

THE RYE BAPTISTS

From 1750 to 1904.

THEIR HISTORY—Taken from the Records.

A LECTURE

BY THE

REV. A. HEDLEY BROWN.

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PREFACE.

Of the Nonconformist Churches now existing in Rye the Baptist is the oldest. Many friends, members of the Church and others, have frequently asked that they might have some information as to its foundation, and the course of its history. This lecture was prepared, and now has been printed, in answer to those requests. The history is authentic, having been drawn immediately from the original documents and books, now in the possession of the Church. These cover the whole period of the Church's history, and not only supply the general outline, but are full of incidental details of the Church life. Some of these details have been introduced that the story might be interesting to the casual reader, as well as to the one who reads for the sake of the history. It is hoped that this publication will help to arouse interest in the work that is being done by the Church, and to bring the cause up to that position which, evidently, it once held in the life of the town.

A. HEDLEY BROWN,
Pastor.

BAPTISTS PAST AND PRESENT.

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IN bringing before you the history of Rye Baptists there is no need to make any apologies. If there is no great importance in the subject, it should, for compensation, provide much interest. Whether that interest is felt by you will depend on the character of the selections that have been made from the records in our possession. We hope that as the story proceeds our judgment will be justified in your interest.

The Church here was founded on November the 8th, 1750. The religious life of England in the middle of the 18th century was at a very low ebb. From the time of the Revolution in 1688 there had been a general decline; both Church and Dissent were held in formality, weakness, and sloth; and the masses of the people were sunk in ignorance and sin. The Baptists had shared in the depression, and our churches were fewer and less prosperous than sixty years earlier. There was a remnant, however; the country remained at least religious; the Puritan spirit still lived among the middle classes; and from that remnant came the Revival which quickened England. Stirred by the ministries of Whitfield and the two Wesley's, the Churches awoke to new life and energy. The Baptists (was it because of their love of water?) were longer in catching fire than the other bodies, but when they did, they played a worthy part in the revival. When Baptists move they move from the heart—there is purpose and heart power in them.

It was in the very commencement of these days of new life that a Baptist Church was founded in this town, and street, and place. The probability is that for some time before November, 1750, the Rye Baptists had met together here for worship. They were members of the Church at Sandhurst, and being so far away would be likely to have a local place of meeting. That they had met together for some time is proved by the fact that, on the day the Church was founded, a call was given to a minister who was already among them. The secession from Sandhurst was not a friendly one; and our first record is a copy of the letter, evidently the last of a considerable correspondence, which severed the connection, and announced the establishment of a separate Church. That letter is keen and strong, involved and argumentative, and (as it is read to-day) even ironical and amusing. Four reasons were given for the step taken. The third, laxity of Church discipline, might be a difficulty to-day, but the other three reasons take us into a religious atmosphere far different from ours. Some members of the Sandhurst Church refused to sit down to the Lord's Table with those who did not believe that, after the baptism of believers, hands should be laid on them. Some of the Baptist Churches of the day practised this rite, but the Rye members did not believe it was instituted by Christ. Neither did they believe that when Deacons were ordained hands should be laid on them—they said "there is no foundation for it in ye Word of God, to be practised in our day, because ye act was apostollicall and ye effects thereof are ceased, and no command for it." There was a rule in the Sandhurst Church that the rite must be observed, and so, since there was opposition, no deacons were elected in the Church

although they were needed. The Rye Baptists sum up their indictment so far thus: "These instances plainly declare yt you understand but very little of Church government, and yett as you think, your having the power you will rule to the Distruction of ye Church and ye Depriving of ye Gospel. But we hope the Lord will help us and frusterate Satan's designs." The last reason brings us into the thick of a fight of which we hear echoes even to-day. The Rye members could not sit down to communion with members of erroneous Churches; and would not allow their fellow members to do so. It is chiefly against those who believe in general redemption that they write. They say "the gineralls assurt what cannot be proved by ye Word of God," "if we are in the right they are in the wrong and what commuunion has light with darkness," "they burn incense to their owne nett, and sacrifice to their dragg." "Wherefore come yea out from amongst them and be you separate saith ye Lord, and notwithstanding this command come yea out, &c., you fain would have tolerated members to have joynd with such people;" "O tell it not in Gath, O, tell it not in ye Churches, never let this your egregious folly be exposed." Evidently, behind this letter was the motto "No compromise." Even in the beginning of it we read "We find that ye Disturber of Churches is still permitted to rivitt opposition in your minds so fast yt there can be no prospect of our ever being reconciled each to other in ye present situation as we are." The claim is made that the separation is legal, and just, and according to the will of Christ, and then they say "In ye name of our Lord Jesus Christ we do separate from as many of you, as are not with us, so that you'll be a Church by yourselves and we by our-

selves." That is a good example of the old idea and spirit. Members of Churches must see eye to eye, or be separate; no matter how small or how weak the Society may be they must all represent one idea—"you by yourselves and we by ourselves," two little gardens walled around, and no door for inter communion. The seceders then heartily pray that there may be no *divisions* in the Church they leave; and give the advice that their erstwhile fellow members might never part with truth for peace; and conclude with this N.B. (it is worthy of noting well), "We should never have separated from you had not you separated from us first." Signed by us at Rye, Nov. ye 8th, 1750. Of the eleven signatories six were men, and five women—David Espenett, Thos. Masters, George Qusted, Jno. Walter, Thos. Luxford, John Davis, Mary Masters, Mary Qusted, Elizabeth Luxford, Eliz. Russell and Elizth. Espenett. On these names two or three notes may be made. The Espenett's link us on to the Huguenots, of whom, Jenke says, there were at one time as many as 1500 in Rye. This David was the son of the refugee, David Espenett, who came over from Rochelle in 1685. His wife, Elizabeth, was the daughter of another Refugee, named Dansays, who was a first cousin of Espenett. The names of the posterity of these two families, and also of another, the Hillarys, are to be found for some years in the Church books. David Espenett, the Rye Baptist, was a Puke Maker. George Qusted was a Fellmonger: he occupied (and afterwards owned) the storehouse, now our Schoolroom and Church Parlor. Thos. Masters was a Bricklayer.

These eleven signed a Covenant, in which, among other things, they say: "We having been baptised upon ye

profession of our Faith, and declare our satisfaction in one another in ye Judgement of Charity, are mutually agreed to incorporate ourselves into a particular Church state as followeth." They made the usual vows: and gave assent to the Confession of Faith made and published by Dr. Gill, of Horse-lye-down. By Particular Baptists they meant that they were of the Calvinistic and not of Arminian belief. In effect, this would probably mean that the preaching would be very largely concerned with the Divine purposes and elections, no invitations would be addressed to sinners to come to the Saviour, and there would be strong denunciation of sin, and dark and gloomy pictures of the sinner's doom. Following the Covenant are pages of signatures of members—signatures stiff and cramped, signatures like a spider's crawl, and a large proportion (it seems to us to-day) of marks by those who could not write. Owing to the lack of dates it is quite impossible to tell how rapidly the Church increased. Many of these names are well known in our Town to-day. Dawes, Southerden, Button, Masters, Noakes, Mitchell, Stonham, Brooman, Clark, Vennall, Pulford and so on.

The first minister of the Church was Charles Rodgers. On the day of its founding, he and his wife were received as members by transfer from Northampton. "The same day (being appointed and set apart for fasting and prayer) ye Church gave Brother Rodgers ye call to administer the ordinances which call he was pleased to accept of." Mr. Rodgers went to Northampton in 1732 from another Church, and the College Street Church books give these two other notices of him. "February 27, 1732, we, the members of this Church have this day unanimously given brother Rodgers a call to be the

mouth of this Church in matters respecting Church order and discipline for the peace and unity of this Church," and "August 15, 1733, Brother Charles Rodgers was solemnly chosen and ordained to the office of a Pastor by this Church." Coming to Rye in 1750, he served the Church here until 1758; he then removed to Exeter, where he died.

The young Church appointed its first deacons a month after its commencement; they were David Espenett and George Qusted. The manner of election appears to have been thus:—nominations were made at a Church meeting, a day was set apart for fasting and prayer, and the members of the Church called out the brother chosen by holding up their right hand; he signified his assent in the same way, and by word of mouth, and the minister then preached a sermon on the place and duties of deacons in the Church. The first baptism took place in the next April; where we know not, but probably it was in the open air.

Under date July 5th, 1753, the Church passed a "Judgement and Advice," in which we have the following: "And our Judgement also is, yt no member ought nor should not, joyn with those who practice infant sprinkling, neither at ye time of ye ceremony nor at ye time of feasting on yt account, judging it to be sinful in them that do so."

Up to this time the Church had been worshipping in the Friends Meeting-house, and Holloway, the Rye historian, tells us that it was in a very dilapidated condition. The Quakers had held the premises since 1701, and there are records of their use of the burial ground a year or two later, but when they ceased to use

the Meeting-house for regular worship, and under what terms the Baptists held it, we do not know. From the correspondence now in our possession we find that the premises were sold from the quarterly-meeting of the Friends meeting at Brighton, and that William Glover was their chief agent in the sale. His letters to George Quedsted, beautifully written, are perfect examples of the old Quaker style of expression. A Church meeting was held here on December 6th, 1753, and Deacon Quedsted informed the members that he had bought the house garden, and burying ground "of the people called Quakers for the sum of Three Score or Sixty Pounds." "And at yt time and place aforesaid ye above George Quedsted did offer unto ye members of ye Church assembling together for Divine worship in the house aforesaid in ye Middle or Mermaid Street: to take down ye said house at a Ladyday next and build on ye same ground a convenient meeting-house. On this consideration That if ye members will subscribe about ye sum of One Hundred Pounds and also be engaged for One Hundred Pounds more, yt may be hired to compleat this work and to pay their subscriptions in about Michaelmas next Then ye said George Quedsted will make over to Trustees (as they ye Church shall think fitt) the House, Garden and Burying Ground to ye Church as theirs for ever." The meeting was adjourned until the following Thursday when the proposal was accepted by the Church and others "who attended on hearing the word preached," and a subscription list was at once opened. The chief subscribers were Mr. Chas. Rodgers Minister, £2 2s. 0d.; Mr. George Quedsted, Fellmonger, £21; Mr. David Espenett, Peruke Maker, £5; Mr. Samuel

Sutharden, of Wittersham, Farmer, £50; Mr. John Button, of Peasmarsh, Farmer, £21; Mr. David Guy, Ironmonger, £10; Mr. David Swain, Shoemaker, £3 3s. Stephen Dawes, Journeyman Glover, £2 2s.; Mr. Miller, of Rye, Grocer, £3 3s.; Mr. Thomas Masters, Bricklayer, £5; Mr. Goodwill, £4 4s.; the Church at Ashford, £5 0s. 6d.; the Church at Folkestone, £5 5s.; the Church at Smarden, £1 9s. Altogether, when the entry was made in the Church book the amount had reached £156 17s. 2d. There follows afterward in the handwriting of Mr. Purdy (a later minister):—Money collected since by Mr. Hall, £45 14s. 6d.; by Thomas Purdy at three different collections, £134 6s. 6d.; making a total of £336 18s. 2d. There is a note, in Mr. Rodgers' handwriting, to the rising generation, that the work began in February, 1754, and was finished the 10th day of November following "being ten months in compleating of it." They were encouraged in the work by three things: they bought the old premises so cheaply, they had a large subscription, and during the erection of the house they had a considerable addition to the Church. Although many alterations have been made, both without and within, we are to-day meeting in that same house. From a note, to which we shall again refer, we gather that while the two side-galleries were part of the original scheme, though not of their present depth, there was no gallery facing the pulpit. Those two galleries were known then, as now, one as "the men's," the other "the women's," and, evidently, at that time the distinction was maintained in practice. The Pulpit was in the present position, but set high in the wall, and over the top of it was a sounding board; which was taken down

in 1810. Those who desired to have regular sittings, built their own pews, and the rest of the congregation sat on forms; we find entries of permission being given from time to time to build these pews. The clock (was it the valuable old clock now in our Schoolroom?) was put up in 1775, and cost £4 4s. Outside also there have been alterations, the steps at one time going straight out from the door. The Vestry was built on to the back of the Storehouse next door, and Deacon Quedsted, in compensation, was granted the privilege of using the room over our heads as a wool store. When the Quakers sold the premises they reserved the right to occasionally use the meeting house. This right was exercised in 1835 when a small meeting was held, the justly renowned Elizabeth Fry being one of the company. It was probably one of the meetings she arranged in so many places on behalf of her great and noble work. When Wesley visited Rye in 1773, he noted in his diary that "the descent in going out of the town was near as steep as the side of a house." This was Mermaid Street: the street, we believe, was cobbled, and sloped from the sides to a centre gutter. Now the street is so picturesque as to be a matter of pride to us, but then it must have been even more so. The Presbyterian Chapel stood on the other side of the Street, next above the Hospital, but probably at the time of which we speak it was very sparsely attended, or even closed. It was there that the Wesleyans came in 1773, and commenced that work which has had so great an influence for good in the town.

We have no record of where services were held during the house-building, but before the completion in November the place was used. On Friday, September 27th,

three women were baptised in the new meeting-house. The first male to be baptised in the new building was a lad of fourteen, David Espenett, Jr. (a son of the deacon already named, and grandson of the refugee). Of him this somewhat curious notice is given, "he *unexpectedly* gave the Church full satisfaction of his repentance towards God and of his faith in Christ Jesus as his alone Saviour."

Of the Presbyterian element in Rye we have one note which we give in full. "Nov. 17th, 1755, was baptised Mr. Hector McDonald (who was a Scotch Presbyterian Minister) was convinced that he was not rightly baptised in infancy; did give himself up to the Lord in embracing His holy ordinance; and on Wednesday evening preached a Sermon, which was accepted by ye Church, believing him to be a man sound in the faith: he was yn inclined to give himself up to ye Church, to walk with ym in ye faith and order of ye gosple and to be under their care, and accordingly ye same evening he was received in to ye generall satisfaction of ye members By Bro. Charles Rodgers, Minister."

The last entry above Mr. Rodgers' signature is dated April 4th, 1756, and is of a baptism and communion. From this time things did not go on well; and in 1760 we find that the ordinance had not been observed for more than two years, partly for want of an ordained minister, and partly on account of much division. Then, however, on the 23rd March, thirteen members sat down to the Supper under the presidency of Mr. Morgan Edwards. It is added "Three more women would have joynd us but were prevented by providence." The other members held aloof. Whence Mr. Edwards came and whither he went, we know not, but he was soon tired of the Rye strife, it

seems, for the mention of his name only covers a year from March, 1760 to February, 1761. Under date of January 18th, 1761, we have a copy of a letter from the Baptist Church Meeting at Rolvenden and Northiam. This Church was of the General Baptist persuasion, and they asked that two of their members might occasionally sit down to communion at Rye. If this was granted the Rye Church had made great progress in charity and liberty since the separation from Sandhurst.

From 1761 to 1767 the work went on under the care of the deacons, as there was no minister. George Quesed and David Espenett were the two active leaders, but it was probably not until the arrival of Mr. Purdy, in 1767, that the division in the Church was healed. In the interval the ordinance of Baptism had been administered chiefly by David Espenett, and the Lord's Supper by an ordained minister when such visited them. At a Church Meeting, 9th Dec., 1766, forty-two members were present, and it was agreed to give a call to the Rev. Thos. Purdy. The call was renewed and revived on Feb. 22nd, 1767. "We agreed to revive and renew the call to our Bro. Thos. Purdy to ye pastorall care of this Church and at ye same time passed it into an act by holding up our right hands and also desired, and intreated him to go to London amongst our friends to Bagg their assistance in defraying the charges or money on ye meeting house, which he did and met with great success." This is one of the collections spoken of in the list given above. In May of that year—1767, fourteen years after the house was built, £24 were yet wanted to clear the place of debt. The call to Mr. Purdy was again "renewed and revived" in July, 1767, and to this third invitation Mr. Purdy answered

"Yes." He wrote a long letter to the members, that breathes the true spirit of the servant of Christ—he depends on their prayers, he declares his yearning for their souls' good and the prosperity of the Church, he counts the success already given to him amongst them a sign of God's leading, he is distressed at their bad case, and appeals for love and unity. Mr. Purdy came from Worstead Church, and with his wife was admitted here in December 6th, 1767, twelve months after the first call was given. For the ordination of Mr. Purdy a day was set apart, and two ministers were invited to come and assist Mr. Trivitt to give the Charge to the Minister, and Mr. Bligh to preach the ordination sermon to the Church. The ordination took place on the fourth Thursday in May, 1768, and a dinner was provided at The George for the ministers and friends attending. We are glad that we have Mr. Purdy's appearance preserved for us—the face is full of character. His ministry here extended over a period of nearly fifty years and was much blessed. Soon after the ordination an arrangement was made to bring in extra forms when the house was very full. One of the members built a pew for Mrs. Purdy and the family. The Church was not without financial difficulty; at first Mr. Purdy received all the general income from the members and congregation, and the bye-expenses (as they called them) were met at the end of the year by a subscription list; after a time an eighth of the amount received was retained for expenses, but again and again difficulties occurred.

About this time there is frequent mention in the books of one David Guy. In the subscription list for the building we find his name and description—an Ironmonger.

Mr. Guy lived at the corner of the High Street, and what was afterwards known as Hilder's Cliff was then known as Guy's Cliff. That house and business have ever since been in the hands of Baptists, and they are now occupied by a deacon of the Church.

The Minister held for use the Meeting-house garden, but under the watchful eye of the Church. Apparently the one and only item of business done at a general Church meeting in October, 1679, was this: "Leave was given to Bro. Purdy to take down the medly tree in the Meeting Garden." One decision of the Church, judiciously used, might benefit many a Church to-day. The Thursday night following Ordinance Sunday was to be given up to speaking from a text, to discover gifts that might be among the members. As an outcome, Francis Espenett was asked to preach on the evenings of the Lord's Days when there was no lecture, and was soon afterwards sent out into the public ministry by the Church. This also was done with one James Browne.

It was in 1772 that the side galleries were made one seat deeper, and a front gallery was built for four seats deep; the work cost £30 and was paid for by special subscriptions. Those who wished to have pews paid for their erection at a price of from two to three guineas. The work was flourishing, but, owing to the way the entries are made, it is impossible to tell how many entered the Church; very many did, from Rye and from all the villages round for ten or twelve miles. From Tenterden, Ham Street, Romney, Appledore, Northiam, Wittersham (or Witsium), Peasemars, Iden, Udimore (or Uddermore), Brede, Westfield, Battle, Winchelsea, and Icklesham they came. Since the con-

gregation came from such an area it will be interesting to know the time of meeting, and we find from an entry under date March 21st, 1775, that from Ladyday to Michaelmas the service was at half-past one; for six weeks after Michaelmas and for six weeks before Ladyday at a quarter-past one; and for the rest, the darkest days of the year, at one in the afternoon. The Quarterly Church meetings of the Christmas quarter were held on Christmas day, and baptisms then frequently took place; there are several notices of immersions on Christmas days. All the candidates for membership had to come before the Church and make personal confession, and were subjected to examination—occasionally candidates had to appear again and again, before those deacons with keen nose to scent the faintest breath of heresy were satisfied. Very various are the expressions used as to the satisfaction given—"of Faith in Christ," "of Hope toward God," "of being sensibly taught," "of a work of Grace," "of Repentance unto Life," and so on.

June 28th, 1770—Here is an entry interesting to our Methodist brethren—"Charles Wood added to the Church, having prior to this given in his experience, he was for a time objected to, for associating with the Methodists, but *being convinced of his being wrong in this matter*, and signifying to the Church his intention of joining the Church and agreeing to the Church's mind in the point he was accepted and joined to the Church."

In 1775, a second Church Act was passed cautioning members against going to other places of worship, especially on Ordinance Sunday—they are called upon "not to abscond their seat at the Lord's Table, or through a roving fancy run to other places of worship on that

day." Discipline was exercised rigorously; and offending members, rich and poor, were admonished and excluded. Messengers were sent to one old lady to tell her that, despite age and distance, she must not neglect her duty totally, and to request and call upon her *in a serious and solemn way to come as often as she could*. About this time several Tenterden people were admitted, but, before long, a Church was founded there and the members transferred.

In 1777, Mr. Jenkin Hague, of Biddenden, in Kent, left the sum of £100, in 3 per cent. Bank Annuities, for the sole benefit of the Pastor of this Church for the time being. We still continue to draw the interest on this and another amount, bringing the total to £500, since added in 1880, by the generosity of Mr. George Hilder.

In the first three months of the year 1780, at least seventeen persons from Battle were baptized, and these almost at once formed themselves into a Church in that town. The first of them was a William Vidler who became their first Pastor. We have two entries concerning him: one of the Church meeting when it was decided to call him out into the ministry by holding a day of Fasting and Prayer the Wednesday sennight after; and the second under date July 23rd, 1780, "was dismissed to the Church at Battle, Brother William Vidler in order to his being ordained over them, which was on Wednesday, August 3rd, 1780." There is yet another record concerning Battle, that is worth repeating: "July 1st, 1793.—At a quarterly Church meeting agreed to disown the Church at Battle as a sister Church, on account of Mr. William Vidler and many of his people imbibing the erroneous doctrine of Universal Restoration, and agreed to request Brother Spilsted, senior, and

Sister Ann Howard not to commune with them any longer."

Among the records of Baptisms is one of a blind woman; one of a man described as "the aged"; one of a good woman, baptized in private, who wished to be baptized, but doubted her conversion, (however, the minute said that for years she had by her conduct proved the reality of a change of heart); one of Captain John Mills, of Sunderland, a member of the Independent Church there, (he was not admitted to membership here because he sailed for Sunderland in a day or two); a year or two later, are entries of soldiers out of the military stationed in the town (there was a large camp on the top of Rye Hill, and barracks were erected there). From the beginning of the century we come on names of those known to us as belonging to families from which we have, or recently have had, members of the Church and congregation—Edward Hilder, Nicholas Harvey, Margaret Watson, Esther Bourn, and others.

Under the date, 17th April, 1785, we find a censure given to a member for attending the Established Church. The insinuation in the charge shews the thought of the day; the visitors were to request the delinquent that he should cease to attend the Establishment, and that he should attend the means of grace. Some months later, this brother was excluded for *neglecting the means of grace, and going from it to the Establishment*.

In 1786, it was decided in Church meeting to set aside from the Lord's Table "all such as should keep a dram shop, and continuing to sell on a Lord's Day."

New vestries were built in 1787; and in 1788 the house, which has since been retained for the use of the minister,

was purchased. Mr. David Guy, of whom we have before spoken, left the sum of £100 to be used, as the officers should choose, for the good of the Church, and this £100 helped to pay for the house and also for the new vestries. After the raising of extra funds, a sum of £44 was left as debt for a few years; and the minister occupying the house had to pay the interest on this sum by way of rent.

Two Church Acts in connection with woman's place in the Church meeting were passed. The first was as early as 1754, "An Act which is yt according to ye command given by ye Apostol Paul to ye Church of Corinth, I Ep. 14 c. 34 v. Let your women keep silence in the Churches: for it is not permitted for ym to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith ye Law Gen. 3, 16. Agreed, that as a woman is not to exercise her gift in Prophesying or Preaching; neither is to be permitted to speak in Church matters, (except any question be asked them) and yn it is allowed for ym to speak as an evidence; in any Church meetings; *but not in such sort, as carries in it Direction, Instruction, Government and Authority*. Though all speaking is not prohibited, they may speak their experances to ye Church, or give an account of ye work of God upon their souls, or to be speaking to one another in Psalms, or Hymns, or Spiritual Songs. And in case any sister be agreived in any wise, *Let her apply to any Brother of ye Church*, in order yt her case may be reported to a proper Church meeting, to be taken into consideration for her, or their, Benifitt, yt all things may be done decently and in order. I Cor. 14. 40.' The second Act was passed in 1790. The first part says sisters are to have a *silent vote* on Church matters by lifting up the hand, and that vote shall have equal value with the

vote of a brother, and then concludes "We have mentioned and concluded on a silent vote to *prevent confusion* and disorder, as we judge it not expedient that women should speak in the Church only when they are asked a question, or their evidence in any matter is called for."

On Monday, May 30th, 1791, a day set apart for fasting and prayer and calling out Brother Pope into the Ministry. Brother Pope preached a sermon and gave his reasons for taking up the ministry, and by prayer of the Pastor, and giving him the right hand of fellowship, he was publicly sent forth into the work of the Lord. This Brother Pope hailed from Folkestone, and why he came to Rye for ordination we know not.

In 1792 we have the record of the baptism of Richard Weedon Butler, who was a surgeon in the town. In the next year he was made a deacon, and for many years, until 1840 indeed, he took a large share in the conduct of the Church affairs.

Wesley in his diary mentions that at Rye in particular he found many willing to hear the good word; but they would not part with the accursed thing—smuggling. It is evident that some of the Baptists were not clear of the traffic. In 1792, two members were accused of contriving and drawing up a letter about Mr. Smith, the Exciseman; and in the following year a member was "spoke to" for having a lot of goods sold at a clandestine sale at Rye; the Church considered the act "very wrong," and the brother expressed his penitence.

Our Sunday School is the oldest in the Town, being founded in 1804; but so far we have been unable to find any records of its foundation or founders.

Mr. Purdy was now getting an old man and feeble. He

came to the Church at a time of great difficulty, he reunited the membership, many were added, and for years the Church had enjoyed quietness. But before 1810 difficulties began to arise. On Feby. the 12th of that year Sergeant James Rees, of the Pembrokeshire Militia, came before the Church, and gave in his experiences, and was admitted a member: on the 16th March he was baptised, and on the 20th was called out to the public work of the Church. In this baptism and ordination Mr. Purdy officiated very reluctantly, and only on pressure being brought to bear by the deacons. The day following the ordination, at a Church meeting, it was decided to appoint an assistant preacher for the help of Mr. Purdy, and evidently the chosen man was Sergeant Rees. The Church resolved to continue as before to support Mr. Purdy; and to raise a special fund for the support of Mr. Rees. The Church was split now into two camps—the Purdyites and the Reesites, and the condition of the Church was referred to the Baptist Board in London, evidently for arbitration. Whatever attempts were made for peace were quite unsuccessful, and soon Mr. Purdy was laid under an admonition, by, by far, the larger part of the Church, for endeavouring to prejudice the members against the preaching of Mr. Rees. Five months later he was requested to hand over the deeds in his possession. In December Mr. Rees was appointed to the pastoral office and charge of the Church in conjunction with Mr. Purdy—"Mr. Purdy being now so far advanced in years as to be unintelligible to many of the congregation." On the 8th of May, Mr. Rees was ordained by the Rev. Mr. Fuller, of Hand Cross. Mr. Purdy continued to oppose these deeds of the Church, not only privately, but also with strong

language from the pulpit. Now came an open breach, when Mr. Purdy and a few members, led by him, abstained from the Communion with the rest of the Church. In this way the Church drifted on for months, with constant bickerings and unpleasant episodes: "Mr. Purdy was requested to take up his fruit trees out of the Burying Ground and not to deposit his house refuse there," and things of that sort. The work went on, and persons came forward professing Christ and seeking baptism. The members evidently believed in the Congregational system; for the smallest details were discussed in the Church meeting, even to fixing a light to the front door, and putting some more candles in the centre pews, and buying some hop bagging for the Table pew floor; all such things were dealt with by Church resolution. In the beginning of 1813 matters came to a crisis, Mr. Purdy received a letter from the Church asking for an answer within three days, refusal to answer being taken as a withdrawal from the Church. Several letters passed, and on the 4th of April the aged Pastor was disowned. Nine persons left the Church, and some members of the congregation also went out. Mr. Purdy was not to be outdone. He commenced services in his dwelling house after he had secured the necessary license for it. That license we have, dated the 29th day of April, 1813, and signed by Thos. Proctor, Town Clerk "The Dwelling house of Thomas Purdy (Baptist Minister) situate on the Strand Hill in Rye and adjoining the Baptist Meeting house there was certified to be forthwith intended to be used as a place of religious worship by an Assembly of Protestants. And by the Court allowed and licensed as a place of religious worship during such time as the said Thomas Purdy shall continue

to reside therein." Here the Church book notices that Mr. P. formed what was called a *second Church*, and preached in the house, and broke bread to about *seven persons*. We have no other records of the work done in the Chapel House. Mr. Purdy died in 1817, and should you have any proclivity for "meditation among the tombs" you may find a monument erected to his memory, in our Burying Ground. At once, on Mr. Purdy's death, the Church applied for possession of the house, but it was not until an action at law had been entered that his family would give it up. The little company of Purdyites went to Watchbell Street, and there built the Chapel yet standing; these were the founders of the Congregational Church in the town. Mr. Rees continued as Pastor for a while and entered into occupation of the house. His salary never rose above £77.

The book supplies some notes of details: "Resolved that no more donkeys be permitted to go into the Burying Ground." There were evidently more donkeys in Rye in those days than now. "Resolved that the meeting house and schoolroom be whitewashed as soon as we have done with candells." "Resolved that something *proper* be provided for the ministers to take to prevent their catching cold of an evening." "Resolved to buy a copper tea kettle for the Vestry, Brother Butler to purchase one when he *pleasantly* can." "Resolved that a sermon be preached on Tuesday evening to sailors once a month." As Mr. Purdy had gone to other Churches to raise funds for this building, so other ministers came to Rye, from Tenterden; Mr Tidd. from Wadhurst; and Mr. Shirley, from Sevenoaks.

In 1820, the Church having been without a Pastor for

some time, this Mr. Shirley recommended the friends to write to London to a Mr. Andrew Smith, who was a member of the Grafton St. Church, to come and supply, with a view. He came once and again, then for six months, and then to settle. He was ordained on August 4, 1821. Mr. Todhunter (Independent Minister of Rye), read Isaiah 52, and prayed. Mr. Gates, of Sandhurst, delivered the Introductory address and received Mr. Smith's confession of faith, Mr. Shirley, of Sevenoaks, offered the Ordination prayer, and Mr. Williams (Mr. Smith's Pastor), gave the charge from I Tim. 4, 16, and Mr. Davis (Independent of Hastings) concluded in prayer.

Now we find the first musical notes. It was resolved to purchase a new book and to have written in it tunes of the various measures, the cost estimated at three or four Pounds to be met by special subscription.

In 1812 the Kent and Sussex Association met in Rye, and again in 1845. Regularly for years we find the entry of the visits of brethren to the Association, and of the Contribution by the Church to the Association Fund.

The work of the Church went on steadily; in 1821, six persons were baptized; in 1822, five; in 1824, nine. Special Prayer Meetings were held to pray for a revival, the men meeting on Monday evenings, and the women on Wednesdays. There are notes covering several years as to one member who wished to become a minister. In 1830, he came before the Church and expressed his desire; the members decided to hear him, or as they put it, "that he should exercise his gift before them." Month after month he preached, being put off from time to time; and then a year later the Church decided unanimously that he had not gifts sufficient, but they were willing to hear him

again. Later still, we have the entry that the Church "*encouraged him to speak in the name of the Lord wherever Providence might open doors.*" He did not succeed in getting a Church, but was among the good who die young. In 1836, the old pews were taken up and cut into slips. That was the year of the great gale on November 29th. The front roof of the Meeting house was partly blown off, and the whole was then slated. The Church at Battle fared worse, and sent to Rye for help, but owing to the case here no help could be given. The first indication of a Sunday School Anniversary is in 1841, when it was agreed that a Sermon should be preached for the benefit of the Sunday School, and Mr. Saffery be invited to preach the same. In that capacity a year or two later, Mr. Wall, of Hailsham, came to Rye.

It seemed in 1849, that the difficulty, experienced when Mr. Purdy became aged, was to be repeated. The Church sought for an assistant for Mr. Smith, and selected Mr. Sparke, of Aylesham, Norfolk. Mr. Smith, however left Rye and settled at Cranbrook. There are many who, yet remember him, his ways, his words, and good deeds. Mr. Sparke was invited for twelve months on probation and did a good work here among the people; several joined the Church. Baptisms took place on the morning of Communion Sundays; the candidates were immersed in the morning, and sat down to the Lord's Table in the afternoon. Mr. Sparke was not a member of the Church, and so members were received by Deacon William Mitchell. The name of Mitchell is one that from this time on is very frequently found in the Church books; for over 50 years members of the family were in membership here, and did good service in the cause of Christ.

were held. He secured the premises next door and there carried on a Free Day School, which was largely attended and the means of much good. There are many now resident in Rye who owe their education to the school; and others yet with us who assisted in the teaching given. In 1853 the room was much too small for the numbers seeking instruction, and the Sabbath Schoolroom also being too small, and it being necessary to provide more accommodation for the congregation, it was decided to convert the adjoining house into two schoolrooms and to throw the upper one open to the Chapel. The late Mr. George Hilder gave £100 for that purpose. That is the first record of the generosity, which he shewed toward the Church for nearly fifty years: after this the Church book gives the record of many good deeds done by him. Up to this time the Sunday School had been held in the Vestry, but it was not then, as now, divided into two; and several classes met in the Chapel. At this time there were 156 Scholars on the Sunday School books, and four years later the number had risen to 235.

The Burying ground was now full, and the garden was brought into use. The present occupiers of the garden have the cheerful prospect of a few graves, and two or three headstones. One of these is to the memory of John Daniel, who died in 1754 and was, as the stone records "a lover of truth:" he was for many years a deacon of the Church.

Mr. Wall left in 1863, and went to Gravesend. He had done good service in Rye; fifty-eight members had joined the Church during his ministry. We have before us now the picture of him that usually hangs in the Vestry. It may be said that from the time of Mr. Wall's

From this time also there is another name frequently found, that of Watson—both Mr. William and Mr. James Watson were baptized on the 17th March, 1850, by Mr. Sparke, and proved to be pillars in the House of God. Mr. Sparke received an invitation to stay a further twelve months, and this he did; but the request was not renewed in 1851, and he removed to London.

On Friday, November 8th 1850, services commemorating the Centenary of the Church were held. Mr. Wall, of Hailsham, preached in the morning on "The Righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." In the afternoon, Mr. Jennings, of Sandhurst, preached on Revel. 2. 1. In the evening a public meeting was held, when addresses were given by Messrs. Jennings, Wall, and Wilmore (the Independent Minister, Rye), and Mr. Sparke read a short history of the Church. A Public Dinner was held at which forty-three sat down, and, of course, they had a Tea; to this they had a company of one hundred and eighty. The writer of the minute adds:—"It was on the whole a good day, and we believe that very many if not all who were present much enjoyed the services of the day, while we publicly and unitedly praised God for the past and earnestly implored his mercy to this Church for the future."

In December, 1851, Mr. Sparke having left in Sept., an invitation was given to Mr. Thos. Wall, of Hailsham, to become Pastor of the Church; and this was immediately accepted. The time of Mr. Wall's ministry was one of prosperity; many joined the Church: five of our present members he baptised, one so long ago as in 1852. Mr. Wall believed in the social element, and quarterly tea meetings for the members, for converse and prayer,

departure the Church declined. No minister for a while made a lengthy stay. In 1864 Mr. Samuel Kevan came from Halstead, in Essex, but before a year had passed he gave notice that he intended to supply Churches with a view to a settlement, as the income of this Church was so small. In May, 1865, he removed to Colnbrook, Bucks. November of the same year saw an invitation given to, and accepted by Mr. Wm. Gill, of Farnborough; and the Recognition services took place on Jan. 24th, 1866. They were very successful, a large company sat down to tea, and appeared, so says the record, "to enjoy themselves very much." Mr. Blunt, of Plumstead was the special preacher and he preached "a most touching and able discourse;" there were present also, Mr. Griffith, of Sandhurst; and Mr. Kevan, the late minister; the meeting began at 6.30, and ended about 10. "These services were opened (says the chronicler) by an excellent harmonium which had been purchased by subscribers." The subscription list is appended and contains the names of present members of the Church, but as they are of those who "do good by stealth and blush to find it fame," we forbear to publish their good deeds. This was the first fixed instrument used in the services, previously a fiddle had been used, and before that a flute. Mr. Gill served the Church for about five years, leaving in Jan., 1871. for Old Buckenham, Norfolk. With a break of about a month only, Mr. Ward of the Metropolitan College was here on probation, and he settled in July of that year.

We have now almost come to the end of our story; for the events of the past thirty years are fresher in the memory of many of you and need not be recalled, so we shall only briefly touch on them.

Mr. Ward was, what in common speech, is called a character, and many are the tales told of him, about his horseback rides, about his pig, and about his baby. He was a popular preacher, and the congregations increased; he started and carried on a Sailor's Society, with a considerable lending library attached. To add to his income he kept a Boys' School; and some of his pupils now occupy good positions in the Town. It was during Mr. Ward's ministry that the Bible Class, known as Mrs. Mitchell's class, was started, and many there are who thank God for the wise help and counsel they gained there. At Midsummer, 1873, Mr. Ward resigned, and immediately left for America, where he yet labours in Ohio. Following this there was a difficulty in raising a sufficient salary to support a minister; two invitations were given and were declined, so that it was not until February, 1877, that a choice made was accepted. During this long period of nearly four years the work had gone slowly on, the Church being served by supplies. The next minister was Mr. Joseph French, of Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex. He was a good man and much respected, but was greatly afflicted in body and mind, and before three years had passed was obliged to resign. Mrs. French also is held in grateful remembrance.

It was in 1879, that the rearrangement of the Sanctuary took place, it being entirely refitted with new pulpit and pews, at the sole expense of Mr. Hilder. From the end of 1879, the Church was again served by supplies. In 1881 the use of the two Hymn Books Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns, and Dr. Rippon's Selection, was discontinued, and "The Psalms and Hymns" brought into use; to the sorrow of some who, to-day, think "the old is better."

In September, 1882, Rev. E. Compton, of Hastings, commenced to supply the Church, and after twenty-seven Sundays was asked to become Pastor. He consented to do so, but never became a member of the Church, so that the position is very hard to describe definitely. Mr. Compton resigned in 1901. The cause had, at this time, come to a very low ebb both as to numbers and spirit.

The present pastorate commenced in November of that year. Since then we have come somewhat out of that depth, but we have much yet to do; our congregations are far larger; we have had additions to our numbers; we have greatly improved our premises. When the present Pastor came, he did so with anticipations of seeing great progress, and those anticipations are not less to-day. Here we stand, a little people truly, but of good heart and faith. The future, the near future, may call us all as a Church and people to further effort, to *self-sacrificing* effort for the progress and extension of the work. The need around is vast as ever, our supply for that need is as ever the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our brethren call us, our Lord calls us. Let us answer, each for himself or herself, "Here am I."