

General Baptist Church, Coningsby.



Ter=Centenary Celebrations

1651 = 1951

Three Hundred Years' Witness.

Ter-Centenary Events

Special Services :

- Nov. 4th: Conducted by Rev. W. LAZENBY (Pastor).
- Nov. 11th: Dr. L. H. MARSHALL, M.A., B.D. (Principal of Rawdon College, Leeds).
- Nov. 14th: Tea and Re-union Gathering. Short speeches by:— Canon N. W. HAGGAR, Rev. T. A. UDY (Methodist Pastor), Mr. C. H. RADFORD (Vice-President of the E.M.B.A.), Mr. Z. GOWING (President of the County Union); and others.

PUBLIC MEETING.

Speakers : Rev. H. J. STARLING (Rishworth, Yorks.), Rev. W. J. LAIT (Ingoldmells, Lincs.) (Former Pastors).

Chairman : Rev. W. LAZENBY (Pastor).

Outline of the History of The Baptist Church, Coningsby.

The following story has been written to remind the present generation of the incidents connected with the foundation of

CONINGSBY BAPTIST CHURCH.

and the debt we owe to the faithful and courageous men and women who have preceded us.

THE FIRST SEVENTY YEARS.

The beginning of the Baptist Church in Coningsby must remain a matter for interesting speculation. Henry Denne toured the Midland Counties, preached, and founded churches. A Baptist family from Spalding, Boston, or Lincoln may have settled in the village, and one or the other may claim pride of place. The unknown few little dreamt that the cause would survive to the present day.

The records of the early years are fragmentary, some are lost, and those we possess do not begin until the year 1657. A very much worn minute book bears the inscription: This booke was bought by John Lupton at London—and is to keepe in memory such things as are of much concernment—and of special note—happings to the baptised people and churches in Lincolnshire—and in especiall for and belonging to the Congregation at Consby and Tattershall. Consby-Sept. 29th, 1657. John Lupton.

What a treasure this minute book is, as it helps us to obtain a picture of those far off days, and the life of this church. The first meeting for worship was held in Coningsby, the meeting place is unknown, perhaps, a cottage long since disappeared, and many came from a wide area to this village Bethel, this they continued to do from 1651.

For some years, the earliest date is 1703, meetings were held at Tattershall Mill, for worship and discipline. The mill is situated about half a mile from the present building used for worship, and anyone may see the mill, which is sheltered by tress, and provides adequate accommodation, as well as an open-air baptistry in the mill stream. The meetings were held there until 1718, by which time a strong church had been built up, a list of members, drawn

up in 1706, and added to for a few years later, shows a membership of 113. It would seem as if they left Tattershall Mill, and returned to worship at Coningsby in a building which stood for some years on the site of the building in use to-day.

We remember with gratitude — John Lupton, probably a founder member of the church, later Elder, and Messenger to the Baptist churches in Lincolnshire, for his labour of love, his foresight, and businesslike method in attending to the affairs of the church. His epitaph, of which a few lines may be quoted, was written by T.G., “ Thomas Grantham, I suppose,” adds Rev. Gilbert Boyce.

An epitaph on the life and death of John Lupton. Messenger of the churches in Lincolnshire:—

Thou wast both called and fitted for the thy place,
By him that is the Doner of all Grace;
Equaled by few and blest with great success,
Till——thy heaven born soul did press.

The date of his death is not recorded. With John Lupton worked harmoniously another worthy of remembrance, Charles Warwick, for the record declares : It was agreed by ye whole church—that Charles Warwick be ordained in ye office of Elder of ye Church, and that he be ordained with what——speed may be. As was the custom, he preached when needed, and presided at church meetings in the absence of the pastor. He succeeded John Lupton in the pastorate, and can be credited with 30 years' service in the church.

A name which appears frequently, at the foot of records of meetings for discipline, is that of Leonard Issac, for some years a Deacon, and later Elder of the church, he signed himself—Leo Isaac Elder. He held this office until 1723, after which time, two further references in the records show that he is no longer in office, for some reason not stated, but the last minute in which he is mentioned shows how he has endeared himself to the church, for we notice—Dec. 25th, 1725—brethren were appointed—to speak to father Isaac and desire him in all love to come to officiate in ye place of a minister amongst us upon the foot of the agreement made by the former brethren—that so the cause of our Lord may be promoted. There appears no indication that this entreaty was met by any response, so ended more than twenty years service.

The name of John Halford, also must be mentioned, he was an Elder, and appears to have succeeded to the office of leader in

the church, and continued to serve the church until the coming of Rev. G. Boyce, from which time we have a full record of the ministers of the church.

A few words may be added to remind us of those days, when faithful, and courageous men and women met for worship, as nonconformists, Baptists ran risks of heavy penalties being imposed, for all persons attending conventicles were to be fined 5/- for the first offence, 10/- for the second—the preachers were to be fined £20 for the first offence, £40 for the second—the owners of the houses, barns, buildings, or yards in which the meetings were held were to be fined £20 each time—the fines to be levied by distress and sale of the offenders' goods and chattels.

The evangelical zeal of the church is seen in the growth of the membership, already referred to, and great joy must have prevailed on Aug. 29th, 1704, at Tattershall Mill, when five young people were baptised, four about nineteen, and one about fifteen.

Later we learn of the church's concern for the young people, as we read—it was agreed—That young men meet together on ye Lords Day Morning at Nine of the clock to exercize there Gifts. Also it is recorded—That Parents Bring there Children that are capable to ye Meeting house every Lords Day After Divine Service to be caticised or Instructed into the Christian Religion.

The meetings for discipline, Gospel Discipline, were held regularly, and minutes refer to, uncharitable conduct, disputes, marriages to unbelievers, apostasy—joining the Church of England, and one brother being charged with card playing, singing in public houses, swearing, and cock-fighting, we are told—We deliver him up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh yet the spirit may be saved in Judgement.

A present day problem troubled the church, for they considered—What course ought to be taken with such as Depart from ye publik Worship of God on ye L'ds day to visit there Relations or Friends—Resolved that as it is a Breach of the Law of God and ye good laws of ye land and particularly A slight upon ye Assembly of Gods people that they be sharply rebuked.

Some offenders were publicly excommunicated, others sternly rebuked, and, happily, many were restored to fellowship.

We come upon the earnest desire of the church for the welfare of Church and State in the statement dated Feb. 4th, 1719—We agree to hold a Sollemn Fast with Prayer upon the following Considerations.

1. Ye deadness we finde in Proffessors of Christianity—our Assemblies being small and those remaining but Cold in Religion So that we have reason to fear ye Displeasure of God—ye Judgements of God that are apparent on ye Earth—more especially ye Mortality amongst our fellow Xstns, and our fellow Brethren, and Consideration of ye sins of our Nation call loudly for Humiliation. The day of Fasting and Prayer we appoint on ye 3rd day of March in this Place, if God permit.

The church shows every sign of a spiritual decline, common to most churches at the time, but the faithful few lived to see the flame of revival kindled throughout the land by the brothers, John, and Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield, and for the re-kindling of faith and zeal thankfulness and praise abounded.

Rev. GILBERT BOYCE. Pastor 1738—1800.

The Rev. Gilbert Boyce was born in the parish of Thorney, in the Isle of Ely, near Peterborough, Northamptonshire, on the 10th of March, 1713. At the age of 8 he was sent to school at Long Sutton, Lincs. to learn Latin, but later was moved to a school at Grantham. After leaving school at Grantham, he returned to Thorney Fen to live with his grandmother, as his parents by this time had moved to Worcestershire. Here he was sent to a common school to learn writing and arithmetic. At 14 he left his grandmother at Thorney Fen and went to live with his father near Evesham, Worcestershire. It was here that he first heard the Baptists, who were then preaching at Bengeworth-on-Avon. Mr. Boyce said later : " It was here that I was first strongly impressed with a sense of sin and my exceeding great need of a Saviour; and it was here that I first knew and felt the power of the Grace of God." Later he moved to Tydd St. Giles in Cambridgeshire where he kept a school. On May 27th, 1734, at the age of 21, he was baptised and received into the fellowship of the General Baptist Church at Fleet, Lincs. Some time after he moved to a school at Brothertoft, near Boston. Mr. Boyce was first called to preach at Wisbech, then at Boston, and 1738 came to Coningsby, where he laboured for 62 years until his death in 1800. He was a man of great temperance and piety, loved and respected by all who met him. He had a large family of eighteen children, twenty-four grandchildren, and fourteen great-grandchildren. In 1740 he was ordained pastor of the Church and it was said that he discharged the duties of that office in a manner which recommended him to the high esteem of the people. In 1748 he met John Wesley who was visiting Coningsby, and we can read with interest the following extract from Wesley's Journal :

“ We rode to Coningsby on the edge of the Fens. Mr. B., a Baptist minister had wrote to me in London, begging me to lodge with him whenever I came to Coningsby; but he was gone out of town that very morning. However, one rode after him and brought him back in the afternoon. I was scarce set down in his house before he fell upon the point of baptism. I waived the dispute for some time; but finding there was no remedy, I came close to the question, and we kept to it for about an hour and half. From that time we let the matter rest and confirmed our love towards each other.”

“ At seven, I preached to one of the largest congregations I had seen in Lincolnshire.”

In 1753 the Rev. Boyce was chosen as Messenger to the General Baptist Churches in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, etc. He travelled about much in this area helping and supporting the weaker churches. He continued in this office with esteem to the end of his life.

On the 30th of July 1800, he died, beloved and respected by all the General Baptist Churches. He was buried in the burial ground adjoining the Church. The funeral service was conducted by Mr. Burgess of Fleet, and there was such a great crowd present, that many had to stand outside, and lots could not get near enough to hear. With his death, the Church at Coningsby suffered a great loss, and it was their prayer that a “ Samuel would succeed a good old Eli, or a Timothy follow an aged Paul.

The following are the Pastors after the Venerable Gilbert Boyce:

Rev. W. Thomas. 1801—1804.

Rev. J. Stevenson. 1804—1810.

He went to Louth from Coningsby.

Rev. F. Cameron. 1812—1822.

He was trained at Dan Taylor's Academy, and came to Coningsby from Louth.

Rev. W. Smedley. 1822—1829.

He was also trained at Dan Taylor's Academy and he had also been at Louth.

Rev. G. Pickance. 1829—1830.

Rev. G. Judd. 1831—1858.

He not only preached in the Church at Coningsby, but also on Tuesday evenings preached at Thorpe, Tattershall, Woodside, and Old Fen Lane. It was during his ministry that the Church celebrated its Bi-centenary. In 1833 the first indoor baptistry was built; until this time candidates were baptised in the river behind the Church. In 1837 the Church was licensed for marriages. Of the Rev. Judd, his epitaph declared: "He was 27 years the faithful and laborious minister of the General Baptist Church in this town."

Rev. W. Sharman. 1859—1873.

It was during his ministry that the present Church was built, and the members met every second Monday in the month to offer prayer to God for His blessing to attend this undertaking. The plans of Mr. Sleight, of Kirton Lindsey, were accepted, and Messrs. Lee and Johnson (Builders, Coningsby), did the work for £400. The Foundation Stone was laid on April 24th, 1862, and the Church was opened for Divine Worship on Oct. 30th of the same year. The strength of the Church at this time was 44 members.

Rev. W. Jarrom. 1875—1882.

The Baptist Reporter gives this interesting detail: that he was an English General Baptist Missionary in Ningpo, China, in 1848.

Rev. A. Smith. 1882—1884.

Rev. G. Camp. 1884—1894.

Members were added to the Church, making the number 28 when he left

Rev. A. Evans. 1894—1904.

During his ministry more members were added to the Church.

Rev. T. Holehouse. 1904—1912.

Unfortunately he was blind. The children of the Sunday school and village loved to lead him about, although that was not necessary as he could find his way about very well. Between 50 and 60 children attended a meeting he held on Wednesday nights, and several came on Sunday mornings to hear his children's addresses.

Rev. H. J. Starling. 1914—1917.

In 1914 the Manse was built and he was the first occupant. During his ministry members were added, and the Church was generally well filled on Sunday evenings.

Rev. P. H. Chase. 1918—1919.

He was Pastor of Coningsby and Horncastle and occupied the Manse at Coningsby. He preached at Horncastle once a month.

Rev. W. J. M. Lord. 1920—1923.

During his ministry the pipe organ was installed in the Church. It came from Horncastle as did the Communion Chairs.

Rev. A. E. Caudron. 1924—1931.

He had the great joy of baptising many young people and seeing them become pillars in the Church.

Rev. J. T. Isles. April 1933—October 1933.

It was extremely sad that owing to an illness he had to resign after a ministry of 3 months.

Rev. H. R. Byatt. 1934—1939.

The Church benefited much by his frequent visits to his people. During his ministry the electric lighting system was installed; thus adding to the comfort and convenience of worship.

Rev. W. J. Lait. 1939—1947.

His ministry was simultaneous with the war years and the difficulties they presented; but the Church had the pleasure of sharing the fellowship of many in the Services. He did much to help and encourage the Service Personnel in the district.

Rev. W. Lazenby. 1947—

The present Pastor, the Rev. W. Lazenby, came to Coningsby in 1947. During his ministry much interest has been stimulated among the young people, and it is gratifying to note that above half the active workers in the Church are young people. He is also doing an important work as O.D. Padre on the R.A.F. Station, Coningsby.

The outline, thus far, has dealt with the History of the Cause with special reference to the various ministers, but note should be recorded of the fact that the Church has not only been blessed by these faithful and devoted ministers, but also by noble men and women, who through successive generations have given of their best, by their prayers, gifts and service. These loyal workers, both young and old, are too numerous to mention during a period of 300 years, and for them we give praise and thanks to Almighty God.

We are also indebted to the Methodist Local Preachers of the district, who, during the intervals when the Church has been without a minister, have so willingly filled the pulpit.

The work of the Church is to preach the Gospel, for which we know of no substitute. Christ is the only hope of the World. May our prayer be that the Church be kept faithful to its mission, triumphant in faith, always abiding in Christ. In conclusion, let our motto be:—

“ Attempt great things for God, and expect great things from God.”

The present numerical strength of the Church and its auxiliaries is as follows:—

Deacons	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2
Church Members	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	23
Sunday School Teachers	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	7
Sunday School Scholars	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	34
Young People's Fellowship	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	25
I.B.R.A.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	18

November, 1951.

1951.

CHURCH.

Pastor : Rev. W. LAZENBY.

Deacons : Mr. F. SELLARS, Mr. W. THACKER.

Secretary : Mr. F. SELLARS.

Treasurer : Mr. W. THACKER.

SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Superintendent : Rev. W. LAZENBY.

Deputy Superintendent: Mr. ROY HODGSON.

Secretary : Mrs. F. SELLARS.

Treasurer : Mrs. E. FRANKLIN.

FELLOWSHIP.

President : Rev. W. LAZENBY.

Secretary : Mr. GORDON HODGSON.

Treasurer : Miss ELSIE THACKER.

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