

A Chapter in the Early History of Havant United Reformed Church



North Street Congregational Church circa 1920

John Pile

Havant
BOROUGH COUNCIL



The Dissenters' meeting-house was the Independent Chapel in The Pallant

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Research in any field of enquiry is cumulative and builds upon the efforts of others. Anyone studying the history of Havant United Reformed Church is quickly made aware of the debt owed to Jack Barrett who, as church archivist for many years, was responsible not only for preserving the existing records but for searching out new facts and drawing new conclusions from the material at his disposal.

The Reverend Anthony Gardiner came to Havant in 1983 and brought new expertise to bear upon the subject and in 1994 he and Jack collaborated on a revised version of *Havant United Reformed Church: a history* that Jack had written in 1985. This leaflet and a useful article in *The Making of Havant*, No.2 (1978) written by members of the Havant Local History Group, remained the most accessible sources for a history of the church for a number of years.

Although not perfect, as their authors would admit, these publications provided a good foundation and inspiration for further work and in 1991 Gillian Peskett with her late husband Brian published for the first time the manuscript of Lewis Lasseter's reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church under Lasseter's original title *These Fifty Years 1891–1941*. Further contributions included Dr. Watcyn Wynn's talk in June 2006 on the former minister and well-known poet and hymn writer William Tidd Matson (1833–1899) and a presentation in May 2008 by Gillian Peskett and myself under the title *Dissent and Dissenters: some aspects of the history of the Independent Chapel in Havant*. The present contribution has grown out of the research that I did for that occasion.

Despite the best efforts of the state and the official Church of the day to impose a uniformity of belief and practice, the history of

religion in England throughout the Middle Ages and after the Reformation shows that disagreement, sometimes breaking out into heresy and schism, was never far below the surface. Even when the pre-Reformation Church seemed to be at its most monolithic there were persistent and dissident voices to be heard. Even though the majority of the population travelled less frequently and less widely than it does today, it would be a mistake to think that Havant, at any period of its history, was isolated from the outside world and its ever-changing ideas and fashions.

Havant's situation at the head of a large natural harbour and its location on a Roman road built soon after the conquest of 43 AD, which appears never to have gone out of use, ensured a steady flow of visitors, new residents and new ideas. Havant was considered important enough to be depicted and named on the *Gough Map* of c.1360, and the recorded itineraries of the kings and queens of England show them passing this way on some six occasions between the 13th and 16th centuries. Although visits by the royal court were infrequent, Havant's weekly markets ensured a regular flow of people from the immediately surrounding countryside and the annual fairs attracted buyers and dealers in wool, cloth, livestock and other commodities from further afield.

The most important agents for the introduction of new religious ideas were of course the clerics: the incumbents of the parish church joined later by successive ministers of the non-conformist chapels. During the period from 1600–1700 with which this article is mainly concerned there were nine rectors of St. Faith's, Havant and seven of St. Thomas's, Warblington.

In reply to the question posed by the Bishop of Winchester's visitation of 1765: 'Are there any dissenters in your parish of any denomination?' Richard Bingham BA, rector of St. Faith's, replied 'Too many! There is a dissenting meeting-house and a mass-house.' The dissenting meeting-house was the Independent Chapel in The Pallant, the precursor of the United Reformed Church in North Street and the mass-house was the Roman Catholic chapel in

Brockhampton Lane built in 1750 or 1751 on land belonging to the Bishop of Winchester with timber from the Bishop's own trees.

Havant has a long history of religious dissent and it must be remembered that the term 'dissent' applied to any deviation, be it Catholic, Protestant or any other, from the prevailing state religion. One of the earliest casualties of Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534 was Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury and mother of Cardinal Reginald Pole who was living in exile on the Continent. The Poles were the last of the Plantagenets and as such they posed a threat to Henry's Tudor succession. Margaret was arrested at Warblington on 13th November 1535 on a charge of complicity with the Church of Rome and beheaded in the Tower of London on 28th May 1542. Edward VI, Henry's son by his third wife Jane Seymour, granted the manor of Warblington to Richard Cotton whose son George founded a dynasty of recusant Catholics that lasted a century and a half before dying out in 1736. Under the protection of the Cottons the Catholic presence in Warblington and Bedhampton, another of Cotton's manors, became considerable, giving rise to the Reverend Bingham's comment of 1765.

This preamble to the early history of the Independents in Havant would be incomplete without at least a short note about five entries in the St. Faith's burial register between 1728 and 1733 where the deceased are described as 'anabaptist'. Two names stand out from the others. They are Mary Millard, buried 2nd May 1728 and Mary Slyder, buried 11 December 1729. Mary Millard was probably the wife of Thomas Millard who died in 1721 and who had applied for a licence for the use of his house as a dissenters' meeting-house. The licence is one of an undated group, but it has been ascribed to the early 18th century. Mary Slyder may be confidently identified with Mary Slidall who received a licence for the use of her house as a meeting-place on 4th May 1717. A Nicholas Slidel subscribed in 1696 to 'The Solemn Association' for the defence of William III and the support of the succession following an attempt to assassinate the king. Dissenting ministers and their congregations were often called upon to subscribe to oaths of allegiance as they were not

covered by those made by members of the Anglican Church. The Hampshire Roll of 1696, which is headed:

The Humble Address of your Maj[es]tie[s] Loyall &
Obedient Subjects y^e Dissenting Ministers and
Congregations of y^e Presbyterian & Congregational
persuasion

includes eleven names under 'Havant' but only further research will enable them to be assigned to their various 'persuasions'.

It has long been recognized that the Independent Church in Havant – subsequently Havant United Reformed Church – owes its existence to one man who, unable to assent to the Act of Uniformity of 1662, withdrew from the Anglican Church to minister to an independent congregation, the latter no doubt composed mainly of those of his former parishioners who shared his views. That man was the Reverend John Harrison, who, prior to the Great Ejection, had been rector of Warblington. Considering Harrison's importance in the history of Protestant Dissent in Havant it is surprising that so little is known about him.

Harrison was undoubtedly an 'Intruder' at Warblington, which is to say the previous incumbent John Payne MA, who had been appointed to the living in 1630, was ejected, perhaps forcibly as many men in his position were, when he refused to accept the alternatives to the suppression of the episcopate and the Book of Common Prayer in accordance with the so-called Root and Branch petition of 1640. This formed the basis of an Ordinance of the Long Parliament carried into effect early in 1645, and Harrison was installed in his place. John Payne, who was vicar of St. Peter the Great, the sub-deanery church of Chichester Cathedral, had already resigned this living in January 1641/2 and he had gone from Warblington before 22nd Feb 1644/5. However, that was not the last that Harrison would hear from Payne, who had taken his grievances to the Committee for Plundered Ministers appointed by the Long Parliament at the beginning of the Civil War in 1643. The

Committee had evidently ordered Harrison to pay Payne's wife Elizabeth a pension of £16 *per annum*, but in the ensuing turmoil of the Civil War Payne pursued Harrison in vain for the money.

Attempts to increase our knowledge of Harrison are hampered by the fragmentary nature of the records at this period and, it has to be said, by the seeming unwillingness of the Anglican Church to recognize that these 'Intruders' may have contributed something of value to the congregations they served. At best they are often ignored in parish church histories and at worst regarded as criminals. The problem with regard to Harrison is compounded by the fact there were several John Harrisons in the Chichester and Winchester dioceses at this period and one is sometime uncertain that one has the right man.

Once Harrison had been ordained he appears to have remained within the border area of Sussex and Hampshire, between Chichester and Havant, for the remainder of his life and we can identify him with some certainty with the Johannes Harrison who was appointed curate to the parish of St. Bartholomew in Chichester on 21st February 1628. Harrison remained at Chichester until 30th December the same year, when he was appointed curate at Funtington (WSRO: Ep.I/9/10). Harrison was still at Funtington ten years later when, on 13th February 1638/9, a cause was heard in the Consistory Court concerning church rates for repairs (WSRO: Ep.I/11/16). It was stated on this occasion that he was about 40 years of age and was born at Caosalton in Sussex (probably Carshalton, Surrey). If this information were anywhere near correct he would have been born around 1600.

The next we hear of Harrison is on 13th February 1641/2 when he witnessed the Protestation Return for Funtington. This was a list of all 95 of the male inhabitants of the parish above the age of 18 who had subscribed to the Protestation Oath ordered by Parliament on 30th July 1641. It was declared 'That what person soever shall not take the Protestation is unfit to beare Office in the Church or

Commonwealth' and the oath itself is so germane to our enquiry that it is worth quoting in full:

I, _____ do, in the presence of Almighty God, promise, vow, and protest to maintain, and defend as farr as lawfully I maye, with my Life, Power and Estate, the true Reformed Protestant religion, expressed in the Doctrine of the Church of England, against all Popery and Popish Innovations, within this Realme, contrary to the same Doctrine, and according to the duty of my Allegiance, His Majesties Royal Person, Honour and Estate, as alsoe the Power and Privileges of Parliament, the lawful Rights and Liberties of the Subjects, and any person that maketh this Protestation, in whatsoever he shall do in the lawful Pursuance of the same; and to my power, and as farr as lawfully I may, I will appose and by all good Ways and Means endeavour to bring to condign Punishment all such as shall, either by Force, Practice, Councels, Plots, Conspiracies, or otherwise, doe any Thing to the contrary of any Thing in this present Protestation contained: and further, that I shall, in all just and honourable ways, endeavour to preserve the Union and Peace betwixt the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland: and neither for Hope, Feare, nor other Respect, shell relinquish this Promise, Vow and Protestation.

The population of Funtington may be estimated from the number who signed the oath at around 300 (L.Bradley, *A Glossary for Local Population Studies*, Matlock, 1978) and the area of the parish, which included the hamlets of East and West Ashling, was 3762 acres. As a perpetual curacy in the gift of the Dean and Chapter of Chichester, Harrison possessed a stipend of £40 *per annum* paid by the farmer of the great tithes (L.F. Salzman (ed.) *Victoria County History of Sussex*, vol.4 (1953) p.192). Harrison remained at Funtington until the sequestration of John Payne at some date before 22nd February 1644/5 (A.G. Matthews, *Walker Revised*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948, p.188). Whether Harrison was

married during his curacy at Funtington is uncertain and the defamation cause heard in the Consistory Court at Chichester between Anne Harrison wife of John Harrison, clerk and Joan Churcher, wife of Richard Churcher on 27th January 1628/9 (WSRO: Ep.III/5/2) may relate to him, although the first marriage of which we can be certain is that recorded as follows in the Warblington parish register (PCRO: CHU19/14/1-3):

John Harrison Rector of Warblington was married to Anne Sone in the p[ar]ish Church aforesaid by Anthony Prowse Clarke & Rector of Alverstoke, the 22th [sic.] Day of November 1644

It is worth pausing a moment to consider the importance of examining original documents wherever possible. A recently transcribed and published version of the Warblington parish registers gives the above entry as follows:

HARRISON, John and Anne Sone 22 Nov 1644

Although this may be adequate for the family historians for whom this edition is primarily intended it obscures information of great significance to our story, as we shall see.

The Sones of East Leigh in Warblington were yeoman farmers and members of the family are found in Warblington, Westbourne and Havant throughout the 17th to 19th centuries. The wills of Thomas Sone, 1640 (HRO: 1640A/159) and Thomas Sone, 1673 (HRO: 1673A/084), both of Warblington, would certainly throw more light on the family background, but it seems likely from the entries in the parish registers that Anne Sone, daughter of Thomas, baptised 26 July 1621 was the lady who, aged 23, married John Harrison in 1644, when he was about 44.

The Warblington registers also record the birth of John, the Harrisons' first child, on 6th January 1646 and his baptism a fortnight later. John lived for only three years and was buried 9th

February 1649. John I was followed by John II born 17th October 1648, three months before the death of his brother, so it would seem that this was expected. However, John II survived only a little longer than his brother and he was buried 12th April 1653. It would appear that the birth of Anne's second son was the cause of her own death for the register records her burial on 17th October 1648.

The Reverend John Harrison remarried within a year of his first wife's death and the marriage was recorded in both the Warblington and Alverstoke registers respectively as follows:

John Harrison Rector of Warblington was married to Ann Prowse by her Father Anthony Prowse the 20th Day of December 1649

John Harrison married Hannah [*sic.*] Prowse 20 Dec 1649

Ann Prowse, the daughter of the Reverend Anthony Prowse was baptised on 10th January 1629 and was therefore 20 when she married. The baptism was recorded in the register of Shaftesbury St. Peter, Dorset where her father was rector. Harrison's second wife gave birth to Nathaniel their first child on 6th January 1650, probably 1650/1 rather than 1649/50. Nathaniel did not live long and he was buried 26th May 1651. Three daughters followed, and as their deaths are not recorded in the Warblington parish register it may be assumed that they survived at least until Harrison was ejected from the living probably in 1662. Two married daughters, Elizabeth and Abigail, are mentioned in Harrison's will made 10th October 1692 and it is not unreasonable to suppose that Elizabeth was the daughter born in 1654 and Abigail was born after the family had left Warblington.

It is curious that John and his first wife Anne Sone should have been married at Warblington by the Reverend Anthony Prowse, the father of Ann Prowse whom he married five years later. According to the *Alumni Oxonienses*, Anthony Prowse matriculated to Brasenose College on 21st November 1617 aged 19 (and was therefore born in 1598). He gained BA in 1617 and MA in 1620 and

was appointed rector of Shaftesbury St Peter in 1624 and of Alverstoke in 1647, although the record of Harrison's first marriage at Warblington in 1644 clearly refutes the date of his appointment to Alverstoke as given in the *Alumni Oxonienses*, but given that Prowse was said to be an intruder at Alverstoke, the earlier date may well be correct. The *Alumni Oxonienses* adds that Prowse was appointed to Alverstoke by the Westminster Assembly thus confirming that he was an intruder, though the fact that the Westminster Assembly met for six years between 1643 and 1649 allows either date for the appointment, and an examination of the original entry would be necessary to settle the matter. According to the *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541–1857*, vol.5, Bath and Wells Diocese, Anthony Prowse was Prebendary of East Harptree between 1672 and his death in 1692, a preferment he continued to enjoy despite his move to Alverstoke. It may be noted in passing that the online *Church of England Clergy Database* has Prowse at Shaftesbury continuously from 1619 (*sic.*) to 1663 although this should not surprise us when we remember the tendency of Anglican sources to ignore the Commonwealth!

What happened to John Harrison immediately after his ejection from Warblington, probably in 1662, is a matter for conjecture as the first news we have of him comes ten years later when Harrison was licensed to be a Presbyterian teacher in Havant in the house of Thomas Bayly. The granting of such licences to dissenting teachers and their hosts was the result of King Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence of 1672–3 which included *inter alia* the provision:

[...] that there may be no pretence for any of our subjects to continue their illegal meetings and conventicles, we do declare, that we shall from time to time allow a sufficient number of places as they shall be desired, in all parts of this our kingdom, for the use of such as do not conform to the church of England, to meet and assemble in order to [practise] their public worship and devotion, which places shall be open and free to all persons.

But to prevent such disorders and inconveniences as may happen by this our indulgence, if not duly regulated; and that they may be the better protected by the civil magistrate; our express will and pleasure is, that none of our subjects do presume to meet in any place, until such places be allowed, and the teacher of that congregation be approved by us.

The applicant for the licence was Henry Bradley of East Smithfield who had also applied for licences on behalf of several congregations in southern Hampshire including North and South Hayling, but who Bradley was and why he should have acted as agent in this way is unknown. It seems reasonable to assume that when Harrison departed from Warblington he took an embryonic dissenting congregation with him, and that this was augmented by sympathisers from Havant and perhaps from further afield. For the first ten years this congregation would have met as an illegal conventicle of the type that the Declaration of Indulgence sought to regularize and it is possible that the conventicle had been held in Thomas Bayly's house from the beginning.

The Baylys were a numerous and widespread family who, like the Sones with whom they were intermarried, were largely yeoman farmers although it is evident from the surviving records that, by the late 17th century, they were moving into the professions – principally medicine. Thomas who died in 1684 was the father of Arthur Bayly (b.1667 d.1699) who in 1691 is recorded as physician and surgeon of Havant (Arthur J. Willis, *A Hampshire Miscellany 1675–1834*, 1964, p.99). Thomas was probably a son of William Bayly and Ann Sone (married 10th June 1656) and brother of Willam (b.1662 d.1735) whose daughter Mary married Thomas Silver, cyder merchant of Havant and one of the trustees in 1761 of the Independent Chapel in The Pallant. William's sons George and Edward became well-known medical practitioners in Chichester and Havant respectively (Richard R. Trail and Francis W. Steer, *Dr. John Bayly of Chichester*, Chichester Paper No.34, 1963).

John Harrison was about 60 when he was ejected from Warblington and 70 when licensed to preach at Thomas Bayly's house. This was an advanced age in the 17th century and it is not unreasonable to ask for how much longer he was actively involved with his congregation. Harrison appears to have been succeeded in Havant by Charles Nicholetts in 1690. In 1693 Nicholetts was mentioned as a 'preacher in the Conventicle' (although I have been unable to trace the sources of Jack Barrett's references for these records). The last we hear of Harrison is his death in 1691. As was usual in the case of men of some property, an inventory was made on 9th March 1691 of Harrison's goods and chattels remaining in his house at Stoughton immediately after his death (WSRO: Ep.I/29/189/56). This has been edited and printed (Annabelle Hughes, *Sussex Clergy Inventories 1600–1750*, Sussex Record Society, vol.91 (2007)). Harrison's will, made 11th February and proved 10th March 1691 has not been printed and my transcription of a microfiche copy (WSRO: STC I/29/91b) in the West Sussex Record Office is given in full in the Appendix to this article. The inventory is of great interest and a number of conclusions about Harrison's material circumstances may be drawn from it. The house in Stoughton comprised eleven rooms, including the smaller service rooms, and this appears to be about the average size of house when compared to the others listed in Hughes's book. The total valuation of £106 11s 8d was below the average of about £225 for the other clergy valuations of the period, but it is noteworthy that Harrison's study contained books to the value of about £50, well above the average of £13 for his peers' libraries. It would be of the greatest interest to know the titles of the books, but unfortunately they are not listed.

The will may be allowed to speak for itself, though there is one point that will not have escaped the attentive reader. The will was witnessed by William Bayley, John Battine, Thomas Sone and John Penfold. All names of considerable prominence in the Havant area at this time. The names of Bayly and Sone will be recognized as John Harrison's longstanding and intimate friends.

APPENDIX

John Harrison's Will made 11th February 1691 and proved 10th March 1691

In the name of God Amen I John Harrison of Stoughton in the County of Sussex Clerk: God make and defend this my last Will and Testament in manner and forme following that is to say First I assign and [...] my soul into the hands of Almighty God receiving admission of Sin and everlasting Life by the [...] death and passion of Jesus Christ my Lord and only Saviour. Item I give and bequeath all those my Messuages Barnes gardens Lands Tenements and Hereditaments with their appurtenances Situate lying and being in the parish of Stoughton in the County of Sussex which theretofore purchased of and from one Thomas Smith [?] for the remainder of a certaine Terme of One Thousand years unto Ann my loveing wife for and during Soe many years of the said Terme as she my said wife shall live together with full power to and for my said wife at any time during her life to sell cut downe convert and disperse of Such of the Timber or Trees growing upon the premises as she my said wife shall think fit for her owne use and benefit And from and immediately after the death of my said wife then I give and bequeath all the said Messuages Barnes gardens lands Tenements and Hereditaments with their appurtenances unto my Daughter Elizabeth Harrison and the Heirs of her body And for want of Such Heir and after the death of my said daughter Elizabeth Then I give and bequeath all the said messuages Barnes Gardens Lands Tenements and hereditaments with the appurtenances unto my Daughter Abigail the wife of Miles Benson her Executors and assigns for and during all the residue and remainder of the said Terme of One Thousand years as shall be then to come & unexpired Item I give all my lands that I purchased of Peregrine Palmer Esqr with thappurtenances to Ann my loveing wife for her to dispose of for the best Advantage of my Daughter Elizabeth the now wife of Thomas Wheeler and to her children lawfully to be begotten or to such Child or Children of my said Daughter Elizabeth as my said wife shall thinke fitt Item I give to my said wife all my household goods during her naturall life and after her decease to be devided between my Two daughters as my wife shall direct Item I give unto my Daughter Abigail Benson Five Shillings to be paid her within One moneth after my decease Lastly I

make and appoint my loveing wife Ann Harrison my full and sole executrix of this my last Will and Testament In witness whereof I have sett my hand and seale the Tenth day of February in the year of our Lord One Thousand six Hundred and Nynty 1690 John Harrison sealed declared and published to be the last Will and Testament of the said John Harrison the Testator in the presence of William Bayly John Battine Thomas Soane John Penfold Junior Be it known unto all men by these present That whereas I John Harrison of Stoughton in the County of Sussex Clerke have made and declared my said last Will and Testament in writeing bearing date the Tenth day of February in the year of our Lord One Thousand Six Hundred and Nynety I the said John Harrison doe by this present Codicill confirme and ratifie my said Will and Testament And whereas I have by my said last Will and Testament given all the lands which I purchased of Peregrine Palmer Esqr with the appurtenances to Ann my loveing wife [...] to dispose of for the best advantage of my Daughter Elizabeth the now wife of Thomas Wheeler and to her children or to such child or children of my said Daughter Elizabeth as my said wife shall think fitt now my further Will and meaning is that if my said daughter Elizabeth should happen to die without issue Then I will and require my said wife her Executors or Administrators to pay unto the said Thomas Wheeler One Hundred pounds to be raised and paid out of the said lands Soe given and bequeatherd within Twelve moneths after such decease of my said Daughter Elizabeth without Issue and my will and meaning is that this Codicill be & be [*sic.*] adjudged to be part and parcel of my said last Will and Testament and that all things therein conteyned and mentioned be faithfully and truly performed and as fully and amply in every respect as if the said were soe declared and set downe in my said last Will and Testament In witness whereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seale the Eleventh Day of February in the year of our Lord One Thousand Six Hundred and Nynety John Harrison Sealed and declared to be the true meaning of the [said] John Harrison the Testator in the presence of William Bayly John Battine Thomas Sone John Penfold Junr.



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