
A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Discipline and Ordination at Berkhamsted General Baptist Church, 1712-1718

THE OLDEST extant minute book of Berkhamsted Baptist Church, in Buckinghamshire, covers the periods 1712-1755 and 1775-1781. The minutes are bound in a quarto volume of 256 pages, with entries in rough chronological order, as though copied from somewhat disordered loose notes. This book, along with the one covering 1784-1851, is now in the custody of Berkhamsted Baptist Church.

In his history of the English General Baptists, Adam Taylor makes reference to two older Berkhamsted church books, one beginning with 9 November, 1676,[1] and the other spanning the years 1688-1706.[2] Regrettably, both books have been lost, making Taylor's picture of the church's earliest years virtually indispensable. The Berkhamsted church is known to have existed prior to 1661.[3] By 1676, it boasted one elder, John Russell, five or six deacons, and over one hundred members. This number grew to around 250 by 1700, and increased to over 400 during the next six years. In 1712, a meeting house was built at Chesham, where there existed one "side" or branch of the tripartite congregation, Tring completing the triangle. "Ministering brethren" from these three "sides" supplied more than 18 different preaching points between 1712 and 1755. Chesham meeting house was enlarged in 1735 and a baptistry added in 1753. Tring acquired a building around 1750.

Of all churches in the Buckinghamshire Association, Berkhamsted was apparently best equipped for survival. When the Associational Meeting adjourned in October 1760, the following note was entered in the minutes: "Thus ended the Association's [quarterly meeting]. None but Barkhamsted Church Appearing The other Sistr Churches being Entirely Decay'd & Broke off from us Because they were too stiff in their mode of faith".[4] What were Berkhamsted's other sources of strength, in addition to its flexible "mode of faith"?

First, the church found capable leadership in such men as John Russell who, in 1682, covenanted with eight other brethren to share in the costs of fines, incurred as a result of religious persecution. Thomas Monck (Moncke), a member of the church, was a subscriber to the 1654 manifesto of the General Assembly, and contributed to an excellent treatise on religious liberty, entitled *Sion's Groans for her Distressed.* Monck was reputedly the author of *An Orthodox Creed* which, in 1678, united churches from four counties against the dangers of papism. In later years, Berkhamsted benefited from the pastoral care of such men as Thomas Sexton, who ministered in their midst no less than 57 years. Sexton's grandson, Edward, likewise served for a phenomenal 54 years.

Secondly, Berkhamsted practised rigorous disciplining of its

members. The period 1712-1755 was one of extensive disciplinary activity. With few exceptions, however, the accounts of these proceedings lack enough detail from which to draw adequate conclusions regarding the intricacies of disciplinary procedure. For example, at least 36 members are known to have been suspended from the Lord's Table, and 35 excommunicated from the fellowship of the church. Fifty-one excluded brethren were restored to "full communion" during this 43-year period, which indicates that correctional measures could often produce positive results. Of all offences, exogamy (marriage with an unbaptized person) was most common, followed by drunkenness and neglect of worship. The order in which a sinner was dealt with was uniform. First, he was reported to the church, who then set forth a formal charge by means of a summons, delivered to him personally. Therewith was an order citing him before the church at a forthcoming disciplinary meeting. Depending upon the gravity of his sin, as adjudged by the church, correction took the form of admonishment, suspension or excommunication. Whatever the sentence, restoration was always dependent upon his sincere repentance, to the church's satisfaction.[5]

The case of Jonathan Widmer provides us with so much detail concerning discipline that it is particularly instructive. The Berkhamsted minutes, in an entry for 2nd January 1712,[6] recorded the nomination of Jonathan Widmer and Thomas Foster to the office of Elder, these men being given until the next church meeting "to shew their reasons why they are not willing". Curiously, their appointments received no further mention in the minutes until January 1713, when they were "once more proposed", indicating either that they had previously refused or that their nomination had been opposed. Berkhamsted was in dire need of leadership at this time, for death had lately removed three of its elders. In fact, a minute of 5 September 1712, states: "It hiveing [sic] pleased Allmighty God to take to himselfe our brethren which ware used to serve us in the capasity of Elders [John Russell of Berkhamsted; J. Castledine of St. Albans; Thomas Basting of Coney Street][7] and there being now but one left [John Cook] and we being many in number and our places of abode being wide the one from the other it hath been thought fit to chuse another person to serve in that capacity". Therewith, Jonathan Woodward, who had been proposed in May 1712, was nominated and chosen. However, his name never again appeared in the church book, causing one to wonder whether he was ever ordained. To say Foster and Widmer merely underwent a twelve-month approbation period, is to forget the celerity with which Woodward was approved, for he was proposed, nominated and chosen in less than half that time. How, then, may the twelve-month delay be explained? In the face of impending opposition, the nominees must have adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Indeed, their caution was justified, as the seven years of ensuing controversy would confirm.

After the nominees had been "once more proposed", a hearing was scheduled for the recognition of any opposition. While no

dissent was voiced at this hearing, which took place in March 1713, another was planned for two weeks later, in order to give Chesham, which had not been officially notified of the previous meeting, a "fair choice". Surely, Chesham had been given casual notice of the hearing, since it had been scheduled two months in advance, in response to an urgent need. Yet the lack of formal notification was used an an excuse to stall plans to promote Widmer. In this ticklish situation, the Chesham members reverted to legalism, which was far more effective than suggesting they were deliberately barred from the meeting.

At the appointed time and place, 20 members from Chesham appeared and, with one accord, denounced the candidacy of Jonathan Widmer. However, "by reason of Bro. Neales funerall", they could find no one to "take and answer their objections". Undaunted, they formulated and subscribed a statement of protest, disclaiming Widmer as one who lacked "a good report within and without, as saith 1st Timothy 3:7,8". Oddly, another year elapsed before the matter received further attention in the minutes. At a gathering in April 1714, "some persons at Chesham shewed their dislike to Brother Widmer being chosen as their Elder", thereby causing another enquiry to be scheduled for the following Tuesday, at Chesham, "to appear about twelve a clock". Widmer's accusers were summoned before the church, to determine whether "the church or the world might saye justly he had dun evill in to such a degree that he ought . . . not be chosen". The word "justly" should be underscored, for within this complex case, there arose three interpretations of justice, held by three parties within the same congregation, each party basing its interpretation upon scriptural principles, and each thinking it had the truth. Most disciplinary cases in the minutes involved only two factions—the offender and the church, the latter enjoying supremacy in both the definition and execution of justice. Widmer's case introduced a triangular conflict, with subtle, interacting tensions, challenging the church's judgments and forcing it to re-evaluate them.

The hearing proved to be a rather fruitless, if not embarrassing, occasion for the antagonists, who had "nothing of their own knoledge . . . to prove against him". Sister Adkinnson claimed that Widmer, on one occasion four years earlier, had falsely accused her of theft. Widmer did not attempt to answer her charge.

By recalling one of the defendant's more abashing crimes, Benjamin Wheeler[8] depicted him as a deceitful glutton. It seems Jonathan had been entrusted to deliver some choice delicacies to a gentleman, from a kinswoman. While on the way, he and some companions ate the succulent morsels, and "burnt the letter which came with them to keep all from being discovered". Jonathan acknowledged his guilt, but assured the church "he never did such a thing before nor since . . . and intends not to do so anymore". The church[9] adjudged that "since it was so long ago and Bror Wheeler hath had communion with Bror Widmer ever since it ought not to have

been mentioned now upon this occasion neither can it be a just reason against our Bror Widmer being an Elder". Here we recognize a cardinal principle of General Baptist fellowship: communion presupposed reconciliation. Wheeler also recalled an instance in which Widmer "did disparage another man's goods", thereby causing that man to say "he thought their was not an honest man amongest us". When Widmer explained it as an innocent mistake, in which no malice had been intended, the church gave him the benefit of the doubt. Furthermore, they agreed that Wheeler was "to blame to medle with it, it being not anything which concerns his person". Indeed, these petty and insipid allegations probably revealed much more about the accusers than the accused. Later evidence suggests that their testimonies were merely a smokescreen, obscuring a more basic objection.

William Adams alleged that Widmer "once in harvest told some maids that if they would go on the other side of the hedge he could quikly warme them and so made the people laugh at him and in a jesting manner said because he would be like one of the pasons [peasants] he would kiss the girles and so did kiss one of them". As stories go, however, this one had two sides. Actually, Widmer was helping a neighbour rake some corn, when a shower of rain forced the workers to seek shelter. When the girls complained of being chilled, Widmer jokingly replied as aforesaid, i.e. if they would join him in returning to work, they would soon grow warm. Strangely, Adams himself testified that he meant nothing else. Realizing the ridiculous position of his opponents, Widmer went on to confess he did "in the middle of the feild set down his rake and did (upon some dareing words which were spoken) kiss one or both of them maids which ware at work with him". The church dismissed this entire episode as a harmless incident of the past, uncharacteristic of Widmer, and void of evil intentions. Their judgment throws some light on the nature of a punishable offence, i.e. a premeditated act, of the not too distant past, in which evil was unmistakably intended.

Throughout this controversy and beyond, Adams' behaviour was less than consistent. First, he was offended by Widmer, yet sat with him at the Lord's table. Secondly, he brought damaging testimony against the accused, and then confessed it to be an empty charge. Thirdly, by submitting to Foster's conditions of election, he gave Widmer a vote of confidence. In fact, he was later asked to testify on Widmer's behalf, although there is no evidence that he did so. Perhaps this is why Widmer later identified him as one by whom he had been especially offended.

Mary Hobbs claimed that she knew Widmer to be a liar, but could not prove it. She considered him to be a hypocrite, because he had refused to settle a dispute with her by casting lots, something which he had agreed to do with William Chase. Widmer believed the use of lots was "to[o] sakred a thing to be used at the pleasure of men; upon there yeas and neas", and went along with Chase "only as a thing indeferent, not to prove the one or the other infailably

guilty, but by consent to drop the controversy". He questioned the practice, because God's will was "so plainly reveiled in his word". Since his testimony was equal to that of Mary Hobbs, the church could only leave the matter to God and their consciences.

Thus, with none of the charges substantiated, the church saw no reason to bar Widmer from ordination, together with Thomas Foster. Yet, to insure peace, the elder John Cook (with the church's consent) proposed that the dissenters should persuade Foster immediately to assume office, on condition that he would agree to a temporary postponement of Widmer's ordination. On Wednesday 28 April 1714 at Chesham, "our ffriends who ware not satisfied with Bror Widmer" approached Foster with Cook's suggestion. He agreed to serve without Widmer for one year only and on the following conditions: "all old matters which had been heard and ended by the church in times past" were to be laid aside; and no new charges were to be raised "as a just reason to object against" Widmer's ordination within the following twelve months. Thirteen of the dissidents accepted Foster's conditions; only nine of them were among the original 20 objectors. Mary Hobbs and Benjamin Wheeler did not agree to the compromise and later emerged as ringleaders in the campaign against Widmer.

Closer attention should be given to Elder John Cook, the most outstanding figure in the church at this time. As early as 1697, he represented Berkhamsted at the General Association in White's Alley, Moorfields, and probably became pastor around 1700.[10] Indeed, in 1701, he was listed as an Elder, among those who attended the General Association meetings. In 1717, the General Assembly requested the church's consent to his ordination as a Messenger, but permission was not granted. At least two reasons may be suggested for their refusal: first, it was General Baptist practice to allow a minister to fulfil only the role to which he had been ordained; and secondly, the congregation were probably reluctant to forfeit his valuable services. Although Taylor indicates that Berkhamsted "yielded at length", the minutes contain no such record.[11] Cook became inactive around 1736, due to illness, and probably died before 1744. A clue to his popularity as a pastor may be seen in the clever proposal regarding Foster's ordination. At a stroke he succeeded in forestalling conflict (in the immediate future), gaining a co-worker, and protecting Widmer's nomination, with a view to his eventual election.

On Friday 14 May 1714, Foster's ordination was scheduled for "this day month at Chesham . . . at ten a clock". That Widmer enjoyed the confidence of most members, is seen by his appointment on the same day to preach at the "General Meeting of all the members of this congregation . . . next Lords Day come three weeks to begin at ten a clock". Although the picture is far from complete, it is possible to make a few inferences concerning the variety of church-meetings held by this congregation. Normally, disciplinary meetings occurred once a month, beginning at one

o'clock, on Friday afternoons. They usually included these elements: (1) appointment of preachers; (2) financial accounts; (3) disciplining offenders; and (4) arranging the next meeting. As early as 1717, the form of the meetings was amended to include a preaching service, probably in preparation for the Lord's Supper. Of the 390 disciplinary meetings for which the church book provides dated minutes, one occurred at Whelplyhill, four at Bedmond, six at Tring, 184 at Chesham, and 195 at Berkhamsted. Of course there are numerous meetings alluded to in the text, for which we have no minutes. There were also special gatherings, such as fasts and ordinations, which could be held on any day and usually began at 9 a.m. General Meetings of all sides of the congregation probably took place on a quarterly basis, highlighted by preaching and the breaking of bread. There are records of such General Meetings being held on Fridays and Lord's Days, beginning at 2 p.m. and 10 a.m. respectively.

Nearly two years passed before Widmer's name found further mention in the minutes. It was at a meeting in March 1716,[12] held at Chesham, that he made the surprising request "to be excused from preaching as he saith for divers good reasons". The one year limit, as set by Foster, had long since terminated, yet Widmer was not in office. Although further objections had been forthcoming, there is no reason to believe that the church officially denied Widmer the right to office. On the contrary, he voluntarily withdrew his candidacy. Caution should be exercised in interpreting his request, for Widmer did not want to lay down the office of deacon,[13] but merely shun an appointment within that office—the preaching ministry. Furthermore, it is significant that Widmer chose to communicate with the church by letter only, for he must have been deeply hurt. The church sent word to him, via Thomas Foster, indicating its willingness to hear his side of the story at the next meeting. Rather than appearing personally, Widmer submitted a written complaint against Mary Hobbs, who had falsely accused him of committing several crimes. Consulting the church's opinion as to a proper course of action, he was advised to proceed according to "Mat the 18 [Mat. 18.15-17] and strive to gaine her". This biblical model for church discipline afforded Widmer a purpose, reconciliation with Sister Hobbs, and a procedure, namely, private action, followed by committee and church-wide action.

Within the month, Jonathan notified the church that he had "don his duty to wards Sister Hobbs as the Lord directs and in order for reconcileation but without success". Therefore, he placed the matter in the church's hands, subscribing himself as their "ffreind and brother in the Gospell". Shortly thereafter, Mary Hobbs was "suspended her communion next breaking bread", for not hearing Widmer "according to the rule of Christ".

Actually, two levels of punishment are recognizable within General Baptist disciplinary procedure. A ruling of the General Assembly declared that if any 'be convicted of sin . . . and departe from ye faith of Christ that they should be . . . declared against as

incommunicable in things pertaining to the worshipe of God and also not to be eaten with in common eating and . . . this to be Looked upon as the first admonition".[14] Presumably, this is what the Berkhamsted church meant when it used the word "suspension". As the first admonition, an offender was barred from worship and the Lord's Table. The Confession in 1660 states that, after the first and second admonitions (according to Mat. 18.15-17), those who "profess the way of the Lord", yet are "disorderly in their conversations", or cause "divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine (of Christ) which they learned", should be rejected and "withdrawn from".[15] This was equivalent to excommunication.

In July 1716, both parties were heard face to face and, after submitting themselves to the church's judgment, were advised to "forgive each other and live in love for the futer [sic], etc.". With this, Sister Hobbs requested to "sit down with her husband as a member in Wycomb church", and it was agreed that she be "delivered to her husband for the futer etc.". (Here, another hand has added: "— better than to Satan etc.".) High Wycombe had supported a General Baptist cause since before 1660, and Thomas Tripp was probably an elder there, when Mary Hobbs left Berkhamsted in 1716.[16] The church disbanded around 1750, and the remnant is said to have joined Amersham.[17]

Nine months passed without Widmer's case receiving any attention in the minutes, leading us to believe that the controversy had finally subsided. However, nothing could be farther from the truth, for the next time Widmer contacted the church, he refused to continue preaching, "at least till things appear'd with such a face as might aford some ease and satisfaction". Evidently, the church had not relieved him of this task upon his first request. What could have made him resort to such decisive action? When asked to give a personal explanation, he again declined to appear. Instead, he issued a letter, reiterating the content of an earlier correspondence, i.e. he had "mett with many things which discoraged diccomposed and incombered" him, preventing concentration "upon matters in a preparatory manner sutable and nessessary to such a work". This uneasiness, he maintained, was the result of unfortunate allegations levelled against him, which the church had mishandled. He went on to expound a five-fold complaint, thoroughly airing his sentiments.

First, he reproached the church for their lenience toward "those who exhibeted an unjust charge against me and managed it with more than a little warmth". He was convinced that such an effective opposition "could not be managed but by private cabals and makeing it a party cause". Furthermore, those who accused him so unjustly "ware never so much as reproved for it", and he "never had the least satisfaction". For this reason he doubted whether his nomination had ever been seriously intended. Apparently, his greatest fear lay in the fact that he had never been sufficiently cleared of the charges, which could be "easily received seven years hence to serve a turn as well as before". This latter statement may well be more than a

figure of speech, for five years had already passed since he had been first proposed to office, in January 1712. The controversy surrounding his ministry may have begun in 1710, possibly marking the date of his ordination as a deacon. Secondly, Widmer believed his ministry was not accepted by "the greatest part of the people" and sensed this from their "countenances" on several occasions. Thirdly, he was embittered by the outcome of his clash with Mary Hobbs, especially since he had refused to employ the same unscrupulous tactics as she (i.e. "cabals" and "parties"), being "a thing I thank God I was never gilty of but do utterly abhor in church affairs. I depended upon the truth and justice of my cause knowing that I had such clear evidence by which I could have made undenieable proof of the fact". He expressed surprise at the church for reprimanding him so sharply, when he requested their advice; allowing Mrs. Hobbs's husband to testify; and preferring a negative witness to a positive one. Notably, the minutes give no evidence of a sharp reprimand, or of Mr. Hobbs testifying on his wife's behalf. Fourthly, Widmer had "more ground than only susphishon to think that these things have been at least influenced if not managed by and in favor of a certin woman or women". Finally, he could no longer support his family as "an honest Christian and deasent man" should, and "spend so much time as is necessary to prepair maters fit to be delivered in the pulpit".[18] His final plea was that everyone should "do his part and sett a helping hand to support the cause of our dear Lord", thereby easing tension on all sides.

While the church found his complaints difficult to understand, they did consider them and offered a five-fold response. To begin with, they were not conscious of any "hypoxkrisie" surrounding his nomination, but had always intended "that it might have peacably been and do still". Next, they thought all parties had experienced satisfaction, but stood "willing to be inform'd", if they had been "short". Thirdly, they knew of no one who rejected Widmer's labours. With regard to the Hobbs case, they asserted: " . . . we did act according to our judgment but if through weakness we have erred we shall be willing to repent when we are informed of our fault". Note the carefully chosen words, "short", "weakness", "erred" and "fault", all of which evade the harshness of the little word "sin", a term which they were not hesitant in using to describe the actions of offenders. Yet the tone of their response reflects prescribed policy, as laid down by the General Assembly, i.e. if a church dealt unfairly with transgressors, "through their weakness & not vnderstand ye right of ye business: that they countinance them: wh[ich] if it be then we believed that there ought to be forbearance executed & means vsed farther to discover the Righteousness of ye proceedings".[19]

In May 1717, Widmer did appear, but "most of the persons who handed the letter being absent", the hearing was postponed for another five weeks, Brother Adams being ordered to act as "Widmers evidence etc.". When the June meeting took place, there was a lengthy debate about the Hobbs case. Therewith, the church agreed

"to shew there sencerity in their intentions to chuse him to the office of an Elder". Notice was ordered to be given "in all parts of the congregation between this and our church meeting at Tring . . . next Tuesday comfort night", in order to fix a time and place for his ordination. Yet, with understandable reluctance, Widmer desired that it be "deferred a little longer". Eight months later, in February 1718, the following minute was entered: "We haveing an answer from our Brethren [brother] at our last church meeting at Barkhamsted upon what termes he was willing to be ordained the substance is as followeth": if his opponents would ask him to assume office; if the church would trade with him, thereby helping to support his family; and if Cook and Foster would secure the church's consent, before entering the office of Messenger. This last requirement echoed a ruling of the General Assembly, made five years earlier, that before men could be ordained as Messengers, "the churches to whom they belong Shall give their Consent in that Matter & likewise the persons nominated".[20]

In response, the church assured Widmer that he had "al[l] the members choice in that he had non[e] opposed"; that if his merchandise was "as good and cheap as another mans", those who could do so conveniently would trade with him; and that Cook and Foster would, indeed, abide by the church's consent. With these assurances, Widmer agreed to be ordained, and the event was scheduled to take place on "Thursday in Easter week next", or nearly two months later.

Thus, after more than five years of struggle, doubt and controversy, Widmer's election seemed imminent. That this was not the case is seen in his surprising letter to the church, dated 4 June 1718:

> Loveing friends. Whereas I have been uneasi for a long season with the proceedings of some persons in this church, and could never yet obtaine any satisfaction, on that account. And finding that the church and I difer in our judgments concerning severall acts of discipline pased among you. Therefore for peace sake and my own comfort without reharceing the matter or reviveing former disputs, I desire you will grant me a letter to remove my communion to the church of Christ meeting in Aylsbury under the pastorall care of Brother John Sturch. It being as I humbly conceive the privelige of any person that is uneasie in one church to aply himselfe to another where he may hope for more peace and satisfaction in his own mind Which with intreating a share continuely in youre praiers is the request of your Bror and Servant
>
> JONATH WIDMER.

In a reciprocal letter, the church expressed amazement that he was so dissatisfied as to prefer communion with another church "of the same faith". With stirring emotion, they implored him to reconsider.

> We must say that we are unwilling to part with a member (a minister!) we love and respect so well; but if you are positive and nothing will do, but a remove; we first desire to confer

> with you upon that head. If with a good conscience we can make you easy, assure your selfe we will. However, after all, if you will be resolute, and will not be prevailed upon to continue with us, but you will relinquish us (a thing we cannot think of without regrett), we hope we shall part in Love. Dear bro[ther], in order to a right understanding, we do therefore . . . desire you to appear . . . to heare what you have to say, and do by you as becomes a Church of Jesus Christ. We are with Christian Love, Your affect[ionate] Brethren and Cordiall Friends. . . .

Widmer did appear the following month, and offered the names of some by whom he had been especially offended: Robert Peirce,[21] Benjamin Wheeler and William Adams. The offences of these men were judged by the church to be "personal", and Widmer was again advised to follow the rule of Mat. 18.15-17. His only reply was that he "desired a little time and hoped to make himselfe easy".

In October 1718, it was finally agreed that he be elected to the office of Elder, and the "ministering bretheren do give notice in all parts of the congregation; that we shall proceed to ordination, if we do not hear anything against it at our next church meeting this day month at Barkhamsted". Ironically, the time of ordination could not be set at that November meeting, for the Tring members had not been notified and, presumably, were not represented. Once again, the matter was postponed until "this day month at Chesham", Tring to be included without fail.

In December 1718, nearly seven years after he was first proposed to office, Widmer was informed "that this church for the good opinion they have received of him have chosen him to the office of an Elder and that they do desire him to comply her election of him to that ofice". There is no specific indication in the minutes whether he was made "easy" enough to comply, but later evidence makes it difficult to believe otherwise. In a minute dated January 1719, he was listed as one of six trustees to the "Generall Baptist Meeting House in the County of Bucks", and holder of a key to the box which contained "The Writeings" of the church, in the custody of Joseph Wheeler. In the years which followed, he performed many duties befitting an Elder, and in October 1728 was ordained to the office of Messenger, after which his name did not reappear in the minute book.

NOTES

[1] Adam Taylor, *The History of the English General Baptists,* London, 1818, vol. I, p. 230.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 328.

[3] J. H. Wood, *A Condensed History of the General Baptists of the New Connexion,* London, 1847, p. 117.

[4] *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society,* vol. IV, p. 217.

[5] Cf. Taylor, pp. 433-445, and Wood, p. 134f.

[6] The first page of the minutes has been given the following heading: "Church Book of Disciplinary Commenced January 1st 1712 & in which

year Chesham meeting house [began to be *deleted*] Was Built". Beneath this title can be found a list of Ministers and Deacons, with their corresponding places of residence. It is doubtful whether this entry belongs to 1 January 1712, as implied by its inclusion under the title, for it records information which could not have been true for that date. For example, John Cook is listed as a Messenger, but was not nominated to that office until mid-1716 (Taylor, vol. II, p. 441, says 1717). Thomas Foster is given the title "Elder", but did not actually assume that position until after 1714. Of the seven deacons listed, Brothers Cox, Hudsun and Coleman were ordained sometime after October 1712, and a fourth, [Joseph] Gould, was nominated in April 1714. There is reason to believe "Nicklos" is the same "Nichols" who, in 1718, began his period of approbation as a deacon. When Taylor maintains there were seven deacons in office at the beginning of 1712, he may be relying on this inaccurate information. Indeed, both title and list were probably penned by the same individual who made entries in 1775, as a comparison of the handwriting suggests, and were designed to fill a blank space with useful facts. Exposing the incorrectness of this entry allows the researcher to: (1) establish the earliest entry as 2nd January 1712; (2) lower the probable number of deacons, in early 1712, from seven to three (unless, of course, there were others not mentioned in the text); and (3) understand some of the textual difficulties involved in reconstructing the Berkhamsted story.

[7] Taylor, vol. I, p. 328.

[8] In May, 1717, Wheeler was ordered to exercise his gifts of prayer and preaching on Friday evenings.

[9] On this occasion "the church" was apparently represented by a nine-member committee, composed entirely of church officers. Never did a woman appear on the disciplinary committee and the number of men varied from meeting to meeting. Hearings were open to all church members, from all sides of the congregation, and those presiding had the authority to call forth, hear and judge any testimony which they deemed pertinent to the case at hand.

[10] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

[11] Taylor, vol. II, p. 441.

[12] Since two of the entries are not dated, the chronology here is conjectural.

[13] It was General Baptist policy that "no officer what so ever in the church being duly Chosen Can by no means Lay down his office. . . . " (*Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists*, ed. W. T. Whitley, London, 1908, vol. I, p. 6.)

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[16] *T.B.H.S.*, vol. II, pp. 97, 237.

[17] *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. III, p. 38.

[18] Widmer adds: "This I believe any trad[e]sman if you ask them will soon satisfy you in", giving the first clue as to his occupation.

[19] Whitley, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 8.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[21] In April, 1712, Peirce was summoned before the church for speaking "evil of the ways of the lord", and, one month later, suspended for "evil desire toward another mans wife". He was restored to "full communion" in September of that year. On 5 September 1718, the church withdrew from him, "as a person guilty of the sinn of uncleanness", according to Eph. 5.3,5 and Col. 3.5, "untill he shall make satisfaction to the church by true repentance".

G. REID DOSTER.