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The Church at Shelfanger.

THE Church at Shelfanger was originally a branch of the Church at Beccles. A secession took place during the ministry of Thomas Tingey (1736-1749) who was pastor of the Congregational Church at Beccles. A number of Baptists wished to secure the benefit of Edward Simmons' ministry at Rushall. Mr. Simmons lived at Beccles so the Rushall Church was transferred there. This took place in 1741, when an application was made to the Board for help to build a chapel. Mr. Simmons united the remnant of Rushall and Pulham St. Mary members with those who seceded. About the year 1759 Mr. Simmons died, and Robert Robinson was invited to take the pastorate, but declined and went to Cambridge. It is interesting that Edward Simmons took part in the ordination of John Stearne at St. Mary's, Norwich, and at the ordination of Edward Trivett at Worstead. After the death of Edward Simmons the cause greatly declined at Beccles. It is possible a remnant may have been left, but by 1774 they were in a very low state. About the year 1762 or 1763 the Church, being without a minister, and only having a minister occasionally, applied to Mr. Edward Trivett of Worstead, Mr. William Cole of Great Yarmouth, and Mr. Henry Utting at Claxton for help, and about the year 1763, these ministers occasionally preached to them about once a month. Thomas Purdy, the son-in-law of Edward Trivett, had been sent out to preach by the Worstead Church and during most of 1764 preached at Rushall, but in January 1765, he left to go to Rye. Their next step was to apply to Mr. John Hitchcock of Wattisham, and Mr. Samuel Sowden of Wolverstone, and they had a monthly supply again.

The old Rushall Minute Book contains some interesting entries of these early days. The following is a copy of the entries for 1763.

The accmpt of the money Re ^d From the Fund and collected in the Church in the year 1763. March 13.	£	S.	D.
Received from the Fund march 13, 1763	2	15	0
Re ^d May 8 by collection of the Church	0	8	6
Re ^d June 12 by Collection of the Church	0	2	0
Re ^d July 31 by collection of the Church	0	19	0
Re ^d August 14 by collection	0	1	0
Re ^d October 23 of Mr. Utting	0	10	6
Re ^d October 30 by collection of the Church	1	0	6
Collected in the whole	5	16	6

The account of the Money Disburst in Church For the Support of the Minister, and other occasions.

		£	S.	D.
March 13, 1763. The account of the money Disburst in the year 1763				
Paid to Mr. Trivett	March 13th, 1763	...	0	10 6
paid to Mr. Purdy	April 10th	...	0	10 0
paid to Mr. Corbin	April 10th for horses keeping	...	0	2 6
paid to Mr. Purdy	May 8th	...	0	10 6
paid to Mr. Purdy	June 12	...	0	15 0
paid to Mr. Cole	July 3	...	0	10 0
paid to Mr. Purdy	July 17	...	0	8 0
paid to Mr. Purdy	July 31	...	0	8 0
paid to Mr. Corbin	July 31 for horses keeping	...	0	6 6
paid to Mr. Purdy	Sep. 11th	...	0	8 0
paid to Mr. Purdy	October 2	...	0	10 6
paid to Mr. Purdy	October 30	...	0	8 0
paid to Mr. Purdy	Dec. 4	...	0	10 6
paid to Mr. Corbin	Dec 4 for horses keeping	...	0	4 0
paid to Mr. Purdy	Dec. 18	...	0	10 3
Disburst in all		...	6	12 3

The accounts do not balance, and one wonders who paid the difference. These accounts were made before the Church was actually established.

The entries in the year 1765 contain the following :

“ Paid to Wells Jillings for troubling his house 0 2 0 ”

“ Paid to Wells Jillings for the use of his house 0 2 6 ”

This was evidently the meeting place of the Church.

“ paid to Wm. Richards for letters ... 0 0 6 ”

On September 30th, 1765 the Church was settled, meeting at Rushall. The account records that Thomas Smith, Charles Mortlock and Mary Murrel, upon profession of their faith in Christ, were baptised, by Edward Trivett. These three were probably baptised in the River Waveney near Harleston, in Norfolk. These three members joined with the nine members from Beccles to form the Church. The members from Beccles were Thomas Gowing, William Barnes, William Shilling, William Richards, William Johnson, Susanna Richards, Sarah Richards, Prudence Jillings, and Martha Shilling. These twelve “ In Love Devoted ourselves to the Lord, and to one another by the will of God, and were

planted into a Church by the instrumentality of the beloved Mr. Trivett."

After the Church had in this manner been united, the members endeavoured to fill up their vacant Sabbaths by prayer, and reading a Sermon, and in the spring they used to set a text of scripture for every one of their male members "to speak their thoughts upon it."

The accounts also record that on May 19th, 1766 two shillings and four pence was paid for a Church Book, and on July 30th a sum of seven shillings and three pence was paid for "the Tablecloth and the napkin."

On the 3rd of August 1766, the Church recognised that Thomas Smith, through the talks that he had given on the texts of scripture, was destined to be a preacher of the Gospel and on that day sent him forth. The interest increased at Shelfanger, and a barn was repaired for a Meeting House. In the accounts there is an entry of £1 2s. 1d. towards this meeting house, but it was not opened until on or about the 24th of November, 1768.

On the opening day the ministers attending were Edward Trivett, Henry Utting, Samuel Sowden, John Hitchcock, Jabez Brown, John Brown, and Samuel Fisher. The bringing together of these ministers, all being Particular Baptists, led them to consider the formation of an Association. This talk ultimately led to the beginning of the "Norfolk and Suffolk Association" actually commenced in 1769. Thomas Smith was born at Fressingfield, Suffolk, on January 27th, 1736. He heard the Gospel and was converted under Thomas Purdy, who soon removed to Rye in Sussex. Edward Trivett baptised Thomas Smith on the day the Church was formed at Rushall, September 30th, 1765. He was chosen a deacon on May 19th, 1766 and had frequent baptisms. He was called to the work of the ministry by the Church on August 3rd, 1766, and was ordained on June 21st, 1769, when Mr. Trivett gave the charge to the minister and Mr. Hitchcock to the people, Mr. Henry Utting was also present on that occasion and these four ministers agreed to meet at Wattisham on the first Wednesday in August, 1769 for the purpose of founding the Association.

Thomas Smith married Kezia Gooch who had been baptised by the Rev. Mr. Hunt on April 13th, 1766, and had joined the Church on that date. They had nine children. Mr. Smith removed to Fersfield on October 30th, 1772.

Several members of the Church were sent out from time to time to preach. John Brown, received from the Yarmouth Church, was sent out to preach on May 1st, 1768. He was present at the opening of the barn. John Calton of Winfarthing, Edward Manser of Bunwell, who founded the Church at Horham, and

probably also Warren Garrod went from the Shelfanger Church. William Wales Horne, who became pastor at Yarmouth was also a member. Altogether eight were set apart, the last being either Simon Tipple or Jonas Smith.

The deacons who served during Thomas Smith's ministry were all "solemnly set apart by the lifting up of the hands."

The records say that four churches were formed, but do not state which. It is probable that they were Kenninghall, Attleborough, Carleton Rode, and Wymondham or Horham.

In sentiment Thomas Smith was a Supralapsarian. He composed eleven hundred hymns, out of which William Ward of Diss selected a hundred and published them under the title "Original Hymns by Mr. Thomas Smith." These hymns were published after his death with a brief memoir. Edward Manser of Horham transcribed five hundred of these hymns declaring "that the pleasure he had himself received in the perusal of them had more than amply repaid him for all his labour."

Both of the families of the Mansers and the Smiths lost their landed properties at their death. Mr. Smith took great interest in the welfare of other churches. He ordained Robert Bunn at Necton in May, 1796, and delivered the charge to the minister at the ordination of William Wales Horne at Yarmouth on December 21st, 1797. He also continued to take an active interest in the Norfolk and Suffolk Association. He was 47 years pastor during which time two hundred were baptised. He died at his home at Fersfield on December 13th, 1813, at the age of 77. The circumstances of his funeral were very peculiar. He was buried "at his chapel at Shelfanger. . . . The coffin was placed in his own waggon, preceded by his bearers, and the singers of his congregation, chaunting a funeral dirge; the waggon was drawn by his own team, and besides the coffin which was covered over with a waggon tilt for a pall, the corn sacks belonging to it were stuffed with straw, and being placed round the coffin, served for seats for his children, all in deep mourning. Behind the waggon followed the chief mourner; this was his own riding horse attached by a bridle."

Jeremiah Hubbard was the next pastor. He was born in 1775, and was baptised at Worstead in 1795. He requested the Worstead Church to send him out to preach in the year 1798, but as he had removed to Yarmouth, permission was not given. However, on December 9th, 1804, the Worstead Church dismissed him to Yarmouth, and the next year he was sent out by that Church. In 1807 he settled at Wymondham, and in 1815 removed to Shelfanger. Jeremiah Hubbard married Judith Jackson and they had five children. About seventy persons were received into the Church during his ministry, and it was during his ministry

that the chapel was built. In 1819, the Norfolk and Suffolk Association meetings were held at Shelfanger. At that time a large booth was erected for the crowds which flocked to the meetings. This is the first mention of an arrangement which is perpetuated in the Association Tent of the present Strict Baptists. In November, 1826, Mr. Hubbard was invited to preach at Lowestoft, this he did with great acceptance, but could not accept the pastorate as he had promised to settle at Aldringham in Suffolk. During the latter end of Mr. Hubbard's life he suffered much from depression of spirits and mental debility, which shortened his usefulness and led him to resign. He died at Chelmondiston, Suffolk.

Mr. Hubbard was succeeded by John Clarke, a man of good natural abilities and preaching talents, but from various causes the Church declined during his ministry, and he left at Easter 1834, having occupied the pulpit for ten years. It is possible that this John Clarke was sent out by the Walsham-le-Willows Church in 1824, and at the end of his ministry at Shelfanger settled at Great Oakley in 1836.

The next pastor was Thomas Winter, a schoolmaster from Reepham. He settled apparently in the autumn of 1834. The beginning of his ministry was very successful. In June 1835, the minutes record: "The Lord having blessed the labours of our Pastor so that our Meeting House became too small to contain with comfort the number of persons who wished to attend, it was unanimously resolved that two galleries should be erected." Before the work was begun a subscription was set on foot, many came forward very liberally and the alteration was soon completed. The amount of carpenter's, glazier's, smith's and mason's bills was £38 7s. 6d. The galleries were opened on Whit-Tuesday, and collections were made. The services of the day were truly interesting and the attendance was very great. The collection amounted to £14. There was a Prayer Meeting previous to the opening day, and on the following day Cornelius Elven preached both morning and afternoon, and in the evening Simon Borret Gooch preached. "We hope the Lord's Presence was with us, and that much good was done" is the note in the minutes.

An advance was made in the history of the Church when on July 5th, 1835, a Sunday School was formed.

There was at that time an Association known as "The Friendly Association." In the year 1837, it consisted of the four churches, Kenninghall, Attleborough, Carleton Rode and Shelfanger. These meetings were held on Good Fridays, and a meeting of this kind was held at Shelfanger during that year.

During the first three years of Thomas Winter's ministry more members were added to the Church than in any similar

period. "Scarcely, however, had we plucked the rose of prosperity than the bitter thorns of adversity pierced us." A separation took place of a very painful and melancholy nature. Thomas Winter left in September 1837, and a year later the following statement was entered in the minutes. "As a Church we have had to sustain a severe shock through the gross inconsistency of our late pastor Thomas Winter who fell so grievously as at once to silence himself and render his separation and departure necessary."

For a time the pulpit was occupied by various supplies, but in May 1838, through the influence of Cornelius Elven, John Dallison came to them from Bury. He accepted the call for a year and then went on to Sible Hedingham. A Mr. Carto next supplied, but was not invited. Then came Joseph Caldwell Wyke from Hunmanby for twelve months, but not being generally received, he left in 1841 for Whitechurch. The Good Friday meetings were held again at Shelfanger in 1841.

Robert Enefer Webster from Kingston started work there in April 1841. In 1842 Enos Holding, one of the members, was called to minister in the villages. Mr. Webster remained only two and a half years and then left for Dorman's Land.

In November 1844, George Ward from Tittleshall "was invited to the helm of the Church, and though a man of exemplary piety and one who desired and patiently laboured for the good of souls, no gale of prosperity attended to cheer the church or sustain the pastor."

In 1844 rules for the conduct of the Sunday School were drawn up and entered in the Church Book. A Scripture ticket was given each week to scholars who repeated their lessons correctly, and another to those whose conduct was good and who had attended both morning and evening. Twelve Scripture tickets could be exchanged for one picture ticket, and every picture ticket was of the value of one penny in rewards. The school met at nine o'clock and one o'clock, and it was particularly laid down that reading and spelling was part of the instruction. In that same year the Church made application to the Baptist Fund for support and received £6. The "Friendly Association" met again on Good Friday 1845. Eight dinners were provided for the ministers at "The Crown," the charge being twelve shillings to the Church.

"On Lord's Day, April 6th, a Petition to Parliament against the Maynooth Grant was read to the congregation and signed one hundred and fifty seven names."

In 1845 the use of the vestry was granted to Mr. Ward for the purpose of teaching a Day School. In the same year the church applied for admission to the Suffolk and Norfolk Association.

There is a curious note concerning the singing in the Sunday School. On February 22nd, 1846, Brother Jolly proposed that with a view to ascertain what talent there is for singing amongst the Sunday School children and with a view to improve it that the children be assembled in the body of the chapel for singing and prayer previous to their being taught in the gallery. This proposition was agreed to.

In 1846 the question of Strict or Open Communion was faced by the Church. There is a curious reference which says that "the strict communion principle being in the eye of Mr. Elven" was one reason why the Association should be broken up. The answer of the Church was that they were decidedly strict on the communion question and intended to appoint messengers to the Annual Meeting.

The ministry of George Ward ended in 1847, when he left for Bradfield St. George. In the July following, Thomas Winter was received back into the church on a profession of faith, and occupied the pulpit. The Church fell evidently into a sad state, for the minutes record: "The high tide of prosperity referred to in his former ministrations by no means returned with the latter. The Church gradually declined to the lowest ebb it had ever known since the early years of its formation."

Some of the minutes of Church Meetings carry a certain amount of humour. Here are two records quite complete. The first records: "1848 April 30 Church met and after imploring the Divine Guidance we came to a unanimous conclusion to have a Public Tea Meeting on June 20." Then on "1853 Feb. 27, Church met—after prayer it was deeply regretted that so little interest was taken in Church Meetings, and having nothing to attend to the meeting was adjourned."

In 1853 the Church drew up a Petition against the Education Bill which was sent to Parliament. There were two hundred and fifty people present when this was passed. In the next year a kind of clothing club was suggested for the children of the Sunday School. The children had to pay something weekly and money was added by subscriptions.

Thomas Winter left in May 1855, and was later transferred to Earl Soham, but the membership had declined to twenty-nine members.

"The feeble band of disciples were not however, deserted by the Great Head of the Church." Barnabus Burroughes of Attleborough, who had been preaching at Wymondham became pastor. There were cheering marks of Divine Goodness. Five were baptised and one restored. Mr. Burroughes had settled in 1855, but in 1857 after an illness of nine months, "borne with fortitude and Christian submission" he passed away. His death was

regretted by a bereaved church and a large circle of friends.

Richard Bryant Horne was the next pastor. He was born in 1827. He appeared before the Kenninghall Church and related his experience, and was accepted for membership. He was received into the Shelfanger church in 1859 and ordained pastor on June 13th, 1859. Mr. Gooch of Fakenham delivered the charge to the minister and Mr. Hill of Stoke Ash the exhortation to the people.

During this time the Church felt great concern over the neighbouring villages. A house was opened at Bressingham, and a chapel was built at a cost of about £60, and was at first used for week-evening and Sunday services only. It was opened by Mr. Hoddy of Horham in 1859.

The Centenary services were held in 1865. The chapel was repainted and repaired at a cost of £15. Three sermons were preached on October 1st, 1865 by Charles H. Hoskens of Norwich, and on the Monday George Wright of Beccles preached, and the evening meeting contained "animated addresses." On October 6th, after an affectionate address from Mr. Porcher, the pastor was presented with a purse containing £6 10s. 0d. by Mr. W. Jarrett. Mr. Horne's pastorate had been marked with quiet but real success. Thirty-four had been received by baptism and seven others received. There were at least fifteen villages from which the members of the congregation came during his ministry. Mr. Horne died at Carleton Rode in 1893.

The next minister was Thomas Henry Sparham, who commenced his ministry on September 2nd, 1866. Mr. Sparham was born on July 26th, 1823 at Brighton. He was converted to God at seventeen years of age, and consecrated every talent to his Lord. In Diss and neighbourhood he was highly esteemed as a preacher before he was thirty years of age. In 1853 he undertook the care of the Old Buckenham Baptist Church. During the week he worked as an upholsterer in Diss, and went on Sundays to his "Bishopric," a distance of ten and a half miles each way. Sometimes he was met on the way by a friend with a pony and trap, and sometimes he walked the whole distance. Mr. Sparham's recognition services at Shelfanger were combined with the Harvest services on September 12th, 1866. For nearly nine years of his ministry Mr. Sparham continued with his trade, but about July 1875 the Church being unanimous in their desire for him to continue his ministry among them, he devoted his whole time to the work.

In 1867 alterations were made to the chapel and repairs to the roof at a cost of £36.

Good Friday "Friendly Association" meetings continued to be held in the Churches. Services were held at Shelfanger in 1868

and 1871. By February 1st, 1871 the Church membership had risen to eighty-eight.

In 1874 on February 22nd, there is this note: "To-day was the opening service with the harmonium played by Mr. Wm. Jarrett."

Thomas Henry Sparham left Shelfanger in 1878. He was a man of great sensitiveness. He would neither cry nor strive, nor let his voice be heard in angry speech. In consequence of his intense shrinking from all conflict he left the ministry and went to Doncaster for three years. In those days there was no Baptist Church there, so he worshipped and laboured with the Wesleyans.

In 1882 he was invited back to Norfolk to take charge of the work at Necton. On leaving Doncaster high testimonials were given him both from his fellow workman and the Wesleyan Superintendent. He later worked at Great Ellingham, and retired in October 1897. The simplicity of character and life of Mr. Sparham was unique. With a fund of humour and pathos akin to genius, and a tender, sympathetic, sensitive nature he endeared himself to all. A great domestic affliction overshadowed his life, but was borne with uncomplaining meekness. In early life he was an intense Calvinist, in maturer years he held wider views of the divine love.

J. Miller Hamilton wrote of him: "A man of saintly character, a very good pastor, and able to speak in a way which commanded the attention of his hearers. A man of sanctified common sense, with power to attract and hold his congregation and the good name of the entire neighbourhood." He died on July 16th, 1898.

After Mr. Sparham's resignation, Mr. C. Hewitt from Hitchen, Herts, preached for several Sundays but was not invited to the Pastorate, but on July 27th, 1879, Mr. A. E. Spicer was invited and accepted and commenced his ministry on November 3rd. At the same meeting the church adopted the use of "Our Own Hymn Book." On September 26th, 1880 Mr. Spicer, having changed his views, resigned.

In February 1881 it was agreed that George Bird Dearle, who had been minister at Felthorpe should be invited to preach, and commenced his ministry on May 1st.

The church joined the Suffolk and Norfolk Baptist Association on March 4th, 1882. Mr. Dearle's recognition services were held on May 30th, 1882. S. K. Bland of Ipswich gave the charge to the minister and Thomas John Ewing gave the charge to the church.

During 1883, in the months of May and June, the chapel was altered and repaired at a cost of between £60 and £90. The

building was also insured and licensed for marriages. In 1887 a Loan Tract Society was formed for Shelfanger.

George Bird Dearle resigned in 1892 and accepted an invitation to Pulham St. Mary. His death was a tragedy for he was killed in his own pulpit, on March 24th, 1895. There was a great storm and wind blew the roof off the chapel and a part of the end wall fell upon him. Several members of the congregation were also hurt. Great sympathy was shown to the bereaved in the churches around and financial help was given.

The last pastor was Amos John Jarrett. He commenced in September 1892. He had previously been a member at Hethersett.

A rule was passed by the Church in 1896 that members not attending the Lord's Supper for six observances would not be regarded as members.

In November 1898, the pastor removed his residence from Redenhall to Shelfanger. His ministry appears to have been a very faithful one, but little success attended the work as many of the older members passed to their eternal home.

In 1906 repairs were undertaken both in connection with the Shelfanger and Bressingham Chapels at a cost of nearly £31.

Mr. Jarrett resigned in 1909 but continued as a member, and in 1914 he again became pastor. In 1915 the pastor made a gift to the church of £20 for bricking the end of the chapel. The trust deeds were deposited with the Strict Baptists of London for safe custody. Mr. Jarrett resigned in May 1922 after a term of thirty years.

Since then the work has continued in a small way, but the membership continued to decline, and in 1942 the church was almost extinct. This was partly due to the loss of population in the country and the ease with which members can now journey from one place to another.

MAURICE F. HEWETT.