastly different from my own, and opposed to each other. I have not been comfortable, and cannot conscientiously embrace your principles, and that especially particular redemption. I cannot believe that the Saviour died for one part of the Human family and left the other part to perish in sin. I will maintain my own principles and publish them~ but to do so among you would occasion much unpleasantness, and so I am withdrawing myself. I have prayed to God for the welfare of the Church and the increased spiritual prosperity of every member - let every man be persuaded in his own mind".

The only comment appended to the transcription of what might appear to be a sincere argument, though admittedly one contrary to the strict principles of the Particular Baptists, is:

"He went from us because he was not of us". The 1841 census shows Mr Davies living in the newly built West End Terrace, very close to the new Wesleyan Methodist chapel, and it may be significant that in a later census of Campden, George Davies is described as a 'cabinet maker and Methodist Local Preacher'.

Several other people, too, withdrew from the church about this time at their own request or as the consequence of other matters, some of them apparently involving incidents with the Pastor.

Mr W.B. Davies resigned his pastorate at the end of 1844, and was succeeded by Rev'd Eli Amery, a Devonshire man. He entered the pastorate in March 1845, after first coming as a supply preacher, and after some long consideration on his part. He stayed for seven years, and in turn resigned in April 1852. Almost the last act of the church during his pastorate was the drawing up and signing of a new Trust Deed, based very closely on earlier deeds. Significantly, now six of the new Trustees were members of the church at Blockley (including Elisha Smith's two grandsons, and two members of the Campden - 1850 to 1870 Belcher family). Only three came from Campden and others were from Slaughter, Naunton and Stow. There is little to indicate what success Mr Amery achieved during his pastorate. Membership did fall somewhat, to under 50 by 1846. A further number of people is reported as having 'ceased to be members' through some failing, and the Church seems to have been far from strong, either financially or in leadership. However, the records of the church during this period are too sparse to be able to record much about its progress up to about 1850.

As we shall see, however, the contrast with progress at Blockley became extreme after that, and

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Campden's decline was to become yet more severe over the next two decades. Immediately upon Mr Amery's resignation from the Campden church in 1852, while the membership of Blockley church under Mr Hull's ministry was rising towards 150, in Campden it was resolved that the three Campden trustees "should consult to get a weekly supply to the Pulpit. The Funds were not in a fit state to engage with a Minister in any other way".

At the same time Mr Reynolds, one of the Paxford members, sent a message saying that "the Church need not send any supply to preach at Paxford. They intended to go to Blockley instead of worshipping at Campden". His membership was in fact shortly afterwards transferred to the Blockley church, and Blockley thereafter seems to have looked after the chapel at Paxford.

The leaders of the Campden church in 1852 seem to have been the three local trustees: William Keyte, a Baker and confectioner (who had a shop in Church Street), John Humphries, a Shoemaker (who lived in High Street quite near the Chapel) and Samuel Taylor, a Watchmaker; together with William Eden of Hidcote, Isaac Haines, who farmed at Court Pieces, and Thomas Ledbetter.

Unfortunately, too, if there were indications of minor disagreements within the Blockley church at this time, there were somewhat greater disagreements in Campden. These six leaders seem to have found difficulty in working together. Within two months of Mr Amery's departure Samuel Taylor withdrew from the duty of obtaining supplies and from other offices. Then towards the end of the same year (1852) it was pointed out that according to the Trust deeds it was the Trustees as a whole that had the appointment of a Minister under their jurisdiction. The other Trustees (who were mainly Blockley residents) were brought much more closely into the management of the Church and two Blockley men, Mr Richard Boswell Belcher and Mr G. Smith, were appointed Treasurer and receiver of rents. These two, with Samuel Taylor as responsible for liaison, agreed to confer with the Church "to transact business as consistent with the cause of Christ".

A few months later the Trustees agreed to use the funds at their disposal to repair the Meeting House and to enlarge the graveyard. It was only at the beginning of 1854, when these had been completed, that the appointment of a Minister was again considered.

At this point, however, a serious dispute arose. Its exact course is not clear, but it appears that Samuel Taylor, in his capacity as member of the Committee of Trustees, circulated a paper within the church purporting to have been issued by authority of that Committee. The paper purported to bring to an end the existing system of providing supply preachers, to admit into full communion "all Evangelical Dissenters being members of Churches", to appoint a number of new people to church offices, and to arrange for regular Sunday evening prayer meetings under a new leader.

A Church meeting was called immediately and according to the Church Book it considered this paper made "statements and appointments never agreed to either by the Committee at a meeting nor at a Church Meeting". As a result a Memorial was sent to the Trustees' Committee, signed by thirteen members present at the meeting and subsequently by twelve others. This began by thanking the Committee for "the care they have taken in the appropriation of money for the repairing of the property", and expressed the Church's willingness to receive a *Baptist* Minister. It then continued:

"We wish also to express our surprise at finding papers in the Chapel containing certain statements which the Church never heard of and never agreed to. We also beg that if the paper was not agreed to by the persons whose names are attached to it, nor yet according to any measures carried by the Committee, that the persons concocting such measures and wishing to enforce them should be rejected from being in any office in future, except the Trusteeship, which we believe cannot be altered".

"As a Baptist Church we object to any addition to our Church for membership without attending to the Ordinance of Believers Baptism. We understand that the deeds of the property express that it is for the use of Protestant Dissenters. If so we answer to that character. But perhaps you may think you are acting according to law in throwing the Church open. Now. We beg of you to dismiss that Idea and act by the Gospel; and then if you will show

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us by the Gospel any other proper way of coming to the table of our Lord but by Believers' Baptism, then we will give up the point, but we beg of you not to enforce upon us that which our consciences do not approve and that which we consider to be unscriptural..."

Mr R. B. Belcher replied to this memorial (*Petition*) in fairly conciliatory but non-committal terms, to the effect that the Committee had undertaken to obtain Supplies, but could not always guarantee to provide a Baptist Minister to supply the pulpit; that they hoped the Church would be able to settle the differences that existed; and that although the Committee's views about the proper constitution of the Church were well-known, they "did not think it desirable on the present occasion to enter further into the subject." A further long letter from the Church characterising this reply as unsatisfactory and having "a great want of candour" brings the note on this incident to an end.

An interesting and yet puzzling relationship is evident in this correspondence. Clearly the deacons of Campden church in their letters to the Trustees Committee are by implication attacking one man, Samuel Taylor, who was apparently the instigator of the original papers, though they are doing so by addressing the whole Committee. Although at least one of the Deacons of the church, (the actual writer of the memorial and letter to the Committee) was a Trustee, and although Samuel Taylor was a member of the Campden church, the tone of the correspondence from Campden implies two quite separate bodies, the Trustees Committee, which is alleged to be divided, and the church, said to be unanimous. The help that the Blockley Trustees were obviously trying to render the Campden church, coupled with the differences in view as to the propriety of open membership, seems to have been the cause of some resentment and misunderstanding. Campden members were apparently also finding it impossible to cope with a brother whose activities were creating considerable difficulties for them.

In any case, the principle of open communion and open membership introduced to the Campden church by Elisha Smith's Covenant and deliberately written into the deeds of the Blockley church on its formation had, it seems, become lost to Campden over the thirty-five years since Elisha's death. It seems likely that the loss, and, as he may have seen it, the consequent missed opportunities for wider evangelism in Campden, may have been a cause of frustration to Samuel Taylor. He had probably been making some layman's inquiries into the trust deeds, and drawing some divisive conclusions from them.

This becomes more evident a few months later. For in January 1855 a series of special church meetings had to be called to deal with the removal of "the greater part of the books belonging to the library" from the church vestry to Samuel Taylor's house. Mr Taylor repeatedly refused to return these, claiming that "the books did not belong to the church", and that "he intends to keep them for the time being". As a consequence of his actions, a Church Meeting on 27th January resolved "that Mr Samuel Taylor should not be considered any longer as a member of the Baptist Church at Campden in consequence of his inconsistent conduct in refusing to give up the books belonging to the church and other things which was brought against him by members of the church".

The most plausible explanation for this second, rather curious incident, given the obvious state of mind of Mr Taylor, concerns the reference in the church deeds to the 99 books of Divinity that had been bequeathed to the old Dissenting Church in 1732, over 120 years before, by Rev'd Peter Peyton. The current Trust Deeds stated that these books were to remain "vested in the Trustees for the sole use of the Minister", and, as in the earlier incident, one could speculate that Samuel Taylor, again in his capacity as Trustee (which office he seems to have taken seriously) had taken a legalistic interpretation of this clause. In the absence of any Minister in the church he had removed the books into the "Trustees" custody. It is not clear whether they were ever recovered, though a library of books is mentioned again in 1865.

The church remained for almost four years without a Minister, by the end of which time its membership had fallen to 25 or less. An invitation to a Northamptonshire Minister in July 1854 seems not to have been taken up. However, in January 1856 Rev'd C. Spiller, "of Dunkerton, near Bath" preached at Campden, and returned for four weeks on probation, after which it was unanimously

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agreed to invite him to become Pastor. It is noteworthy that the letter of invitation includes the following sentence:

“We wish you to know that we do not approve of any person being admitted into full membership into the Church without Believers Baptism, believing it to be in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament and that most likely to secure Peace in the Church”.

Mr Spiller accepted the invitation and came to Campden in the spring of 1856. He laboured with considerable success until March 1858, when he died after a short illness, after barely two years ministry here. He was succeeded as pastor by Mr J. W. Webb, from Dunchurch, Warwickshire, who remained until 1863, when he resigned. The renewal these two ministries brought to the church is evident from the notes in the church book. Clearly, that of Mr Spiller was set to be a successful one. A number of former members returned to the Church soon after his appointment, and four new members were baptised in 1857. Mr Spiller is one of only three Ministers whose pastorate was ever commemorated by a plaque in the church. He left a widow, who died in Campden in 1860, and two daughters who were baptised into the Church a few years after that.

Mr Webb’s pastorate, too, saw a continued increase, and at least fourteen new members were received into the Church after baptism. There is little reference to the financial position of the church during these seven years, but despite the management of its affairs by the Blockley Trustees Committee, it is unlikely to have been greatly improved.

Mr Webb’s resignation was followed by almost a year without a Pastor. However, in March 1864 Mr R. A. Shadick, a young student from Spurgeon’s College in London came to preach at Campden, and returned to supply the pulpit for four Sundays, after which he was invited to become Pastor, an invitation he accepted “after much thought and earnest prayer” in May 1864.

Spurgeon’s College, then more properly called the Pastor’s College, had been established in the East End of London by the great Baptist preacher out of the funds of his church. It was still presided over by Dr Spurgeon himself, and its aims were to prepare young men for the ministry whose education was not sufficient for them to gain access to the older theological colleges. Most students seem to have been natives of London and southeast England, many of them men who had come personally under Dr Spurgeon’s influence.

Mr Shadick’s first year seems to have continued the work of his two predecessors. Eight more people were received into church membership after baptism, and three others either transferred from other local churches, or re-admitted. His marriage was celebrated in the church, too, towards the end of the year, his wife’s membership being transferred from the Congregational Church at Gravesend in April 1865.

What happened after that we simply do not know? Mr Shadick seems to have left, but there is no note as to the circumstances. Most probably the Church then underwent a further period without a Minister, and suffered more financial problems and loss of members. The next note in the Church Minute Book, and the last for a long time, is a report of a Church Meeting held on Sunday May 26th 1867, called by the remaining Deacon (apparently under the direction of the Oxfordshire Association) “to consider what should be done for the future prosperity of the Baptist interest at Campden”. Rev’d S. Hodges of Stow-on-the-Wold was present at this meeting to represent the Association, and was elected to the chair. After some discussion it was moved and seconded:

That the Church be Dissolved.

A show of hands was taken, and the motion was carried by seven votes to four. The Chairman thereupon “pronounced the Church to be dissolved”.

So, almost at a stroke, after 200 years of witness of the Protestant Dissenting Church in Campden, nearly 150 years of it in the same Meeting House; and less than 50 years after the death of the man who had brought the Baptist faith to the town, the Church had, it seemed, been brought to the end of its life. So many had laboured in the town and district over so many years. Had all their work, then, been brought to nought?

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Rev. W. R. Irvine – Renewal

Reconstruction and Controversy in Campden

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It was on May 26th 1867 that the Baptist Church at Campden was dissolved, by resolution of its members, and by authority of the Oxfordshire Association.

Fifteen months later, on September 5th 1868 there appeared a long report in the *Evesham Journal*, of which the following is an extract:

On Tuesday evening last a very interesting meeting in connection with the reopening of the Baptist Chapel took place in the Town Hall, which was tastefully decorated for the occasion. The Baptist Church has been for some time reduced to a very low state and for a short time the chapel was closed. It was then reopened for worship on the Lords Day in the evening only. This service was for some months conducted chiefly by brethren belonging to the Church at Blockley. The Rev'd W. R. Irvine of Ascot and Leafield was then invited to take charge of the station. He entered upon it the first Sunday in July and the results have been very pleasing. The Chapel, which had been almost deserted, is now well filled, especially in the evening. Mr Irvine's ministry has awakened considerable attention and judging from the numbers, which attend every Sunday evening some extraordinary steps will have to be taken to provide seats. It was under the above encouraging circumstances that it was resolved to hold a Public Meeting in connection with the revival of Christian effort in the place. The use of the Town Hall having been granted, a large number of persons met for tea, which was well supplied by friends in the congregation. About 180 sat down and many others would willingly have joined them had there been room. In the evening a public meeting was held.

The speakers at the meeting included Robert Comely Esq of Condicote, Rev'd C.J. Middleditch of Blockley, who was then Secretary of the Oxfordshire Association, Rev'd G. Robson of Shipston-on-Stour its Moderator, Mr R.B. Belcher of Blockley, Rev'd J. Bennett a Congregational minister of Broadway, Rev'd W.R. Irvine himself, and others. *The Evesham Journal* article continues:

The meeting was well attended, many persons not being able to gain admission. An admirable spirit pervaded the whole of the proceedings and gave warrant to the hope that better days are in store for the cause of voluntary evangelistic religion in the Town of Campden For a time, at least, they certainly were. Rev'd W. Ritchie Irvine was one of the most active Ministers the Campden Baptists have had, and one whose material achievements are still evident to us today. Curiously, he is a rather elusive figure. Not a single word was written into the Church Book during his Ministry of over ten years, and for the only references there to his pastorate we have to rely on four or five manuscripts copied into the book by his successor after 1880. His work, however, was notable both in the Church and in the town, and fortunately from references in the records of the Blockley church and the Oxfordshire Association, and especially from the local press, we can get some impression of him and of his influence. Mr Irvine and his wife were both Scottish. He seems to have been in his late forties when he came to Campden. He had been married 24 years, his wife being a few years his junior, and they had a large family. From the few surviving comments it is evident that both he and his wife became much loved and respected in the Church. They were obviously a cultured Victorian family. An album or Visitors' Book survives in the Gloucester County Record office, presented to the Church about 1980 by one of Mr Irvine's descendants. It is full of poems and acrostics, some composed by, and others copied into the book by both family members and the many visitors they received. In Campden they lived with Mr Irvine's sister, who had also moved to the town with them.

It is not altogether clear how the Church, in the condition it had reached a few months earlier, were now enabled to have a Minister of Mr Irvine's obvious ability. However, the church clearly had

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much help from the churches of the Oxfordshire Association and from Blockley in particular. Blockley's letter to the Association in 1868 states that:

“some of our brethren have united with brethren belonging to other churches in conducting services on the Lords Day, occasionally in the afternoon and regularly in the evening at Campden in fulfilment of the resolution of your Association. We may be allowed to say that the cause at Campden will require your serious consideration and strenuous effort Rev'd C. J. Middleditch, the Blockley pastor and secretary of the Association, was a particularly valuable ally to Mr Irvine. Blockley's letter in 1869, for instance says: In connection with [*our village stations*] we avail ourselves of this opportunity to state that the cause at Campden in behalf of which you made a grant to the church at Blockley last year, has assumed an aspect of great encouragement under the ministry of our brother Mr Irvine. Allow us to express the earnest hope that you will continue to render to that station the most liberal pecuniary support that your funds will permit.

Mr Irvine seems to have come to Campden in the course of his lay occupation, and agreed to carry on the old Baptist tradition of earning his livelihood outside the ministry while acting as Pastor. He was an insurance agent, and in Campden he acted as “District Manager of the General Life and Fire Insurance Company and Agent for the General Hailstorm and Plate Glass and Railway Passengers' Accidental Insurance Company”. If it were not for his fortuitous arrival the cause of Non-conformity in Campden could well have been lost, for the Church could not have paid the stipend of a full-time Minister, and it is doubtful if either the Association or the Blockley church could have long sustained the burden of maintaining the mission station here.

In spite of the wording of the Journal article of 1868, it was some time before the Church was officially re-established as a Church, rather than as a Mission station. Mr Irvine attended the Oxfordshire Association meetings in 1870, but by invitation only, and mainly to make a statement. It was not until January 1871 that, at a meeting of the Oxfordshire Association, the Secretary reported a strong desire in Campden for the formation of a Church, and that Mr Irvine ‘thoroughly united with them’ in making such a request. It was therefore at that meeting

‘Resolved unanimously that the proposal to form a Baptist Church at Campden is hereby approved, and that the friends about to unite in Church fellowship be assured of the earnest desire of the Committee for their prosperity and peace’.

Some of Mr Irvine's more long-standing achievements were material ones. For example the musical life of the Church benefited. A manuscript version of the 1868 *Evesham Journal* report quoted above continues with the comment:

We sincerely hope the next step will be taken to provide a good harmonium for the use of the chapel, which might soon be done by subscription, and would be the means of drawing a great many more people to chapel.

The hope was satisfied, and a special service was held in August 1869, led by Rev'd A. Morton Brown of Cheltenham, to mark the opening of the new harmonium. Although hymns had certainly featured in the life of the Church since the time of Elisha Smith, it seems hitherto to have been lacking this aid to worship. The only previous reference to a musical instrument is a note in the Church Book in September 1853, when Mr J. Humphreys and Mr William Eden were detailed to ‘take charge of the chapel viol until some person appointed by the Church should use it at the services’.

But the greatest material achievement of Mr Irvine's ministry and a permanent memorial to his faith was the construction of a new chapel, together with schoolrooms and manse. These are the buildings that now stand facing the High Street, in the place of the old chapel yard with its cottages, gardens and orchard. That this fairly imposing series of buildings (designed by Thomas Allen, architect and surveyor of Stratford-on-Avon) should have been constructed just four years after his arrival in Campden - and only five years after the church had been closed through lack of support, is a tribute to the energy and faith of Mr Irvine. According to a report in the *Campden*

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Herald in June 1872,

... the tender of Messrs Chambers and Sharp for the sum of £800, being the lowest which was sent in to the Trustees, is accepted, and they have commenced pulling down the old houses. The materials of the old chapel and three houses on the ground became the property of the contractors, and are to a considerable extent available for the new erections. The contract allows for certain curtailments, which would bring down the cost to £700, should the state of the funds require it, but it is hoped that the liberality of Nonconformists will enable the trustees to carry out the complete design.

As the memorial plaque to Rev'd W. Ritchie Irvine that used to stand in the chapel says, it was during his pastorate that the chapel, schoolroom and manse were 'built and paid for'. How the church was able to prosper to this extent must be a matter of some wonder. Few records remain of the decision, the way the main funds were raised, or the debates that ensued. One early reference shows that the plan had been in preparation for some time before the building started. The letter from Blockley to the Oxfordshire Association in 1870 includes this passage:

In acknowledging your grant last year in behalf of Campden, we beg leave respectfully to commend that cause to your Christian support. The generous and self-sacrificing efforts of Mr Irvine to secure the erection of a New Chapel in that town are worthy of recognition by his brethren. Severe and protracted affliction, together with other unavoidable circumstances, prevented his commencing his collection among the associated churches in sufficient time to complete the canvass during the year now expired. We trust you will allow him to do so in the year ensuing.

Mr Irvine's own statement to the Association that year was too much the same effect. The plans and elevations for the new church, School Room and Manse are available in Gloucester Record Office, and an undated account shows a total cost of £978. 18s.4d, and a few details of the cash received. At the time this account was prepared £696 had already been received, £120 was expected from a 'Bazaar & Anniversary', £100 from 'Mr Robinson's scheme' and £100 of promises were still to come.

Mr Robinson (Elisha Smith Robinson, Esq., grandson of Campden's faithful former Minister) laid the Foundation Stone on 19th June 1872 during a day of celebration that included a Public Tea Meeting in the Town Hall. In the evening the last service was held in the 'small and ancient building' that had been the chapel for so long. The preachers that day were Rev'd William Allen of Oxford and Rev'd J. W. Todd of Sydenham.

[Description of premises, architects, Evesham Journal on opening, etc]

[for details of celebrations see Evesham Journal 16, 23 & 30/11/1872]

The building seems to have proceeded quickly, and the opening ceremony for the new chapel took place on 16th November that same year.

The Minister's house was probably completed and occupied some time later. The new Manse no doubt filled a great need in the church. Thereafter the members could offer accommodation as part of the Minister's stipend, rather than the pastor having to find his own dwelling. It is not known where most ministers had lived up till then. Mr W.B. Davies and his wife were living on the lower side of the High Street in 1841, in a cottage where the police station now stands. In 1851 the Amery family (Rev'd Eli Amery with his wife, four young children and a girl servant) were living in Leysbourne, probably in North End Terrace. In 1871, Mr Irvine and his family lived in one of the houses between the Lygon Arms and Woolstaplers Hall - possibly Braithwaite house, where Lloyds Bank now stands. The Irvine's (Mr and Mrs Irvine, daughter Isabella, sons David and William and a girl servant) also had two Grammar School pupils boarding with them and at the time of the 1871 Census another Baptist Minister was then staying with them.

[See registers for growth of membership etc during this pastorate]

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Mr Irvine's ministry seems to have coincided with the start of a period of growing confidence and determination by Non-conformists, in Campden as elsewhere, as they began to assert their rights over against the power of the Established Church and other entrenched interests. The period also marked their enthusiastic entry into political debate. Working people, too, were gaining in self-confidence. Agriculture had been fairly prosperous for some time and employers were starting to recognise the need to improve the lot of their labourers. Working men had very recently secured the right to vote; education was improving; wages were better than they had been; and although until 1871 they were still in theory illegal conspiracies in restraint of trade, trade unions were gaining in support.

Mr Irvine seems to have differed from his predecessors in the way he entered into and served the life of the town. Dr A.W. Exell has written of Elisha Smith and of Mr Irvine's Blockley contemporary, R. B. Belcher: "Both these earnestly religious men would almost certainly have affirmed that their primary motives were to lead men to God and eternal salvation, but their actions show a constant regard for the happiness of the community on this earth and in this village". If this was true of Elisha Smith, it was at least as true of W. Ritchie Irvine in Campden, in the very different circumstances of his day.

The Campden Gas Light Company is one instance. The Gas Company was founded in 1869 by the subscriptions of a number of Campden farmers and Trades people, and was said to have been established expressly for the public good rather than for the benefit of the shareholders. One symbol of this was the differentiation between the fairly prosperous local shareholders and the more professional directors and officers of the Company, one of whom was Rev'd W. R. Irvine. At the banquet held in February 1870 to celebrate the completion of the gasworks and the lighting up of the town, Mr Irvine gave the reply to the toast to The Directors. Typical of the age, among his remarks was the following (to quote an *Evesham Journal* report):

The introduction of gas into any town was not only a domestic comfort, but it was also a moral and a social blessing to any community possessing it; it could not be denied that gas was one of the moral reformers of the age. (*Hear, hear*).

Mr Irvine also served on the Committee of the first Reading Room in Campden from the time it was established for the benefit of working people in 1872; he spoke strongly at the Vestry Meetings discussing the sanitary condition of the town, and he sat on other similar bodies.

This was a time, however, of much dissension in the town, social as between the landowners, farmers and Trades people on one side and the labourers on the other; political, between Liberals and Conservatives; and religious, both within the established church between traditionalists and the new Ritualists, and also between the established church as a whole and the nonconformists. To complicate matters, the chief landowners (the family of the Earls of Gainsborough) and many of their employees had recently joined the Roman Catholic Church, which was treated with suspicion by adherents to both the other churches. However, to a surprisingly large extent in Campden, the Conservative party locally tended to be led by the Anglican clergy, larger Trades people and some of the leading farmers, while the leaders of the Liberals were almost all Nonconformists.

To take just one example, the National Agricultural Labourers Union created considerable stir locally from the time it was founded in 1872. Local Non-conformists were among its supporters, and when at the beginning of September that year Joseph Arch the founder of the N.A.L.U. from Warwickshire came personally to speak to a large meeting under the Elm Tree, Mr G. C. Smith, a leading Blockley Baptist, was voted to the Chair and put the proposition (which was carried) that "the meeting would support in every possible manner the interests of the National Agricultural Labourers Union".

Other Union meetings followed over the next few years, some more successful than others, and for several years the trade unionists hired their own band to march in a separate contingent to the annual festival of the local 'Britannia' Benefit Society. Joseph Arch returned at least once more to the town, the meeting again being chaired by a Baptist, Mr J. Ledbetter. Mr W. Godson (a former Baptist who had recently left the Church) spoke at a large Union meeting held under the Elm Tree

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in September 1873, advocating emigration to Australia. More than at any earlier time, therefore, Baptist church leaders, in Campden and Blockley, were drawn into public controversy. Mr Irvine himself got involved in some wide social and political issues, debated with intensity in the town. For example in March 1870 a meeting was held in the Blue School to support a provision that instruction in the tenets of the Church of England should be mandatory in schools established under the Education Act of that year. Mr Irvine, who was present, insisted that it was not a representative public meeting, but a party meeting of the Church of England: indeed a political meeting. Mr W. Godson supported him in a controversial speech, who said:

While I am in favour of religious teaching and in favour of the Bible being read and taught in school, I am ... opposed to sectarian, denominational, dogmatic, teaching. (*Hear, hear*) And how will it be when two thirds of the members elected to serve on the Board belong to the Baptist denomination? (*Confusion*) Yes, I can understand your saying, "We'll take care who are to be elected". You try to crush us. (*No, No!*) But you have tried to do so. You tried to put Mr Irvine down. (*Tremendous confusion and hisses*). I have been in Australia and have there addressed many meetings, but never have I been hissed before. In Australia you enjoy perfect religious, social and political equality, and every man is fairly and uninterruptedly allowed to give utterance to his opinions whatever they may be".

[*Evesham Journal 2. 4.1870*]

Clearly this was a time of high emotions and strong feelings. Another such intervention came the following year, when, after considerable discussion in the press a meeting was called in the Town Hall to consider the future of the fifteenth century town Grammar School. The aim of the meeting, chaired by the retiring headmaster, Rev'd Dr S. F. Hiron (who had been born in Campden and was an old boy of the school) was to protect the 'useful' education he had practiced, and which was said to be desired by most parents, against the encroachment of a 'higher classical teaching' feared under the Endowed Schools Act of 1869.

Rev'd Irvine and other Blockley and Campden Baptists spoke strongly in favour of the motion. Mr Irvine, who claimed a special interest as a parent of boys attending the Grammar School, said that upwards of 25% in the whole School were the sons of Non-conformists, and that section of the community should be fairly represented on the Board. Furthermore, he continued, the School was a public trust, but its meetings were held behind closed doors. "I object," he said, "to the trustees transacting their business in the dark". (*Opposition cheers and hisses*) A circular had appeared opposing the proposition, and Mr Irvine declared "that circular is published by the authority of the Earl of Gainsborough" (*who was chairman of the Board of Governors*) "and I don't call it fair play" (*Cheers and hisses*).

Two or three weeks after this the Nonconformist Grammar School boys presented a testimonial to the retiring headmaster. Thirteen boys are named, including two sons of Rev'd W. R. Irvine and two of Mr Godson. However, when in the following March a public meeting was called in the (old) Baptist Chapel to memorialise the Endowed School Commissioners on the rights of Nonconformists in the School, it is reported to have been but meagrely attended.

However, the issue, which caused most commotion in Campden during these years, was that of the disestablishment of the Church of England. This was just a few years after the Church of Ireland had been disestablished by the Liberal Government: disestablishment of the English Church remained a live issue for some years thereafter. As early as 1846 the Oxfordshire Association had been commending the Anti-State Church Association to its members, and by 1859 a resolution was passed recommending all member churches to co-operate in the work of the Liberation Society, which had much the same aims.

Meetings in Campden of the Liberation Society were, however, uniquely stormy. A series of meetings were held in the town from 1874, each apparently creating more excitement than the last. In March 1874, Rev'd W. R. Irvine organised a public meeting on disestablishment that was crowded with opponents of the theme. While the announced lecturer attempted to speak,

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three cheers were given for the Queen, three for the House of Lords, three for the Church, and three for the Volunteers, with groans for the promoters of the meeting. Some of the most stalwart of the members of the Volunteer Corps marched into the room with "Church and State for Ever" printed on a blue ground, and wearing it round their hats.

[Evesham Journal 28.3.1874].

ultimately, the chairman dissolved the meeting and vacated his seat. Mr W.H. Griffiths, the Campden solicitor, was then elected to the chair and an antisestablishmentarianist proposition was passed. Later a correspondent to the Evesham Journal claimed that:

"there was a thoroughly organised effort to disturb the meeting and to prevent the lecture being given if possible. A number of roughs were introduced into the room for the express purpose of shouting down the lecturers, and one or two persons, dressed as gentlemen, led them on".

[Evesham Journal 4.4.1874]

Another correspondent accused the Rifle Corps Volunteers of being drunk, and of coming to the meeting with the specific intention of putting it down.

However, a third denied that the Volunteers had been drunk, denied that the opposition to the meeting had been organised, but justified their behaviour on the basis that the lecturer had been told (from the floor) that "his lecture was at an end".

[Evesham Journal 11.4.1874]

The strength of opposition to this campaign was sustained. In October of the same year another meeting was proposed, which occasioned the following announcement to be made about the streets of Campden by the town crier:

Notice to all Churchmen: If you would hear what the despoilers of our church would do, attend the meeting at the Town Hall this evening at 7 o'clock. Be in time. God Save the Queen and Church.

That meeting seems to have passed off reasonably well. Another meeting was held in October the following year. Chaired by Mr Irvine, the meeting took the form of a talk by Rev'd J. Scott James on "The Pilgrim Fathers, or a Struggle for Liberty". The hostile audience was "very demonstrative from the start, and several of them arrived with 'Church and State for Ever' round their hats. Nevertheless they listened with tolerable patience while the lecturer outlined the history of the Pilgrim Fathers and made some parallels with present-day struggles for equality. The very late arrival of Rev'd. W. Tatlock was the occasion for a change in tone. Mr Tatlock, a curate and local Secretary to the Church of England Pastoral Aid Society, seems to have been a combative clergyman who had only lately taken up residence in the town. His entrance was 'highly applauded'. He took the floor and spoke forcibly for over an hour about 'the equality that dissenters wanted to drag the clergy to', alleging that the Liberation Society 'sent men to sow dissension' in our great towns.

When the chairman had declared the meeting closed a familiar tactic was used: Rev'd Tatlock was elected to the chair, and it was "Resolved that this meeting repudiates and condemns the policy of the Liberation Society and strongly upholds the Church of England, the Church of our Fathers".

Just three months later, in January 1876, yet another crowded and stormy Liberation Society meeting was held in the Town Hall with the title 'Rationalism, Ritualism, Romanism'. Many supporters of the Church of England were again present, wearing the familiar slogan round their hats. Mr R. B. Belcher of Blockley was in the chair and he expressed his opinion of the importance of the theme:

the extension of the franchise and the reform of the land laws would only have a passing effect upon the political life compared with the changes they advocated.

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[Evesham Journal 29.1.1876.7]

The meeting was to have taken the form of a lecture by Mr G. Hastings. However, in spite of conciliatory efforts by moderates on both sides, it rapidly degenerated into a howling match. The Evesham Journal reported at one stage Rev'd Irvine and Rev'd Tatlock facing each other, one standing on the table, the other on a chair, each demanding the other withdraw certain allegations; an egg allegedly thrown at the chairman and an attempt physically to depose him; accusations of lies and insults; cheers for the National Church and for the Queen, and counter cheers for 'Brummagem' (the speaker); and a full hour of uproar, during which the supporters of the Church sang 'Rule Britannia' and no business could be conducted. At about 11.30 p.m. the chairman finally closed the meeting; but when the Church party voted Mr W.H. Griffiths to the Chair, Mr Belcher refused to vacate it until after a physical struggle during which part of the table fell down.

The high feelings continued in correspondence to the, *Evesham Journal*. Mr. Belcher wrote that as he was leaving,

two Church-defenders (brothers) attacked me, collared me, and poured in their blows fore and aft.

[Evesham Journal 5.2.1876].

Rev'd Tatlock, on the other hand, wrote alleging that a gang of 'thorough roughs', some of them convicted poachers, 'gathered like a body-guard to the chairman on the right-hand side of the platform and obeyed most readily every hint given them in any way for hindering a full and fair discussion' According to William Stanley, a Church and State supporter, "The disciples of Mr Joseph Arch were there, together with other celebrities of the Police Court".

"Fair Play" of Chipping Campden however, wrote that the only convicted poacher he had seen was one of the Church party close to and supporting Mr Tatlock. "If the Church party were not 'roughs' and cads" he continued, "their conduct belied them".

[Evesham Journal 5.2.1876]

At this distant time it is hard to distinguish how much this general emotion and excitement was part of a common pattern of the period. A quite peaceful meeting of the Liberation Society in Evesham in January 1875 for instance produced a very long rambling letter in the Journal from a correspondent signing himself 'Vigil', showing all the common reactions of the time. There was some general suspicion and resentment of the newly won power and privileges of Non-conformists, and the way they might be used, given the natural alliance between Non-conformity and the Liberal cause in politics. On the other hand there were many social wrongs to be righted. There was room for controversy. The excited activities that developed in Campden, the involvement of the Rifle Corps Volunteers with their hat bands, the disturbances, and the behaviour of some of the clergy, may have been peculiar to this town with its long standing social structure and traditions, as well as to the temperament of certain individuals, Curiously the people with these strong feelings and strong prejudices seem otherwise to have worked together on bodies within the town.

As one may imagine, some aspects of Mr Irvine's ministry may not have been to the taste of all its members. A letter from Mr William Godson, dated December 1872 and copied into the Church book by Mr Irvine's successor, says, inter alia,

.....I, cannot comfortably remain in connection with a Church, which I regard as a disorderly, disjointed democracy. The future of a Church having no rule of faith and practice except the caprice, whim and caprices of its members must necessarily be involved in an unpleasant uncertainty. The questions, *what next and next?* will so haunt the minds of the lovers of truth that they will create constant uneasiness and increasing foreboding of evil, From my heart I hope that those who approve of a church so constituted will rally round you and by your united efforts Campden will be benefited and blessed, In going to Church I shall know the worst of what I may expect, and I very much prefer travelling by daylight to travelling in the dark.....

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It would be interesting to know just what provoked these comments by a man who seems to have supported the Minister on certain public occasions; unfortunately the Church records for Mr Irvine's Ministry are so sparse that no hint can be gleaned from them.

[Evesham Journal Jan. 1878 re celebrations,]

[Evesham Journal 19/10/78 & 26/10/18 re Rev, W.R.Irvin's death and funeral]

This then was a period of strong Baptist revival, as well as of the political involvement that almost inevitably accompanied it. It must have been an exciting time in Campden. Sadly, however, it was brought to an end in October 1878 with the sudden death of Rev W. R. Irvine while on a visit to Hull - probably on Church business. (Shortly before this a Mr Joseph Ledbetter of Detroit, USA, no doubt a member of the Campden family, had given the Trustees a house he had acquired in Hull, the revenue from which was to be put to the Minister for his own private use). Mr Irvine's sudden death was a loss that seems to have left the Church somewhat bereft. To quote from the annual letter to the Oxfordshire Association in 1879:

The past year has been to us one of great trial and deep sorrow. On the occasion of your last annual gathering it was our joyful privilege to receive you among us, when our beloved pastor appeared to be in the midst of his years and usefulness: but a short time afterwards was suddenly taken from the Church here to join the Church above, to our very great loss but his 'eternal gain.A number of members who were active among us have withdrawn and others have left the town. So that we are now as a few sheep lacking a shepherd.....

Some hints of the regard in which Mr Irvine was held can be gained from the *Evesham Journal* report on his funeral, for which there was a large concourse at the grave, and blinds were generally drawn in the town. The funeral was attended, not only by his family and the members and trustees of the Church, but by Ministers from other neighbouring places, by one of Campden's curates, Rev'd D.L. Pitcairn, and by Dr C. W. Morris, the Campden Surgeon, himself a supporter of many of Campden's societies, and a staunch Church of England man.

Very shortly afterwards, Mr Irvine's sister also died. Mrs Irvine and her surviving children left Campden and she seems to have lived in Leytonstone for the rest of her life. She died in London in December 1894, sixteen years after Mr Irvine, and her remains were brought to Campden to be buried by the then Pastor in the chapel graveyard, near her husband. Some years later a plaque was erected on the wall of the chapel Rev'd Irvine had been instrumental in having built. It reads:

In grateful memory of the Rev'd William Ritchie Irvine, called to rest Oct 15 1878 aged 59; the beloved and devoted pastor of this church for 10 years, By whose faith and zeal this chapel school and Manse were built and paid for.

Also of Julie Thompson his wife and helper in many good works, who fell asleep in peace Dec 17 1894 aged 70. Erected by friends 1897.

There are virtually no first-hand glimpses of Rev'd W. Ritchie Irvine. Everyone who knew him is now dead, and very little remains that is written in his own hand - other than an anniversary poem to his wife in the form of an acrostic written in the family album. Indeed, apart from that album, and because of the absence of contemporary entries in the church minute book, we know him mainly via newspaper reports. However, his name is clearly one of those deserving to be remembered with gratitude by the Baptists of Campden. To his efforts they owe the present chapel and its manse, and possibly the very survival of the Baptist cause in the town.

It may be appropriate to conclude with a contemporary tribute from a Campdonian. The following poem by Mr E. T. Haines, possibly written either in the Campden Manse, or in the Reading Room Mr Irvine was instrumental in founding, appears in the Irvine family album:

In the Library at Campden

In silent pensive mood I sit

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**And gaze upon the vacant chair.
Oh, how the memory wanders back
To him we last saw sitting there!
No more the fond endearing look,
No more the soul-inspiring voice
In accent sweet, in truth sublime
That made the heart within rejoice!
We hoped that voice should ever be
Prolonged to us whilst life was given,
To warn, to bless, to guide, to cheer
Whilst passing on to rest and heaven.**

**But now, alas, we look in vain.
The form that once was seated there
Has passed away to brighter realms,
No more to fill the vacant chair.
But yet a blissful hope is left
To light this life now bathed in gloom.
It is that we shall meet again
Within our Father's glorious name.**

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