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

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

EARLY STAFFORDSHIRE BAPTISTS A Further Note

In the *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.XXIV, October 1971, pp.167-170, Barrie White transcribed Bodley MS Tanner 61 folios 110, 111, which concerned two propagandists who advocated Baptist views at Ipstones, in north-east Staffordshire in 1644. One was Captain John Garland, an officer in the Parliamentary Army who provides an early example of Baptist views being spread by military men before the New Model Army was established. The other was James Cokayne. White gave evidence that subsequently both men spent until at least December 1644 in Stafford gaol. The examination of Garland and Cokayne, which took place on 3 September 1644, concerned especially the nature of Christian ministry (every one who has ability may preach, quoting 1 Peter 4.10) and the unscriptural nature of infant baptism (baptism is for those who repent and believe the gospel). White suggests that the lack of links with later Baptists may mean that the 1644 incident marked only one stage in the evolution of their religious opinions.

John Briggs followed White's article with details of James Cokayne's later career as parish minister at Frodsham, Cheshire, from 1649 to 1658.¹ He was removed from office following several objections, including denying that there should be a separated ministry and calling the sacraments 'popery'. He may have been the same as the James Cokayne licensed as a Congregational preacher near Tarporley, Cheshire, in 1672.

This further note adds to the story evidence of Separatist activity in the Leek area before the events at Ipstones in 1644. Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Records for 1642² list people convicted of being absent from the different Anglican churches within Leek parish since 22 May that year and of assembling as a conventicle in the dwelling house of Thomas Hamersley. The Separatists convicted were:

Johes Sherman of Leek, yeoman, and his wife Priscilla
 Johes Leis of Leek, shoemaker, and his wife Maria
 Willms Mathfield of Leek, tinker
 Thomas Bromley of Leek, free mason
 Jacobus Cockyn of Leek, 'clercus'
 Timotheus Dent of Leek, mercer
 Johes Dent of Leek, mercer
 Jacobus Johnson of Leek, shoemaker
 Johanna Smith of Leek, spinster
 Johes Hulme of Thorncliffe, yeoman
 Thoms Hamersley of Basford, Cheddleton parish, yeoman
 Beniamyn Endon of Rudyard, Leek parish, yeoman
 Josephus Endon of Rudyard, yeoman
 Maria Endon of Rudyard, spinster
 Jeremias Hoade of Wetton, yeoman.

James Cokayne links these 1642 Separatists from the churches of the Leek parish

and the nearby area of Staffordshire (Wetton is nearby in Derbyshire) with the 1644 incident at Ipstones itself only three miles from Basford where Thomas Hammersley had his residence.

Several of the group, including Cokayne, were brought to court again in January 1648/49 for not going to their parish church.³ Hammersley continued as their Baptist leader, signing a Baptist petition to Oliver Cromwell in 1652. along with John Slacke on behalf of a church at 'Berryhill'.⁴ Berryhill can be identified with Ferny Hill, which is situated just above the hamlet of Basford, near Cheddleton. The Berryhill church changed after 1654 when Hammersley, as no doubt others, became a Quaker. The resulting Quaker meeting-house of 1695-7 still stands south-west of Basford Hall, though now disused.

Henry Haggard took over the remaining Baptists, signing for them in 1659 *A Further Testimony to Truth*.⁵ Previously he had baptized Henry Danvers at Stafford, founded a Baptist church at Ellesmere, Shropshire, and confronted various Quaker preachers in Staffordshire. 1659 is the last record of his work.

Haggard's co-leader at Berryhill was Thomas Ginder. He appears in the 1660s, brought to court for not going to his parish church. His home was at Caverswall, some eight miles away to the south-east of Stoke-on-Trent. Berryhill's meetings were reported at Norton-le-Moors, and lasted until another Thomas Hammersley, of nearby Dilhorne, emigrated to America⁶ where he established a Baptist Church which for some years corresponded with the church in Staffordshire from which he migrated.

The early north-east Staffordshire Baptists also formed a church at Parwich, Derbyshire, by 1652, and another in a farmhouse at Rushton Spencer, five miles north-west of Leek, with members excommunicated from their parish church in 1665.

So around Leek we have the sequence of Puritan to Separatist to Baptist to Quaker in thirteen years. The initial secession from the parish churches was early, in May 1642, and suggests that in even more radical areas such evidence might also be available. Essential to prove continuity are the names of the people involved.

Although of significance in tracing Baptist origins, the 1642 Leek group was not extensive or of high social standing: seventeen people of the yeoman and tradesmen classes. But they were thoroughly convinced of their beliefs, ready to suffer social and legal displeasure, with a strong conscience towards God and awareness of the New Testament pattern of church life.

NOTES

1 *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. XXV, 1973, pp.164-6.

5 *ibid.*, pp.279-83.

2 Lichfield Record Office. Q/SO 5, p.122.

6 Lichfield R.O., Lichfield Diocesan records,

3 *ibid.*, Q/SO 6, p.139.

B/v/1/72, 75.

4 *BQ* XXV, pp.275-7.