

£3.50

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXI

JANUARY 1968 TO DECEMBER 1968

CAMBRIDGE  
DEIGHTON BELL  
1968

PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY  
(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXI

JANUARY 1968 TO DECEMBER 1968

CAMBRIDGE  
DEIGHTON BELL

1968

*Published for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (incorporating the Cambs and Hunts  
Archaeological Society) by Deighton Bell, 13 Trinity Street, Cambridge*

*Printed in Great Britain at the University Printing House, Cambridge*

# CONTENTS

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <i>Officers and Council of the Society, 1967-1968</i>   | <i>page vi</i> |
| A Collection of Flint Implements from the Hunstanton District<br><i>By</i> HAMON LE STRANGE                                       | I              |
| A Neolithic Hut and Features at Little Paxton, Huntingdonshire<br><i>By</i> GRANVILLE T. RUDD                                     | 9              |
| A Romano-British Settlement site at Brickhills Estate, Eynesbury, Hunts.<br><i>By</i> GRANVILLE T. RUDD <i>and</i> COLIN DAINES   | 15             |
| A Roman Farm-settlement at Godmanchester<br><i>By</i> W. H. C. FRENCH, D.D., F.S.A.   | 19             |
| The Anglo-Saxon S-Shaped Brooch in England, with Special Reference to<br>one from Lakenheath, Suffolk<br><i>By</i> TERESA BRISCOE | 45             |
| The Hidation of Huntingdonshire<br><i>By</i> CYRIL HART   | 55             |
| The Dissenting Churches in Cambridgeshire from 1660 to 1700<br><i>By</i> MARGARET SPUFFORD  | 67             |
| Review Note: West Cambridgeshire (R.C.H.M.)<br><i>By</i> MARY D. CRASTER  | 96             |
| <i>Index</i>  | 97             |

## THE DISSENTING CHURCHES IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE FROM 1660 TO 1700

MARGARET SPUFFORD

THE Commonwealth saw the rapid growth of 'gathered' churches, which drew in their members from a wide area. For instance, the Baptists of Fenstanton in Huntingdonshire and Caxton in Cambridgeshire, united between 1644 and 1666, baptized members from no less than thirty villages and towns in Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Bedfordshire.<sup>1</sup> As John Cook wrote, 'A Union of hearts rather than a vicinity of Houses, is to make up a Congregation according to the New Testament'.<sup>2</sup> The Restoration marked the end of the toleration which all but the Quakers had enjoyed for most of the preceding twenty years. It also marked the beginning of official inquiries by the re-established Anglican church, into the number of these gathered churches, and the number of parishioners who had switched their allegiance from the parish church to the nearest Congregational, Baptist or Quaker meeting. These Anglican inquiries were naturally made on a parochial basis, whereas the whole aim of the sectarian churches they were attempting to examine was to bring together believers in a conscious act of choice, wherever they lived. The Church Book of Gamlingay Old Meeting defined a true church of Christ as 'visible saints, and . . . a congregation of visible Believers in Christ who are separated from the wicked world, and give themselves up unto God, and unto one another'. The returns made by the ministers on the numbers of dissenters in their parishes therefore only give dismembered fragments of the nonconformist churches in the area. It is usually impossible to reconstruct the whole body from these fragments. However, the Anglican reports of the late 1660s and 1670s do give statistical information on the extent of nonconformist growth in the preceding period. They are therefore valuable, particularly since they come at a time when the records of the dissenters themselves become extremely thin.<sup>3</sup>

The printed sources available for the diocese of Ely which show the extent to which nonconformity had spread under the Commonwealth are the returns made

<sup>1</sup> *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham, 1644-1720*, ed. E. B. Underhill for the Hanserd Knollys Society, 1854, pp. 251-4. (Henceforth, *Fenstanton Records*.)

<sup>2</sup> Quoted G. F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints* (1957), p. 108, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> The Quaker records are the only ones for Cambridgeshire which continue through the 1670s, and they in any case record the doings of a hard core of converts which had been under persistent pressure since the sect was founded in the 1650s. They may be regarded as untypical. The continuous records of the Fenstanton Baptists end in 1658/9 (*Fenstanton Records*, p. 250) and the records of the Open Baptists of Bedford become too scrappy in the 1670s for a reconstruction of their history (*Church Book of Bunyan Meeting 1650-1821*, ed. G. B. Harrison). Even the earliest history of the Cambridgeshire Congregationalists is extraordinarily thin, never mind their history in this time of persecution.

by the bishop, Benjamin Laney, in 1669, the licences issued for dissenting meeting places and preachers after the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672,<sup>1</sup> and the Compton Census of 1676,<sup>2</sup> listing the numbers of papists, conformists and nonconformists in each village. Two unpublished visitations of the diocese, carried out in 1679 and 1682,<sup>3</sup> form extra evidence to support or disprove this general information gathered by central authority, as do the detailed memoranda made for the visitation of the archdeaconry of Ely in 1685.<sup>4</sup> Of these sources, the licences issued in 1672 and the visitations of the diocese carried out at the end of the decade are the most trustworthy, in so far as they are issued to, or they present, specific named individuals, whose existence can be safely assumed. Neither, of course, is any guide to the extent of nonconformity in a particular parish. Licences were usually, but not always, issued only to the larger congregations. The fact that a licence was issued in 1672 is therefore only proof that nonconformity did exist in a specific place, and the absence of such a licence is no evidence. Similarly, the presentation by the churchwardens of parishioners as conventiclors is proof that the nonconformists they named inhabited their parish. There remains the problem of what proportion were so presented, and of how far this proportion varied from parish to parish depending on the tolerant, or unsympathetic attitude, and on the laziness, or devotion to duty, of the individual churchwardens concerned. The necessity for caution is underlined by the example of the Warwickshire churchwarden who was presented for holding conventicles at his house.<sup>5</sup> His previous reports, made by virtue of his office, on nonconformists in his parish, seem unlikely to have been very thorough. However, the existence of a licence, or of presentations, for a particular parish is useful confirmatory evidence to collate with the episcopal returns of 1669, and with the Compton Census.

The returns of 1669 give details of the places within the diocese where the bishop knew, or suspected, that a conventicle was held, together with an estimate of its probable size, and the names of its teachers, and the social background of those who attended, where possible. The Compton Census listed the numbers of papists, nonconformists and conformists in each village. Both these surveys are useful bases for forming general impressions of the extent of nonconformity in the late 1660s and 1670s, but both are, of course, liable to be inaccurate in specific cases.<sup>6</sup> The Quarter Sessions records for Cambridgeshire, as opposed to the Isle of Ely, are unfortunately seriously defective. The volume of presentations for dissent at Quarter Sessions would provide a useful check on the numbers of dissenters recorded in various parishes in 1669 and 1676, but the session rolls only survive from 1730. Only the order books,

<sup>1</sup> Both printed in G. Lyon Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence* (1911), I, pp. 34-42 and II, pp. 862-75.

<sup>2</sup> William Salt Library, Stafford. Soon to be printed in the Staffs. Historical Collections, ed. A. Whiteman.

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge University Library, Ely Episcopal Records, B2/66 ff. 13-28v and 39-53r.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Bradshaw, 'Notes of the Episcopal Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Ely in 1685', *Proc. C.A.S.* III (1875), pp. 323-61.

<sup>5</sup> *Warwick County Records*, VII (1946), p. lxxvii.

<sup>6</sup> See note on the Compton Census at the end (p. 94).

and a book of recognizances survive from the 1660s.<sup>1</sup> The former do give registrations of meeting houses after the Toleration Act of 1689, but these, at least until 1715, are so sporadic, and omit so many major congregations known to be in existence, that they are very little help.<sup>2</sup>

The census showed that the villages of Cambridgeshire<sup>3</sup> contained between 4 and 5 per cent of nonconformists in 1676. This proportion was almost exactly typical of the country as a whole.<sup>4</sup> An average figure is, however, deceptive because a detailed survey of the distribution of nonconformity shows that it had obtained a really strong grasp in some areas, and was almost completely non-existent in others.

The census recorded the existence of dissenters in over thirty more parishes than the bishop had done in 1669, perhaps because dissent had spread up to 1675, after the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672. Even so, parishes with congregations which were entirely conformist made up the largest single group amongst the parishes of the diocese of Ely. Nearly half the parishes in the diocese had only two dissenters at most. The parishes which stood out in the census as centres of nonconformity were those with a group of ten or more dissenters. There were twenty-five of these in southern Cambridgeshire,<sup>5</sup> and, on the whole, all the available evidence agreed, with remarkable unanimity, on the part they played as strongholds of dissent. Bishop Laney had recorded a conventicle in, or a licence had been issued for, seventeen of them. Moreover twelve of them also had significantly large numbers of presentations for dissent in the visitations of 1679, 1682, and 1685. Only six other parishes appeared from the visitations to have large numbers of nonconformists at the end of the 1670s which would not have been selected as significant nonconformist strongholds on the basis of the Compton figures alone.<sup>6</sup>

The episcopal returns for the country as a whole showed that in 1669 the Presbyterians, with well over 40,000 adherents, were by far the strongest sect. The Baptists, with 7,000 or thereabouts, were equally noticeably the weakest. The Congregationalists competed with the Quakers for second place.<sup>7</sup>

This order was almost completely reversed in Cambridgeshire,<sup>8</sup> where the pitifully small group of thirty-odd Presbyterians put the county lowest amongst those which had Presbyterians at all.<sup>9</sup> The Congregationalists were, by Bishop Laney's reckoning, the strongest sect in the shire,<sup>10</sup> in 1669. There were just over 700 of them. Only London, Kent and Norfolk in eastern England, and Monmouthshire in the

<sup>1</sup> Cambridgeshire Record Office, Q.S. 2 Ia, etc. and Q.S. 4 (i).

<sup>2</sup> Mapped on Map B. Registrations began in 1699, Q.S. 2.2. See also 'Nonconformist Places of Worship Licensed under the Toleration Act, 1688', *Tr. Cong. Hist. Soc.* VI (1913-15), pp. 200-1, 206.

<sup>3</sup> Including the Isle of Ely.

<sup>4</sup> I.e. 4.4 per cent in Cambridgeshire compared with 4.5 per cent (or 1:22) over the whole country.

<sup>5</sup> Excluding Cambridge itself and the parishes of the deanery of Fordham in the diocese of Norwich.

<sup>6</sup> These were in any case missing for two of them, Swaffham Bulbeck and Willingham.

<sup>7</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, p. 119.

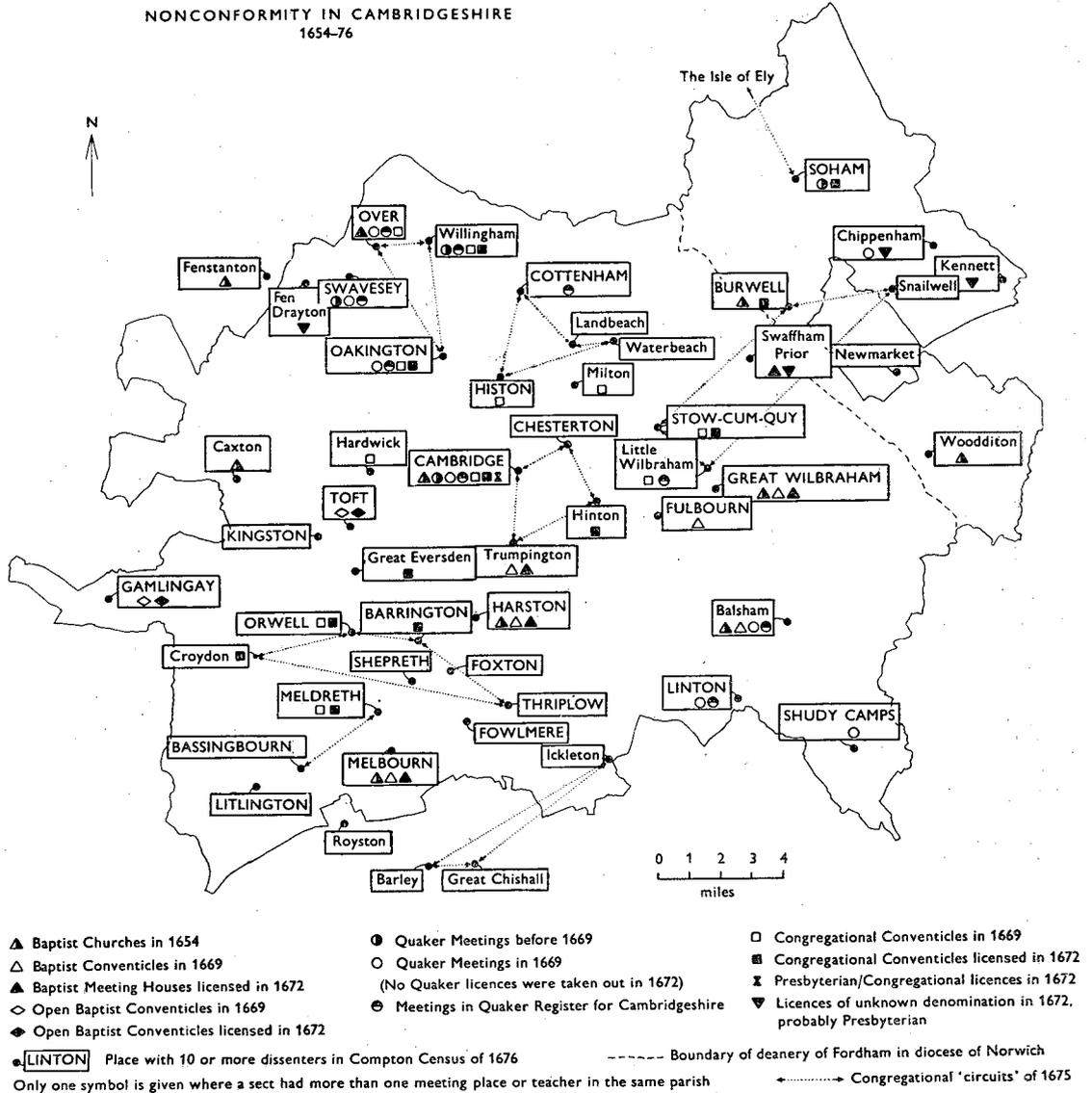
<sup>8</sup> Numbers of conventiclors tabulated by denomination in Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, pp. 127-9.

<sup>10</sup> All these figures include the Isle.

west, had more,<sup>1</sup> and apart from the last they all, of course, had much larger populations on which to draw.

The evidence for the early growth of the Congregational church in Cambridgeshire is very scanty. The work of Francis Holcroft,<sup>2</sup> fellow of Clare, seems to have been fundamental. He accepted the living of Bassingbourn in 1655, and, according to tradition, founded a Congregational church there almost at once. Only the wording



Map A.

<sup>1</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, pp. 130-2.

<sup>2</sup> For Holcroft, Bradshaw, and Holcroft's assistants Oddy and Lock, see A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (1934), pp. 271-2, 69-70, 325-6, 371.

of the covenant which bound the members of this first church survives.<sup>1</sup> There is little evidence which shows how extensive the growth of the Bassingbourn church was before the Restoration, apart from the account of Richard Conder, junior, who became pastor of a branch of Holcroft's church at Croydon-cum-Clopton after his death in 1692. At about that time, when he was in his early forties, Richard Conder wrote a note on the work of 'God's servant' Francis Holcroft, at the beginning of his Church Book, which afterwards became the Church Book of Great Gransden.<sup>2</sup> In his account, he described how, after Holcroft had begun to preach at Bassingbourn:

the lord oned him much in conuerchon of soolls and their began to be a talk of him, and my father being a anchent profeser then being feri son in this contri heard of his meting on one of the holi days as they calle them at East or Whisanti. he maid his servant and children to goo with him to the meeting thow it much displeased us and he preached then from them words 'the ston that was regectid by yow builders is becom the head ston of the corner'.

and i being yong did not understand what he preached but thought he was a strang man to talk so much about stoons. and when wee cam away he followed us out and talcked with my father about severall things, and my father being feri plain with him he askid him what he thought in him, and his ansour was that he tooock him to bee on of the reformed prests of that day, and hee claped him on the shoolllder and said 'thow dost not know my mind, but thow maist know it hereaftor'.

and soo hee partid with him and soon after the woork of God went forward and soolls was convertid and the lord was much with him and soonn seet his hart to builld him an hows. and the lord's hand was seen in that day in calling seaverall of the yong schollers in the unifarciti which did preach about in the cuntri towns, as mister Oddi at Melldrid and mister Ecins at Chisell and mister Ponder at Whadon.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Robert Robinson, 'Historical Account' in his *Posthumous Works*, ed. B. Flower (Harlow, 1812), pp. 257-9. Most of Robinson's material is drawn from the near-contemporary account of Francis Holcroft's work preserved at the beginning of the Great Gransden Church Book (see below), which appears to be the only seventeenth-century documentary evidence on the spread of Congregationalism in Cambridgeshire, apart from the list of members of the church made in 1675. The wording of the covenant taken at Bassingbourn was recorded in the Gransden Church Book when the members of the Croydon church renewed their covenant in the 1690s. The 'Statistical Survey of Dissent' in the *Congregational Magazine or London Christian Instructor*, II (1819), p. 437, also records the Bassingbourn tradition, as, in a modified form, does the first surviving Church Book of Cottenham Old Meeting (in the keeping of the secretary and deacons, to whose kindness I am much indebted). The latter only begins in 1780, and includes two passages of meditation on the earlier history of the church inserted amongst the minutes of meetings in 1823 and 1829 (pp. 107-8 and 163). The writer of the second seems to have had an earlier church book in front of him. W. T. Whitley, 'Willingham Church', *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, XII (1933-6), pp. 120-30, prints 'An Authentick Account of the Church of Christ at Willingham from the year 1662 to 1781' probably written in 1811.

The only other possible reference to early Congregationalism in the county is the reference made by the Quaker, Margaret Killam, in 1654 to a church she attended in Cambridge 'where most of those meet which are comers from the other priests, and have one, as they say, that speaks freely without hire' (*Early Quaker Letters from the Swarthmore MSS. to 1600* (1952), no. 83 calendared G. F. Nuttall). Dr Nuttall suggests that this separatist congregation might well have paved the way for the work of Holcroft and Oddy after 1662. A. G. Mathews, 'The Seventeenth Century' in *Congregationalism through the Centuries* (Cambridge, 1937), pp. 45-7, was baffled because he had not been able to find any trace of a Congregational church nearer to Cambridge than Wisbech at this time.

<sup>2</sup> H. G. Tibbutt, 'Pattern of Change', *Cong. Hist. Soc. Trans.* xx, pp. 170-3, and 'Memoir of the Late Rev. John Conder, D. D.', *Evangelical Magazine*, III (1795), pp. 393-5. I am deeply indebted to Mr Tibbutt for his generosity in lending me his transcript of the Great Gransden Church Book.

and God's servant, being fixcd for the rulls of God's hous, was soonne set apart pastor by mister Staloms and soom others which I hafe forgat, then being feri yong, but this I remember they cept the day and all the night after with great joy and singin. and I remember that my father and mother cam hom in the morning and as soonne as my mother had doon milleking shee cam in and toolld my father that shee must goo to Basingbon again, and they toock their hors and went away.

their was schuch a mighti preasenc of God amongst them that they ware redi to forsack all to follow Crist.

Holcroft was obviously drawing large audiences to Bassingbourn before his ejection, although it sounds as if the formation of his church did not take place very long before 1662. Richard Conder added that his father 'stood out a priti whil' before he joined the covenant 'but the Lord brought him . . . to see into it afterwards and in the time of builldin this church it was a tim of trobell, for now king Charls cam in and God's servant . . . was turned out of the publick placises'.

The lack of references to tension between the Open Baptists of Fenstanton and Caxton, and the Congregationalists, in the later 1650s seems to argue that, although Holcroft's church was formed, and had considerable drawing-power, there was no overlap in the areas from which the two dissenting congregations were drawn, and therefore little opportunity for friction before the recorder of the Fenstanton church completed his volume in 1658/9. Holcroft's work before that date must therefore have been carried on to the south of Great Shelford and Harston, the most southerly villages within the orbit of the Fenstanton Baptists. Negative arguments are admittedly dangerous, but the struggles between the Quakers and the Baptists are so fully noted by the Baptists after the arrival of the Quakers in 1653 that it is difficult to believe that debate between the Calvinist Congregationalists and the Armenian General Baptists would find no place in the record.

After Holcroft refused to subscribe in 1662, he became a peripatetic minister in south Cambridgeshire, aided by a team of ex-fellows of Trinity, including Joseph Oddy. In Richard Conder's words, 'the woork of God went forward and their was daly adid to the church'. By 1663, he had meetings of several hundred people in southern Cambridgeshire and the neighbouring counties.<sup>1</sup> Most of his time between 1663 and 1672 was spent in prison, but according to tradition he was allowed out to preach. Conder testified that with Holcroft's imprisonment 'the churchis afflicton began upon her but the moar she was afflicted the moar she gru'. At the same time, Nathaniel Bradshaw, the non-subscribing rector of Willingham, continued to preach in his own house there as well as the neighbouring villages,<sup>2</sup> until he made the place too hot to hold him in about 1667. He then retreated to London for a space. Joseph Oddy took over his work and became the itinerent Congregationalist minister of north-west Cambridgeshire.

The Baptists, who were generally so weak, were extremely well established in Cambridgeshire in 1669. Their congregation in the county numbered over six

<sup>1</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, pp. 294-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Cottenham Old Meeting first Church Book* (unprinted), p. 163.

hundred, and was probably more considerable than that of any other area except London and Buckinghamshire.<sup>1</sup> Kent and Sussex, in the south-east, also had a strong Baptist element. The only other counties where Baptists were found in considerable numbers were Wiltshire and Warwickshire.

The Baptist church in western Cambridgeshire owed its genesis to Henry Denne,<sup>2</sup> the famous preacher, who was presented to the living of Eltisley by the Disborough family under the Commonwealth. The first members of the church all lived within easy physical reach of Eltisley, which was once described as 'an asylum for the most extravagant fanaticism. . . psalm singing was as heinous a sin at Eltisley as bending a knee to Baal, and it was then as much noted for the devout exercises practised there, as any other canting place within the kingdom'. Denne's son, John, became elder and recorder of the General Baptist church which was established round the joint centres of Fenstanton in Huntingdonshire and Caxton in Cambridgeshire in the early 1650s. John Denne lived at Caxton Pastures, a farm in Caxton parish a mile or so from Eltisley, which therefore became one of the principal meeting places of the church. The fullness and vivid reporting of the first Fenstanton Church Book, which covered the period up to 1659 and includes comment on the relations between the Baptists and other religious groups, makes it not only the most complete source for the history of the dissenting churches of Cambridgeshire but also the principal source for Baptist history under the Protectorate. Even so, little is known of the origins of the other Baptist churches in Cambridgeshire, like those at Melbourn and Burwell, which were not affiliated to Caxton. These were conveniently listed by the Fenstanton Baptists in 1654, when they had occasion to send out a fund-raising letter, but nothing more is known of their early history.

There were probably over 600 Quakers in Cambridgeshire, but the county did not stand out as a predominant centre of Quakerism in the way that it did as a centre for

<sup>1</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* pp. 133-6, discusses the Baptist figures. The order in which he lists the size of Baptist, or, indeed, any, congregations in the counties, depends on the theoretical size given to conventicles for which the bishops gave no number of attenders. Lyon Turner adopts the nominal figures of 90 and 50 for these meetings of unknown size, and gives two alternative tables for each sect, based on them. In these tables, Cambridgeshire, which certainly had 610 Baptists, plus three meetings of unknown size, comes out sixth and seventh respectively, well behind such counties as Kent, which had 236 Baptists, plus the members of 13 meetings of unknown size.

I feel myself that figures of 90 and 50 are much too large. The whole baptized membership of the church of Fenstanton and Caxton, which had been one of the strongest in the kingdom, was only 84 in 1676. This included many local meetings, which would have been listed separately by the bishops (*Fenstanton Records*, pp. 255-6). Quaker meetings were undoubtedly smaller than this, judging from the records of the prosecution of attenders under the second Conventicle Act in 1670. The largest Cambridgeshire meeting recorded was one of just over twenty. If this figure of twenty is adopted for the Baptists, whose numbers were certainly diminishing under persecution, Cambridgeshire had more Baptists than anywhere except Buckinghamshire and London.

<sup>2</sup> The career of Henry Denne is described in most works on the General Baptists. It is given in the introduction to the *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham, 1644-1720*, ed. E. B. Underhill for the Hanserd Knollys Society (1854), pp. v-xxiii. Adam Taylor, in his *History of the English General Baptists* (London, 1818), I, described both Denne's career and the history of the Fenstanton church, pp. 99-100, 101-7, 137-57, 218-24. W. H. Whitley listed Denne's printed works in *A Baptist Bibliography*, I (1916). B. Nutter, *The Story of the Cambridge Baptists* (1912), mainly concentrated on the central figures in the Baptist church rather than its local developments.

Baptists. Yorkshire, in the north, and Wiltshire and Somerset in the south-west, all had over 1,000 Quakers. Almost all the eastern and south-eastern counties had over 600 apiece,<sup>1</sup> even though they were also mostly larger counties.

Organized Quakerism had first reached Cambridgeshire with the visit of Mary Fisher and Elizabeth Williams to the county town in 1653. In the following year, Richard Hubberthorne was jailed for visiting a woman imprisoned for 'testifying against a false prophet' in Cambridge. There they were joined by James Parnell, who was to be the principal Quaker apostle of Cambridgeshire. He had heard, somewhere in the north, of two of his friends, who were presumably the two women visitors of 1653, being whipped for declaring the truth in Cambridge. Although he was frightened, and was only seventeen or eighteen, he was moved to come to the town and there 'found those that were worthy that received me' before himself being jailed. Sometime after his release from prison in the autumn of 1654, Parnell returned to Cambridge, and spent six months evangelizing and 'declaring the Truth in the Countries about', whence he found many 'that received the Truth gladly, but more Enemies'. By mid 1655 he was in Essex, where he was finally martyred, still only aged eighteen.<sup>2</sup>

It was no wonder that Parnell found some willing converts, for the records of the Baptist church show that, even before Elizabeth Williams and Mary Fisher reached Cambridge in 1653, spiritual seeking and unrest were extremely widespread at the lowest parochial level. Many villagers had already reached the Quaker position, like the maid Isobel at Kingston, who in 1653 'tried the Scriptures by the Spirit, and not the Spirit by the Scriptures'.<sup>3</sup> The ground was well prepared to receive Quaker teachings. Converts were also made at a higher social level. In 1655, the year of Parnell's evangelism, James Docwra, a gentleman of Fulbourn, who was married to Ann, daughter of Sir William Waldegrave of Wormingford in Essex, settled a close of pasture and about sixty acres of arable in Fulbourn on his wife for 500 years. The

<sup>1</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, pp. 127-9. I have again used 20 as a theoretical number for meetings of unknown size.

<sup>2</sup> Information on the persecution of individual Quakers is taken from the *Volume of Sufferings* preserved in the Friends' Meeting House, London, I, pp. 101-35 covering Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely. The original book of sufferings of the Cambridgeshire meetings, from which the transcripts preserved in Friends' House were presumably made, did not survive. The first sufferings book in the Cambridgeshire Record Office covering Cambridgeshire as well as Huntingdonshire only begins in 1756. Most of the information from the *Volume of Sufferings* is printed in J. Besse, *Collections of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers* (1753), pp. 84-99, but he sometimes leaves out entries, or vital information, like the name of the village from which the particular sufferer comes. The humbler the Quaker, the more risk of omission. The rest of the history of early Quaker evangelism in the shire can be pieced together from G. F. Nuttall (ed.), *Early Quaker Letters from the Swarthmore MSS to 1660* (1952), particularly numbers 57, 76, 83 (Richard Hubberthorne from prison in Cambridge), 84 (Margaret Killam to George Fox), 367 (George Whitehead at Cottenham and Ely), 440, 476, and 486. James Parnell, referred to in letter 83, gives his own account of his Cambridgeshire ministry in the 'Fruits of a Fast' printed in *A Collection of the Several Writings Given Forth from the Spirit of the Lord, through that Meek, Patient and Suffering Servant of God, James Parnell* (1675). The minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of Friends in Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely survive from 1673, Cambridgeshire Record Office R. 59.25.1.5. The register of Quaker births, marriages and deaths is in the Public Record Office, R.G./6/1219.

<sup>3</sup> *Fenstanton Records*, p. 78.

income was to support various Quaker causes, including £3 a year towards the charges of 'Travelling Preachers and Horses at Cambridge'.<sup>1</sup> This argues a high degree of organization by the end of Parnell's ministry. With both this, and popular support, it is not surprising that Quakerism flourished, and that despite the intense persecution suffered by Quakers, both under the Commonwealth and later, a considerable hard core of adherents still remained in the late 1660s.

The arid figures and estimates given in the bishop's returns of 1669 in fact partially reflect the successful evangelism of Henry Denne, James Parnell, and Holcroft and his associates in the 1650s.

All the official sources of the 1660s and 1670s, taken together, show that dissent had gained a really strong footing in three well-defined areas of the country.<sup>2</sup> These were a cluster of nearly a dozen villages in south-west Cambridgeshire in the upper valley of the Rhee, with a couple on the western clay uplands nearby, another cluster on the edge of the fens north-westwards from Cambridge, and yet a third group of villages sited just above the edge of the fens running north-eastward from Cambridge. Just as there were areas where nonconformist influences were strongly felt, there were also areas where nonconformity had very little, if any, footing. The villagers in the south-east of the county on the chalk ridge had almost no organized centres of dissent, and another group of villages west of Cambridge on the north of the clay plateau had none at all.

#### CONGREGATIONALISTS

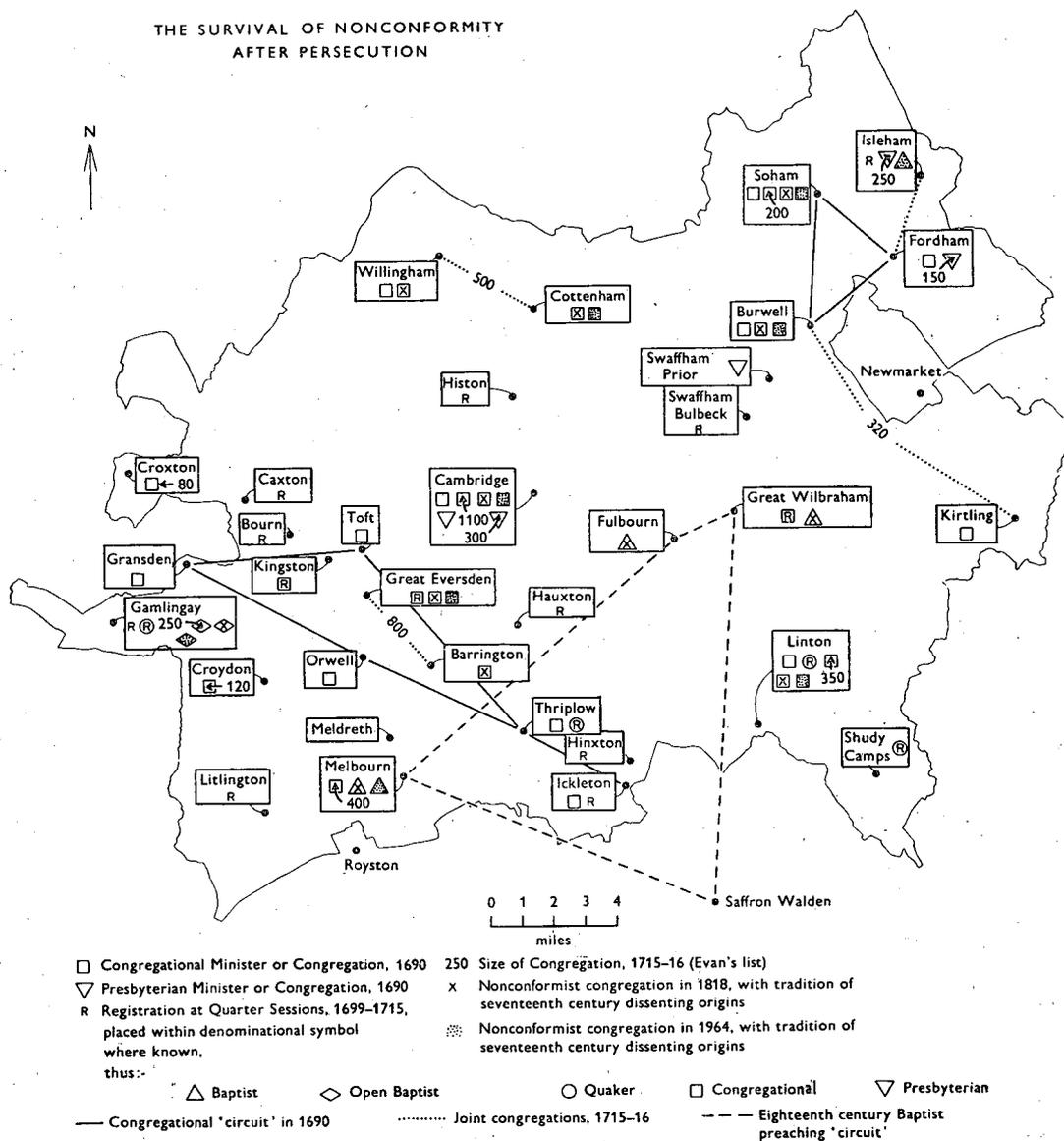
Congregationalism was represented in all three areas. By the time the series of official returns on dissent began in 1669, the position once held by Bassingbourn as the centre from which Holcroft formed his first church was only a memory. Yet the work he had done there had had a lasting effect, as the amount of nonconformity in the villages of the upper Rhee valley showed. Amongst them were Meldreth, Shepreth, Fowlmere, and Thriplow, together with Orwell and Barrington, which lay a little further away at the foot of the western clay uplands. Orwell, which had fifty-eight nonconformists in the Compton Census, had more than any other parish in the county, and Thriplow with forty-eight, Barrington with forty, and Shepreth with thirty-nine ran it close. The only contemporary Congregational document is a church list of 1675.<sup>3</sup> It shows that there were two groups of adherents here, one of which was mainly derived from Bassingbourn and Meldreth, and the other from Barrington, Thriplow, Croydon, and Orwell. These two congregations with ninety and a hundred and twenty-four members apiece were the strongest in the county, apart from the one in Cambridge town itself, which had a hundred and ten adherents.

<sup>1</sup> W. Geoffrey Stevens, *Old Time Links between Cambridgeshire and the Lake District*, II, 'The Knights Hospitallers and the Docwra Family' (typescript 1966), pp. 27-31 (copy available in C.R.O.). Ann Docwra gave the 'Meeting House Yard' estate to the Friends in her will of 1700. The codicil of 1710 confirmed the annual payment of £3 for preachers, and added £20 towards a new burial ground. The present Meeting House was built in 1772.

<sup>2</sup> See Map A (p. 70) and Map B (p. 76) throughout this discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. D. 1480, ff. 123-6.

This strength of membership reflected Holcroft's early work, as did the significant inclusion of three women from Bassingbourn and Meldreth, along with Holcroft himself and Joseph Oddy, amongst the 'ten stones of the foundation' listed in the register.<sup>1</sup>



Map B.

<sup>1</sup> Only eight names were in fact given; the other two identifiable ones were brethren from Cambridge itself. This list is a very corrupt copy. It is arranged by groups of members under the headings of the villages from which they came. These headings are certainly not complete, and other villages must have contributed as well as those named, which presumably sent the largest contingents. The Bassingbourn and Meldreth church, for instance, included ninety names, whereas the Compton Census recorded only forty-two

Amongst this cluster of villages, Meldreth and Orwell had both Congregational conventicles in 1669 and Congregational licences issued in 1672.<sup>1</sup> They must therefore have been the respective meeting places for each of the groups of members in the area. In these centres Oddy, Corbin and Lock, who had all been ejected from Trinity College, nursed Holcroft's converts.

Congregationalists were also found in the second nonconformist area amongst the villages north of Cambridge on the edge of the fens, Histon, Oakington, Willingham, and Over. This was the region in which the influence of Nathaniel Bradshaw, rector of Willingham, who was a non-subscriber in 1662, had been felt. He had, he said, 'left four score and ten praying families in Willingham at . . . ejection'.<sup>2</sup> Joseph Oddy moved from Meldreth to minister to this congregation after Bradshaw temporarily retired from the vicinity in 1667. Most of these villages had large numbers of dissenters in 1676<sup>3</sup> and Willingham and Oakington had both had conventiclers meeting in the parish in 1669 and licences issued in 1672. There were again two Congregational groups hereabouts listed in the church list of 1675. The stronger one, with seventy members, included Over, Willingham, and Oakington, and was led by Oddy himself. He was assisted by Samuel Corbin at Willingham and by James Day at Oakington.<sup>4</sup> The church of Willingham and Cottenham, which is now known as Cottenham Old Meeting, preserves a continuous tradition of worship ever since Bradshaw's ejection in 1662. It had 500 hearers in 1715-16, and was the largest in the county after the Barrington and Eversden church, and the Congregational church in Cambridge itself. Later in the eighteenth century it fell on evil days, but was refounded in 1780, with eleven members, under the guidance of a supply from Isleham. It adopted Baptist principles in 1813.

The weaker group, with only thirty members in 1675, covered Histon, Cottenham, Landbeach, and Waterbeach. Histon had had an independent conventicle in 1669,

dissenters in these two villages. But the census also recorded twenty-four dissenters at Litlington, the next parish to Bassingbourn, where Holcroft had preached. These must surely have been Congregationalists included under the Bassingbourn and Meldreth heading in the Congregational church list. The list also contains mis-spellings and duplication. As well as the Bassingbourn and 'Meldred' list, there is a separate one for 'Mildred' which appears to bear no relation to the first. It is very likely that the Bassingbourn and Meldreth list is itself seriously defective, for the latter part of it includes Brother John Day as deacon. Brother John Day had been licensed at Eversden in 1672, and appears to have been living there in 1682, when a certain John Day was presented for absence from church. It is likely therefore that part of the list of members of the Barrington and Orwell church, which included members from Eversden, was wrongly copied under the heading of Bassingbourn and Meldreth.

<sup>1</sup> Lyon Turner, 'Classified Summary' of the 1669 returns and licences of 1672 (*op. cit.* II), makes several wrong attributions. Thus he enters meetings and licences at Eversden, Orwell and Barrington as Presbyterian (p. 863) although the people involved in them appear in the Congregational church list of 1675. He entered Moses Crab of Little Wilbraham, who also appeared in the Congregational list, as a Baptist (p. 872).

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (1934), pp. 69-70. *Congregational Magazine or London Christian Instructor*, II (1819), p. 439, and III, pp. 168-9.

<sup>3</sup> Led by Over, with forty-two, and Oakington, with thirty-seven dissenters. The figures were missing for Willingham in the Compton Census. Quakerism was also strong here however, and the conventicle at Oakington in 1669 was entered by the bishop as Independent and Quaker.

<sup>4</sup> The entry for 'Haginton', printed by Lyon Turner as for a separate place, II, p. 869, should be under Oakington, p. 865, which was frequently spelt thus.

as had Milton, which was nowhere mentioned in the church list, but no licences permitted the group to function independently in 1672. Possibly the list was mistaken in ascribing a separate identity to the group, which was obviously absorbed into the joint Willingham and Cottenham church soon afterwards.

Congregationalism was not nearly so strong a force in the last area in which it was found, east of Cambridge in a group of parishes stretched along the edge of the fens from Stow-cum-Quy and Little Wilbraham to Burwell, and out to Snailwell. A further group included Soham and members in the Isle of Ely and Needingworth. Stow-cum-Quy had had a flourishing Congregational conventicle in 1669. It was attended by fifty to a hundred people, many of whom came from other places, according to Bishop Laney. The conventicle was licensed in 1672, but there were only eleven dissenters in the parish in 1676 according to the census.<sup>1</sup> Burwell, the only other village in the group for which a licence was taken out in 1672,<sup>2</sup> had a much larger number of thirty-three dissenters in 1676, but these may well have been Baptists rather than Congregationalists. There had been a Baptist church in Burwell in 1654,<sup>3</sup> and the Congregational list of 1675 only included between twenty and thirty members in the whole area. Amongst these were the Crabb family of Little Wilbraham, who were to prove indefatigable dissenters for several generations.<sup>4</sup> The discrepancy between the numbers of nonconformists recorded by the census and those recorded in the church list is confusing, unless a Baptist group did indeed survive at Burwell. No other churches were strongly represented in the area, although there was a small Quaker meeting at Soham<sup>5</sup> and single staunch Quaker families at Little Wilbraham and at Quy. The later history of the Burwell district is almost entirely Congregational, and there may well have been some continuity between the members of Holcroft's church who lived in the area in 1675, and the membership of the Congregational church thereabouts fifteen years later. The survey of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches made in 1690 recorded that a Scottish minister had been working in Burwell, Soham and Fordham for some considerable time, although he was discouraged and about to leave.<sup>6</sup> George Doughty, a 'Mechanick', had already been introduced as a replacement, although the Congregational church of Burwell and Soham was not formally founded by him until 1692.<sup>7</sup> It included members from Isleham, Burwell, Reach, Bottisham and Soham, and was soon joined by others from the old Holcroft area of Wilbraham, Swaffham Prior and Snailwell. Baptist ideas did not reassert themselves, unless the present Baptist church of Isleham, which

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Not identified by Lyon Turner. See 'Classified Summary', II, p. 870, no. 25, for 'Barrell Hightown'. The later Congregational chapel in Burwell was in Burwell High Town.

<sup>3</sup> See below, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> No Soham entries appear in the Quaker register for Cambridgeshire, although the elders were occasionally listed amongst the witnesses at weddings. This makes the size of the meeting difficult to gauge.

<sup>6</sup> 'Review of the State of the Severall Counties in England and Wales', 1690-2, ed. Alexander Gordon, *Freedom after Ejection* (1917), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> The Church Book of George Doughty's church is printed in the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, VI (1913-15), pp. 415-28; and VII (1916-18), pp. 3-15.

claims seventeenth-century origins,<sup>1</sup> has an early Baptist tradition. It is recorded that the minister who was working round Burwell in 1690 was discouraged because 'the people are many of such od opinions'.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps these represented a last memory of Baptist teaching in Burwell.

Congregationalism remained strong in the Meldreth and Orwell area, despite the renewed wave of persecution in the 1680s, and the eighteenth-century apathy which generally seems to have followed it. In 1679 and 1682, the relatively high number of eight Orwell parishioners had been presented for absence from church and for attending conventicles; an additional note in the visitation of 1682<sup>3</sup> listed no less than twenty-eight names presented by the churchwardens of Orwell at the visitation.<sup>4</sup> No other village in Cambridge had a similar indictment for nonconformity. This estimate was confirmed by the note in the visitation of 1685 that, of the sixty families in Orwell, there were many dissenters and about thirty disciples of Holcroft and Oddy, most of whom were excommunicated already.<sup>5</sup> No conventicle met in the village at that date however. Nevertheless, the survey of Presbyterian and Congregational churches made in 1690 recorded the existence of a Congregational preaching circuit in which a new generation of Holcroft's assistants preached every third Sunday, in Orwell, Thriplow, Ickleton, Toft and Gransden.<sup>6</sup> The circuit had extended its area a little, and Holcroft's old church groupings had been altered since 1675, but, although individual villages had changed from one group of the Congregational church to another, or been added to it, the Congregational church of west Cambridgeshire had visibly survived persecution and emerged as recognizable as ever in its old stronghold. There is, however, a certain amount of evidence that, although Congregationalism survived wherever Holcroft and his helpers had worked, his church met with considerable setbacks before the local branches were settled as separate churches. Holcroft had been imprisoned again in the later 1670s and 1680s, and tradition has it that his ill-health was combined with depression towards the end of the 1680s, and the end of his life. Oddy died in 1687, and Holcroft himself in 1692. Holcroft's successor, Joseph Hussey, did not openly adopt Congregational principles until 1694. The vacuum left was to some extent filled by the activities of Richard Davis of the Rothwell Congregational church, as his Church Book shows. Although Davis merely preached at the formation of the Burwell church in 1692,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have not yet managed to investigate the records of this church, which dates its formation to 1693. So far, I have found no reference to a dissenting congregation there in general sources earlier than 1715-16, when there was a joint Presbyterian congregation there and at Fordham.

<sup>2</sup> There was some connection between the church of Burwell and Richard Davis's Congregational church of Rothwell in Northamptonshire, for Mr Davis preached at the formation of the Burwell church in 1692. This connection, as well as residual Baptist notions, may have accounted for the 'od opinions', for, in the same year, Richard Davis was accused of High Calvinism bordering on Antinomianism at Kettering. G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and the Modern Question', *Journ. Theol. Stud.* n.s. xvi (1965), pp. 104, 106-8.

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge University Library, Ely Episcopal Records B 2/66, ff. 51-52 v.

<sup>4</sup> Almost all of these were additional to the eight already presented.

<sup>5</sup> See Map B throughout this discussion.

<sup>6</sup> 'Review of the State of the Severall Counties in England and Wales', 1690-2, ed. Alexander Gordon in *Freedom after Ejection* (1917), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> See above, n. 2.

some of the members of Holcroft's church in Soham, Needingworth and the Isle of Ely were received into the Rothwell church itself in 1691, after messengers had been sent from Rothwell to inquire 'into a handfull of late converts in the Fens',<sup>1</sup> and the church had been 'exceedingly affected to observe how the Lord gloriously taught those poor people in those dark corners'. The churches of Needingworth and Guyhirn in the Isle eventually obtained their collective dismissions from Rothwell church in 1693.<sup>2</sup> Davis's activities went further. Oddy's death had obviously left the church of Cottenham and Willingham lacking a pastor, and in 1692 the Rothwell church agreed to send a preacher to them and 'assist and support' the meeting at Cottenham.<sup>3</sup> It is more surprising that amongst the many admissions to the Rothwell church from Needingworth and from the Isle in 1691 and 1692 were included half a dozen apiece from Willingham, and Swavesey, three or four from Cambridge itself, and, most startling of all, a man and his wife from Eversden and a man from Orwell.<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder that Davis's activities aroused resentment.<sup>5</sup> Some indication of the rudderless state of the church after Holcroft's death is given by Richard Conder, who wrote of the Croydon church

The Lord tacking our dear pastor away the lord sturid up som of us seing mani disorders amongst us to renew our cofenant and to purg the hous of God but meet with mani hinderances and coold in no wise git forward but contention aroas about mani things to the greef of som of our sools and coold by no means atain to a onnes to follo the lord fully but after much greef and trobell of solle the lord seet it upon our harts with desier to follow the lord as he shoold help us.

Only seventeen members of the church renewed their covenant at Clopton in 1694, led by the deacon John Day from Eversden<sup>6</sup> and the propriety of their renewal remained a cause of debate and dissension as late as 1702, when 'Brother Nicolls', pastor of the Melbourn and Chishill church, was amongst those who did not support the Croydon church in their desire to appoint a pastor. Richard Conder wrote:

the meshingors ansured us that if they shoold stand by us in this woork that they shoold bring the churchis under blam and our answer was this that they brought them seellvs under blam. . . namely the church at Needingworth and Gyhorn and Chisill which had tacken our members without dismiss or recomendation.

The survey of the main dissenting congregations in Cambridgeshire made by Joseph Hussey in 1715 or 1716 shows that the period of confusion after Holcroft's death had not permanently affected his church. There was one change; Orwell lost predominance as a meeting place and Great Eversden acquired it. The Eversden

<sup>1</sup> Rothwell Church Book transcript, pp. 14, 24, 25, 26, 29-30. I am again indebted to Mr Tibbutt for lending me this.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 38, 42 and 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 34, 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and the Modern Question', *Journ. Theol. Stud.* n.s. xvi (1965), pp. 107-8, 112.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 75, n. 1, and this page.

church later preserved a strong tradition of Holcroft's work of foundation and conversion there.<sup>1</sup> This is verified by Richard Conder's account of Holcroft's work. He wrote that after his ejection

God's servant was for going on in church order and for choosing elders, and at a meting at Eavesden was chosen foor . . . and God's servant, after he was turnd out at Basingbon, preached in the publick at Croydon and then was turnd out their and then hee preached at Great Eavesdon publicly and their they toock him and woould leet him preach no longer.

Despite this, the Compton Census had recorded only conformists in the parish in 1676. The census was certainly in error here, for John Day, Deacon of Holcroft's church, had had his house in Eversden licensed in 1672. Congregationalism was not numerically strong there, however, for, in 1682, John Day was the sole parishioner presented for absence from church. Presumably the Eversden church only acquired a strong resident membership after 1690, but by 1715 or 1716 the Barrington and Eversden church had eight hundred hearers, more than any other except Hussey himself in Cambridge. These hearers were of course drawn from the whole area round about, the self-same area in which Holcroft's largest church was rooted in 1675. The present Eversden congregational church is the heir of a long tradition in western Cambridgeshire.

The mother branch of Holcroft's church, lying in Bassingbourn and Meldreth, also survived the varying vicissitudes of both persecution and the eighteenth century, also in a somewhat changed form. Three years after the Compton Census, the visitation of 1679 recorded the persistence of nonconformity in Bassingbourn in the persons of five absentees from church, although the visitation memorandum in 1685 reported 'noe Dissenters, Many Sluggards'. In Meldreth, which had been the traditional meeting place of this group of Congregationalists since 1669, the existence of 'Many unbaptized dissenters, Holcroft's disciples' amongst the parishioners was noted. Twelve of the seventy families in Melbourn, the next village to the south of Meldreth, were Holcroft's disciples. This was new.<sup>2</sup> Melbourn had had a Baptist tradition since 1654 at least. However, Congregationalism now gained so strong a footing in Melbourn that, at some point in the next thirty years, the old Meldreth and Bassingbourn church moved its meeting place there.<sup>3</sup> Between 1716 and 1717 the charming house of brick which is still used by the Congregationalists today<sup>4</sup> was built in Melbourn, and by 1715-16 the meeting house, with four hundred hearers, was the fourth best

<sup>1</sup> R. Robinson, 'Historical Account', p. 260. By the time the recorder of Cottenham Old Meeting set down what was known of the origins of the Congregational church in Cambridgeshire in the nineteenth century, all memory of the work of Holcroft in Bassingbourn and Orwell was lost, and the church was supposed to have originated in Great Eversden.

<sup>2</sup> As far as the evidence so far goes. It is very likely, however, that some of the members of the Bassingbourn and Meldreth church in 1675 came from Melbourn, if they could be identified.

<sup>3</sup> Local tradition dates the move from 1694 when John Nicolls was chosen pastor of the church of Melbourn and Chishill, but there seems to be no direct evidence for this. J. Porter Chapple, *Congregationalism at Melbourn 1694-1894*, printed with an essay on *The Puritan in Melbourn 1640-88*, by W. M. Palmer as *A Nonconformist Bi-Centenary Memorial* (London, 1895).

<sup>4</sup> After a vicissitude during which it was used as a Sunday school in the nineteenth century.

attended in the county. Appropriately enough, a Bassingbourn man, John Jermans, a tailor, was one of the first feoffees of the new meeting house.<sup>1</sup>

The Congregational church in Cambridge also prospered greatly, far more than its Presbyterian rival. The Presbyterians in Cambridge were, according to the first historian of dissent in Cambridgeshire, 'not many, but they were rich'.<sup>2</sup> All the thirty-odd Presbyterians noticed by the bishop in 1669 were in the county town itself, and in 1672 they acquired two licences. After toleration, their numbers had increased to seventy-six by 1691, when the Presbyterian Joseph Hussey became their pastor. The lack of doctrinal dispute between Independents and Presbyterians, who disagreed only on church government, made it easy to drift from one denomination to the other. In 1694, Hussey's Presbyterian church was split, and Hussey himself with over half his communicants adopted Congregationalism. The Presbyterian remnant joined the church at Green Street in Cambridge which had hitherto been Congregational and now, in turn, became Presbyterian.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Hussey, as head of the portion of the Congregational church in the centre of the county, inherited something of Holcroft's position. Despite the fact that after Holcroft's death in 1692 his Cambridgeshire church split up and settled itself on a local basis, Hussey's list of baptisms in his church book<sup>4</sup> shows him baptizing all over the county in most of the main Congregational centres like Barrington, Eversden and Linton, even though, after his adoption of Congregational views in 1694, his theological opinions gradually hardened until by 1707 he was an exponent of the extreme Calvinist view that the offer of God's grace should only be proclaimed to the converted.<sup>5</sup> Those baptized by Hussey are often stated to be sons and daughters of parents 'late of Mr Holcroft's church in the county of Cambridge'. The family continuity which existed in some cases between the early dissenters and their eighteenth-century brethren is vividly illustrated by an entry for 1716. In this year Hussey baptized Sarah Crabb of Little Wilbraham aged twenty, the daughter of the Widow Crabb, 'after her experience of the work of God laid upon her soul in the law of the church', together with her eighteen-year-old sister. These were presumably the great-grandchildren of Moses Crabb, water-miller, who had held a very small conventicle at his house in 1669, according to the bishop. The Crabb family were the only members of the meeting to come from the village itself.<sup>6</sup> In 1676, four nonconformists were entered for Little Wilbraham in the Compton Census; and in the visitation of 1679 four Crabbs and a Crabb son-in-law

<sup>1</sup> Title deeds of the Melbourn Congregational chapel, copied by W. M. Palmer, A. 27, in his collection of papers in the University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup> R. Robinson, 'Historical Account', p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> R. Robinson, *op. cit.* pp. 268-9. It attracted very small audiences compared with Hussey's new Congregational church, if Hussey himself is to be believed, for in 1715-16 it had just over two hundred 'hearers' compared with Hussey's eleven hundred. See also C. S. Kenny, 'The Earlier History of Emmanuel Church, Cambridge', *Trans. Cong. Hist. Soc.* iv (1909-10), pp. 183-90.

<sup>4</sup> Partially copied by W. M. Palmer in his 'Notes on the Non-Parochial Registers of Cambridge', B4/3, W. M. Palmer Collection, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>5</sup> G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and the Modern Question', *Journ. Theol. Stud.* n.s. xvi (1965), pp. 111-13.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 78.

were being presented by the churchwardens of Little Wilbraham for joining conventicles. The validity of Sarah Crabb's marriage, which had presumably been performed in a Congregational meeting, was also doubted by her co-villagers. The Sarah Crabb baptized by Hussey was presumably her grandchild, and one of the fourth generation to experience spiritual convictions deep enough to lead her to separate herself off from her natural village community.

Hussey's pastoral work also took him to baptisms at meetings in many other villages, some of which were traditionally held, as was that of the daughter of John Giffard of Dry Drayton in 1700 'at a meeting there held in his barn'. As well as inheriting some of Holcroft's peripatetic position in the county, Hussey also records that he received some of the members of Holcroft's old church in Cambridge directly into his Hog Hill church, after it had become Congregational. In 1698, he noted in his diary 'On this great day, we joyfully received a dozen of Mr Holcroft's former members'.<sup>1</sup>

Congregationalism was spreading. Just as Congregationalism moved into Melbourn, to challenge the Baptists, it now moved into Linton to challenge the Quakers. There is no surviving evidence that there was any early Congregationalism at Linton, apart from the tradition of the church there that during persecution the oldest members had been to hear preaching in the woods a few miles away.<sup>2</sup> Apart from this the early dissenting history of the place was all Quaker. However, only ten years after Toleration, in 1698, the Linton Congregationalists were planning to build a chapel.<sup>3</sup> In the eighteenth century this building was described, and the description gives a vivid impression of the simplicity of the reformed worship, and the predominance in it of the preaching of the Word from the dominating pulpit. It also shows that Congregationalism had acquired great social respectability by the end of the eighteenth century at Linton, where the squire had his own pew, despite the fact that the meeting house stood next to a tan yard, since the ground had been given by a tanner, 'which rendered it most unpleasant'.

The pastor of Linton in the late eighteenth century wrote of his chapel:

In appearance it was rather rough, the shape was like unto a barn divided into three bays, to be converted into a barn again if persecution revived. . . the doors opened outside, the windows were all provided with shutters to prevent their being broken into by persecuting men, the shutters being drawn up with pulleys. As you enter, opposite the doors, stands the pulpit, with a large Cumbrous sounding board over it. In front of the pulpit is a long table pew across the building capable of holding thirty persons or more, with a large brass chandelier hanging over it. There is a square pew for the Squire, lined with green baize surrounded with silk curtains, with a devotional table in the centre; other large square pews lined with green baize capable of seating fourteen or fifteen persons, other pews in variety, some long, some square, some three-cornered,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. G. Matthews in 'The Seventeenth Century', one of the lectures in *Congregationalism through the Centuries* (Cambridge, 1937).

<sup>2</sup> Typescript précis of the Rev. Thomas Hopkins and others, *History of Linton Congregational Church*, W. M. Palmer Collection, B3/8, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>3</sup> Copy of first trust deed in 'Notes on Linton Congregational Church', W. M. Palmer Collection B4/1, University Library, Cambridge.

it appeared that each one built his pew as he pleased. On either side of the pulpit galleries were erected in 1704, and in front of the pulpit was a circular gallery where the singers like the sons of Asaph had their place. On the walls were many monumental tablets in memory of worthy men, the Malns, Jacksons, Fords and Taylors, whose voices once filled the house with praise.<sup>1</sup>

The later history of the Congregational church in Cambridgeshire shows that, wherever Francis Holcroft and his assistant planted Congregationalism in the county, it took lasting root. The descent is not direct, but, in each of the three areas where the list of members of the Congregational church in 1675 shows that Holcroft gained support, a Congregational church survives today. The present churches of Eversden and Melbourn represent Holcroft's cluster of believers round Orwell and Bassingbourn and Meldreth. In the north-west of the county the present Baptist Cottenham Old Meeting descends from the adherents of 1675 in Cottenham and Willingham. In the north-east, the churches now to be found in Burwell and Soham probably derive from Holcroft's members in Stow, Wilbraham and Burwell in 1675.

#### BAPTISTS

The Baptist cause in Cambridgeshire had taken root in John Denne's farmhouse at Caxton Pastures and spread outwards from it in the early 1650s,<sup>2</sup> just as Congregationalism had done from Francis Holcroft's vicarage in Bassingbourn. By the 1660s and 1670s, though, no trace was left of the early pre-eminence of the Caxton area. The list of members of what had once been the General Baptist church of Fenstanton and Caxton made in 1676 shows that there had been a radical change in the membership, and that the church now barely touched Cambridgeshire.<sup>3</sup> The strength of the Fenstanton church now lay in Huntingdonshire, in Fenstanton itself, Godmanchester, the Hemingfords, and St Ives, where John Denne was living by 1672. Fenstanton still provided more members than anywhere else, but not a single member in 1676 came from Caxton, which had once stood second only to Fenstanton, or from Eltisley, which had once figured so prominently among the 'canting places' of the kingdom. The Compton Census itself recorded five nonconformists in Caxton and three in Eltisley; but they were not General Baptists.<sup>4</sup>

Some disaster seems to have hit the Cambridgeshire part of the Fenstanton church. As it happens, the Quaker records of their trial at Assizes for refusing to swear the Oath of Allegiance in 1661 give some idea of what this had been. The Quaker spokes-

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the typescript précis of the *History of Linton Congregational Church* by the Rev. Thomas Hopkins and others, W. M. Palmer Collection, B3/8, University Library, Cambridge. This building was pulled down in 1818, according to Hopkins, and the materials were used in the present meeting house which stands at right-angles to the original building in Horn Lane, Linton.

<sup>2</sup> This farm still stands today, but, according to the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for Cambridgeshire, it is almost entirely a remodelled eighteenth-century building.

<sup>3</sup> *Fenstanton Records*, pp. 255-6, compared with pp. 251-4.

<sup>4</sup> Two at least of those at Eltisley were Quakers. Elias and Elizabeth Woodward of Eltisley were presented for absence from church in the visitations of 1682, and in 1674 Elias Woodward had been fined for holding a Quaker meeting in his house. *Volumes of Sufferings*, I, p. 126.

man recorded that 'Severall of Bunion's People and also Baptists' were tried along with the Quakers, and that among them was

one John Denne, a teacher amongst you, to whom the Judge was very harsh, more than to any other of the prisoners. . . and did much upbraid him for getting up to ye Pulpitt for he and some others had crepen into a Steeplehouse to shelter themselves from the King's late proclamation against meetings in private, And it became a greater Snare to him, for he was taken in the Pulpitt not haveing orders as the Judg said.<sup>1</sup>

It sounds as if the Caxton meeting had taken refuge in Eltisley parish church, a mile or so away across the fields, when John Denne's father Henry probably still held the living.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of the Cambridgeshire section of the Fenstanton church seems very likely to have been related to whatever penalties it suffered in 1661. However, John Denne was not discredited amongst his fellow Baptists. He remained their acknowledged leader, for in 1672 he was responsible for applying for the licences for all the meetings in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.<sup>3</sup> These showed that one at least of the former local meetings of the Fenstanton church in Cambridgeshire had survived. The Baptists of Harston who had given Henry Denne hospitality on his evangelizing tour in 1653, were still meeting in 1669, and also acquired a licence in 1672.<sup>4</sup> At Melbourn, the church taught by the redoubtable farmer Benjamin Metcalfe, which had existed by 1654, was also still meeting in 1669, and was licensed in 1672.

The Baptists had had early meetings amongst the villages on the edge of the fen to the east of Cambridge, just as had the Congregationalists. Great Wilbraham<sup>5</sup> and Burwell had had meetings in 1654, but apparently only the one at Wilbraham survived to be reported in 1669.<sup>6</sup> According to the bishop, it was then a small conventicle of twenty to thirty people 'all of meane sought most from other places' taught in a barn by John Denne who came from Huntingdonshire. The Wilbraham influence had spread to Fulbourn All Saints, where there was another small Anabaptist conventicle 'neere White hall in a house fitted for it. . . their especiall Encouragement'.<sup>7</sup> The teacher was John Dennis, who really seems to have been a different individual from John Denne, for he was presented as a parishioner of Great Wilbraham for being an Anabaptist and attending conventicles in the visitation of

<sup>1</sup> *Volumes of Sufferings*, I, pp. 113-14.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Denne is supposed to have died in 1661. *Fenstanton Records*, p. xxii.

<sup>3</sup> Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* III, 299-300. W. T. Whitley included a note on the Cambridgeshire licences in 'The Baptist Licences of 1672', *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, I (1908-9), pp. 162-3.

<sup>4</sup> If the identification of the 'Hawson' named in the Baptist records with 'Harston' rather than the more likely looking 'Hauxton' is correct. I have been able to discover no trace of Baptist affiliations in the latter.

<sup>5</sup> There is a brief note on the Wilbraham and Melbourn General Baptists in *The Baptist Quarterly*, n.s. III (1926-7), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Unless the licence for Edward Gardiner's house in Burwell in 1672 was in fact for a Baptist congregation (Lyon Turner, *op. cit.* p. 870, no. 25). See above, pp. 78-9.

<sup>7</sup> I have not been able to trace the site of this, which must have been the earliest chapel building in Cambridgeshire, and was early by any standards. Most meetings were licensed in houses or barns. The earlier Commonwealth meetings had also been in private houses, like the farm at Caxton Pastures.

1679. Despite the existence of a house set aside as a chapel in Fulbourn, the Wilbraham meeting alone obtained a licence in 1672. It was well attended by the people of the parish itself in 1679, when eleven Great Wilbraham people were presented for being Anabaptists, in the visitation that year. Amongst them was John Dennis, who had been the teacher of the Fulbourn meeting in 1669, and was then described by the bishop as a tailor.

Balsham was the main exception to the rule that the villages lying on the chalk ridge which carried the Icknield Way across south-eastern Cambridgeshire were almost entirely untouched by organized dissent. Balsham had had a history of separatism reaching back to the sixteenth century, when the Family of Love had adherents there. Baptists existed both in Balsham, and in the villages round Woodditton in 1654, but only survived in Balsham, where, as might be expected from the previous history of the place, tiny conventicles of both Baptists and Quakers were found in 1669. Neither was large enough to apply for a licence in 1672.

The last true General Baptist meeting in Cambridgeshire lay amongst the other group of villages where dissent flourished, on the edge of the fens north-west of Cambridge. A great deal of the pastoral work of the Fenstanton church had been devoted to the difficulties of the Baptists in Over, who were much disturbed by the arrival of Quakerism there. In 1669, there were only four families of Baptists in the place, and, if Bishop Laney is to be trusted, they attended meetings elsewhere. But by 1672 the Baptists of Over had acquired their own licence. Here again, the work of the Caxton church had an influence which survived well into the period of persecution after the Restoration.

Apart from the General Baptists proper, the Open Baptists of Bedfordshire had meetings in Cambridgeshire also. The Bedford church, although it contained many members who were baptized as adults, had, since its foundation, made a principle of toleration in such matters. Baptism was not a prerequisite of admission to communion. Its first pastor left a letter as a testament to his church on his death in 1655, which ran:

Concerning separation from the Church about Baptisme, Lying on of hands, Anoynting with Oyls, Psalmes, or any externells; I charge every one of you respectively . . . that none of you be found guilty of this great eville: which whiles some have committed . . . through a zeale for God . . . yet they have erred from the Lawe of the Love of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

This principle of comprehension held through the 1660s, when 'Bro. holcroft' was amongst the preachers invited to address the church,<sup>2</sup> and the 1670s, when Bunyan applied for licences under the Acts of Toleration and styled them 'Congregational', since he was at the time vigorously opposing making baptism a test of communion.<sup>3</sup> The Bedford meeting had had some influence as far into Cambridge-

<sup>1</sup> *The Church Book of Bunyan Meeting, 1650-1821*, ed. G. B. Harrison, f. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* f. 26.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Whitley, 'The Baptist Licences of 1672', *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.* 1 (1908-9), pp. 165-6.

shire as Toft as early as 1659. In that year, Thomas Smith, the Cambridge University Librarian, who was also rector of Caldecote<sup>1</sup> near Toft, wrote scoldingly to 'Mr E.' of Toft,<sup>2</sup> who had 'rebuked' Smith several times when he spoke at one of the meetings held in Toft in Daniel Angier's barn. Angier apparently invited Bunyan regularly to Toft, and 'Mr E.' had used him as a counsellor for one of his daughters, who was in spiritual distress. According to Smith, Bunyan had 'intruded into Pulpits in these parts' so Toft was not the only village accustomed to the presence of 'the Tinker' with whom Smith was 'angry. . . because he strives to mend Souls as well as Kettles and Pans'.<sup>3</sup> The implication of Smith's pamphlet is that he had been visited in his own parish and heckled there after a sermon, by Angier. Smith returned the compliment and invaded the Angier barn at Toft, where he was called a liar for his pains. The ordinary man behind the plough may have suffered from the curtailment of some of his amusements under the Commonwealth, but he seems to have gained some very lively free entertainment in exchange.

The small meeting held at Toft by John Wait, a yeoman of Toft, in 1669, must have been the direct descendant of the meeting in Angier's barn. John Wait started his career in the Cambridgeshire Congregational church. He was one of the four elders chosen at Eversden to minister to the church soon after Holcroft's ejection;<sup>4</sup> with Oddy, Corbin and Bard. They were all, with Holcroft, imprisoned shortly afterwards, but Wait

maid his escap from them into another counti, and mister Bard liekwise fell under sum surcomstance that he leaft the church too and this was a great greef to God's servants whoos harts was ficksed for crist. . .

God's servant, being as a good shepard zealos for God and ready to lay down his life for the sheep, was in great disstreas abowght mister Waits and mister Bards leafig the church in its afflickhon, and seant seaveroll admonishons to them to return to the church, whei of they returned not and the church proceedid against them for their not ansoerin their call and some other crims that was against them, and they was coot of from the church but som was dissatisfied.

This history explains the letter addressed to 'our elect sister' in Cambridge by the Bedford church in 1671, asking why Brother John Wait had been excommunicated. It inquired whether the sentence can have been just, since 'he is not [a] withered branch: he is still a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall' to 'we who heare, see and observe him'. Holcroft replied that Wait, as an elder, had become a 'railer, and a blasphemer of God; who raised up amongst us strife and contention'. His answer was judged unsatisfactory and the Bedford congregation, 'witness of the power of God with our Brother, and of the success of his ministry', received Wait into fellowship just the same, in 1671.<sup>5</sup> The Bedford church seems to

<sup>1</sup> 'Cawcat'.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Smith, 'A Letter in Defence of the Ministry, and Against Lay Preachers', printed in *The Quaker Disarm'd* (London, 1659).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Denne's description of Smith's case at the beginning of *The Quaker No Papist* (etc.) (London, 1659).

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Church Book of Bunyan Meeting, 1650-1821*, ed. G. B. Harrison, ff. 32, 34, 36, 38-9, 47.

have had some justification, since Wait's ministry in Hitchin in Hertfordshire had been highly praised in 1669.<sup>1</sup> However, according to Richard Conder, writing in the 1690s, the action taken by Bedford 'maid such a breach of communion between these churchis that to this day is not maid up'. It is possible that a doctrinal dispute lay at the back of this quarrel, as well as John Wait's defection under persecution. Wait had obviously adopted the principle of comprehension on which Bunyan's meeting was based. It is perhaps significant that in 1677, after the dismissal of a brother from the Bedford meeting to the church at Hitchin, which Wait had earlier taught, a group of the Hitchin brethren sought their dismissal to Holcroft's church on doctrinal grounds, and later formed a true Independent church in Hitchin.<sup>2</sup> Wait was licensed at Toft in 1672, but no permanent congregation seems to have been established there as a result of his ministry.<sup>3</sup>

The meeting of the Open Baptists of Gamlingay was much more important than that at Toft, and, indeed, one of the Gamlingay brethren was joint teacher of the Toft group, with John Wait. Gamlingay lies in the extreme west of the county, projecting into Bedfordshire. A couple of converts had been made there by the Caxton Baptist church in 1652 and 1653. By 1669 there were no less than forty hearers of a weekly conventicle there, taught by the schoolmaster, Samuel Smith; Oliver Scott, a maltster; Edward Dent, a brick-kiln master; and Luke Astwood, an oatmeal maker. The Gamlingay meeting does not appear to have been affiliated to Bedford until the following year, when the four men named in the bishop's returns as teachers at Gamlingay were received, with five more, at Bedford. The present Gamlingay Old Meeting certainly has a longer corporate existence than it claims, probably stretching back to the 1650s rather than to 1670. Almost at once, Gamlingay became one of the places where the Bedford General Meeting, which was still under heavy pressure, met.<sup>4</sup> According to the Compton Census, Gamlingay, which had forty-five dissenters in 1676, was the third largest nonconformist centre in the county after the Congregational villages of Orwell and Thriplow.

Twenty-three people were presented for absence from church in Gamlingay at the visitation of 1682, and this relatively high number is an indication of the continuing strength of the support for the Open Baptists in the parish. In 1685 the rough notes for the visitation mentioned disgustedly that there were thirty to forty 'unbaptized followers of Cummin ye Tinker' in the parish. The schoolmaster was both excommunicated and unlicensed. The Bedford General Meeting continued to meet occasionally in Gamlingay until 1710. In this year, the Gamlingay Open Baptists obtained their collective dismission from the Bedford church and established their

<sup>1</sup> W. Urwick, *Nonconformity in Hertfordshire* (1884), pp. 639-40.

<sup>2</sup> W. Urwick, *op. cit.* p. 645.

<sup>3</sup> John Wait's identity has been confused with that of Joseph Waite, who was ejected from Sprowton in Suffolk in 1662, but died in 1670. G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and the Modern Question', *Journ. Theol. Stud.* n.s. xvi (1965), p. 112 n. 2. It is not clear whether John Wait was indeed the minister in London in 1681 whom Samuel Palmer, *Nonconformists' Memorial*, III, p. 287, took to be Joseph Waite. John was still alive in 1692, and acquainted with the situation in Cambridgeshire, for he wrote a letter in that year warning the members of Joseph Hussey's church against Antinomianism. G. F. Nuttall, *art. cit.* p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Church Book of Bunyan Meeting*, ff. 29, 31, 110.

own church with thirty founder members. The success of the church is indicated by Hussey's list of 1715-16, which ascribed two hundred and fifty 'hearers' to the Gamlingay Open Baptists. Hussey did not give estimates of 'the size of any other Baptist church in the county, and, while this may indicate his natural Congregational bias, it may also indicate that the General Baptists in Cambridgeshire continued to decline in the eighteenth century, as they had under persecution.<sup>1</sup> The Baptist cause faded out at Over for the time<sup>2</sup> but it retained a hold on its other old centres. Melbourn and Great Wilbraham, where there had been groups of Baptists since 1654, shared a preaching circuit in the eighteenth century with Fulbourn and Saffron Walden.<sup>3</sup> The entry for Wilbraham in Hussey's list was never filled in, however. The Melbourn Baptist chapel had recently been joined by a Congregational chapel in the village in 1717, and the older meeting could certainly not compete in drawing power with the newer, for the Baptists of Melbourn appeared only on Hussey's list as a crossed-out entry. However the church was still active in 1701, as was that of Great Wilbraham, which in this year took a stand against Socinianism in the General Assembly of General Baptists. In 1733 Melbourn and Fulbourn were amongst the churches of the reunited assembly.<sup>4</sup> Fulbourn had had a very early chapel building, and was the place at which converts from Cambridge were baptized in the later eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> However, of all these Baptist centres, the chapel at Melbourn is the only one of the Baptist churches in Cambridgeshire known to Henry Denne which survives today. It is therefore the heir of the longest datable dissenting tradition in the county, reaching back to 1654.

#### QUAKERS

Much more information is available on the Quakers than any other dissenting body after the Restoration. The existence of their carefully kept Volumes of Sufferings means that a vivid picture of their tribulations can be built up for a period when only the brief factual records of non-sympathizers or would-be-persecutors exist for other churches.

The first Cambridgeshire items in the Volumes of Sufferings which record the persecution of villagers, as opposed to Quaker missionaries, for going to meetings and public testifying are for 1655 and 1656. They show that Quakerism had taken

<sup>1</sup> I owe much of my information on the Gamlingay open Baptists to the kindness and hospitality of the minister, Mr G. S. Tydeman, who not only arranged for me to inspect the first Church Book, but also for me to see the earliest trust deeds at Messrs E. T. Leeds, Smith and Co., in Sandy. Unfortunately, neither the trust deeds nor the Church Book give a date for the erection of the present chapel building. The meeting yard was first mentioned in 1722, and the meeting house itself in 1740.

<sup>2</sup> Although later in the eighteenth century the neighbouring Congregational church of Cottenham and Willingham itself became Baptist.

<sup>3</sup> *The Congregational Magazine, or London Christian Instructor*, II, pp. 503 and 696, and III, p. 168 (1818).

<sup>4</sup> Information taken from the list of general Baptist churches in Cambridgeshire compiled by W. T. Whitley (ed.), *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches in England with Kindred Records*, I, 1654-1728 (1909), p. lvii, and II, 1731-1811 (1910), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> R. Robinson, 'Historical Account'.

root both in the south and the north-east of the county. Men from Royston and Meldreth were imprisoned in Cambridge Castle in 1655 for meeting on the first day, so Royston meeting was under way. In the same year, Anne Norris of Swavesey was 'moved by the Lord to beare her testimony against the priest of Over in the Steeple-house' and went to prison for six months as a result. Her husband, who was nearly eighty, was fined in the same year for riding on the Sabbath, as he was caught on his way to a meeting two miles away from Swavesey. For refusing to pay, he also was imprisoned, and so they were both kept from their six children who were still 'not able to guide themselves'. A week after his release from prison, Boniface Norris died. So began the long series of painful family disruptions, and the imprisonments which sometimes led to martyrdom, which the village Quakers were to suffer over the next twenty years. Unlike most dissenters, who enjoyed relative freedom under the Commonwealth, the Quakers were persecuted from the time when the sect was formed. They had already suffered fines and imprisonments for several years when, in 1660, they and other nonconformists were hit by the first of the waves of persecution which were to continue until brought to an end in 1689 by the Declaration of Indulgence. For this reason, the Quakers' fortunes were a little different through the 1660s and 1670s from those of the other, orthodox sects. The sect had had no room for the half-hearted since its inception, since it was under constant pressure. The names in the Volumes of Sufferings therefore recurred, as often as not, again and again, as their possessors were gradually stripped of their goods over a decade or so and reduced to the state of John Smith of Over, who, by the end of 1670, had several charges of attending meetings against him, and eventually had two cows taken from him 'being all he then had'.<sup>1</sup>

The first period of persecution lasted from 1660, through the passing of the Act of Uniformity and the first Conventicle Act proscribing meetings, until the fall of Clarendon in 1667 and the adjournment of Parliament from 1667 to 1669 brought some relief. The Quakers were probably the worst sufferers. Even before the Restoration, they had been obvious scapegoats for communal feelings of superstition and xenophobia, as the credence given to charges of witchcraft brought against them in 1659 showed. These charges were linked with an unpleasant little tale of the defilement of an altar in Norwich, in a way well calculated to rouse feelings of disgust and hostility in the reader.<sup>2</sup>

The unpopularity of the Quakers brought mob violence down on them in Cambridge by April 1660, when the meeting in Jesus Lane was broken up, the house wrecked, two women stabbed in the street and blood drawn from another couple of dozen attenders. They wrote a letter of complaint to the king, quoting the Declaration of Breda against him and adding bitterly 'now heere all may see what muddy

<sup>1</sup> *Volumes of Sufferings*, I, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Strange and Terrible Newes from Cambridge, being a true Relation of the Quakers bewitching Mary Philips*, etc. Anon. (London, 1659). Replied to by Alderman James Blackley *et al.* *A Lying Wonder Discovered and the strange and Terrible Newes from Cambridge proved false... and on answer to John Bunions Paper touching the said imagined witchcraft*, etc. (London, 1659).

waters this fountain of Cambridge streames forth'.<sup>1</sup> But by the beginning of the following year, their refusal to swear the Oath of Allegiance got them into worse trouble, and Cambridge gaol was filled with Quaker prisoners.<sup>2</sup> They were kept under evil conditions, which were described by John Aynslo, their spokesman:

Some of us are kept in and not suffered to go out at all to ease themselves but might doe it where they lye, and others of us shut up in dungeons and holes where they keepe their fellons and witches and Murderers and soe thronged y<sup>t</sup> they have but roome to stirr one by another and y<sup>e</sup> places doe smell soe nastily y<sup>t</sup> it were enough to poyson any creature but ye Lord is our preserver. . .

Worse still, these prisoners were of all ages, all conditions and both sexes, and their imprisonment had bitter consequences for their families. The worst-hit village was Swavesey, from which twenty-three people were taken, including men whose families were wholly dependent on their trade and who were now reduced to destitution. All adults were removed from some houses, leaving in one case two small children 'left as in ye streets without habitation'.<sup>3</sup>

Another particularly bad period for the Quakers followed the passing of the second Conventicle Act in 1670. The records show the same members of the same meetings distrained on again and again during 1670 for doggedly continuing their worship together. Proceedings were frequently taken under Elizabethan and Jacobean acts originally intended to cripple the Catholic gentry,<sup>4</sup> so the dissenting husbandman and yeomen of Cambridgeshire found their farm stock and household goods disappearing to satisfy demands for fines of £20 a month for not attending church.<sup>5</sup> John Smith of Over had already lost four cows worth £13 and three heifers worth £5. 10s. when his last two were taken from him.<sup>6</sup> Nine cows of John Aynslo's valued at £30, as well as household goods, were taken in 1670. At a time when the ordinary husbandman's goods at his death were worth £30 and the ordinary yeoman's goods £180<sup>7</sup> such repeated fines could be completely ruinous and it is perhaps no accident that, by 1674, John Aynslo only lost one brass pot and a pewter dish when he was caught at meeting. He may not have had much left to take. Under-sheriffs and informers grew fat on the proceeds of distraint, and a bitter note made in 1670 records that 'Edward Walls, of Cambridge, cobbler, one of the Informers. . . is now turned a grazier'.<sup>8</sup>

The Volumes of Sufferings and the Quaker register for Cambridgeshire, taken

<sup>1</sup> *Volume of Sufferings*, 1, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Thomas Sclater, one of the Cambridgeshire J.P.'s, made brief notes in his diary on this. They are printed as 'Commitments at Cambridge 1660-1', *Journ. of Friends Historical Soc.* xx (1923), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Volume of Sufferings*, 1, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> A list of statutes under which Quakers were most frequently prosecuted is given in a letter of c. 1685 printed in J. Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers* (1753), 1, pp. xl-xli.

<sup>5</sup> 23 Eliz. cap. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> H. M. Spufford, 'The Significance of the Cambridgeshire Hearth Tax', *Proc. C.A.S.* LV (1962), p. 54, n. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Volumes of Sufferings*, 1, p. 122. See also J. Besse, *op. cit.* p. 97, for the story of the under-sheriff deliberately taking household goods from the sufferers, since he was about to set up house himself.

<sup>9</sup> Public Record Office, R.G./6/1219.

together, give a very strong impression that Quakerism had got most hold in the group of villages round Over and Swavesey, where Anne Norris and her husband had been early pioneers, and where John Aynslo lived.<sup>1</sup> Almost all the identifiable Quakers taken in the mass arrests of 1661 came from this group of villages. It is perhaps no coincidence that George Whitehead, one of the more notable early Quaker missionaries, was visiting Cottenham in 1656.<sup>2</sup> By 1669, the Bishop recorded meetings in Willingham and Oakington, as well as Over and Swavesey. During 1670, meetings were broken up in all these villages except Willingham. They seem to have been held in rotation in this group of parishes, so that a meeting in any one of the villages drew in members from all of them. The register is preceded by a list of nine meetings in Cambridgeshire, and five of them—Swavesey, Over, Willingham, Oakington and Cottenham, lie close together in this area north-west of Cambridge. There are few entries in the register itself for the early period, from the 1650s to the temporary indulgence of 1672, and it does not seem to record most of the major events in the lives of those Quakers who are named in the Volume of Sufferings up to 1670. Many of those early entries which are included appear to be later insertions of some of the family affairs of the more notable Quakers of the conversion period, like the earliest births to be included in the register, of the children of Boniface and Ann Norris of Swavesey from 1648 on, and of the twelve children of John Aynslo. There is not much material from before 1665. However, for what it is worth, the register gives the same impression as the volumes of sufferings, that Quakerism was more strongly rooted in Over and Swavesey before 1672 than anywhere else. Even in Over the doings of only half-a-dozen families are recorded, however. After 1672 there were still more entries in the register for this area than for any other, although there were never more than six Quaker families in one village.

There were also Quakers in two other parts of the county, apart from Cambridge itself, but in most cases they were single, and isolated, individuals of strong conviction. John Prime of Little Wilbraham was one of these. In 1674 he was attending a strongly supported meeting in Fulbourn, together with Henry Bostock from Quy. Henry Bostock seems to have started his dissenting career as a Congregationalist, for he bore the same name as the man who had acted as host for a large Congregational conventicle in Stow-cum-Quy in 1669, which had since petered out.<sup>3</sup> John Prime was steadily mulcted of his household goods and farm stock for attending meetings and non-payment of tithes. He must have been a very substantial yeoman for, between 1673 and 1679, five horses, twenty cows, corn, pigs and household goods valued by

<sup>1</sup> Aynslo was not a Cambridgeshire man. According to the register, he came from Aynsley or Aynsley Hall in Northumberland. There was at least one gentry family of Aynsley in Northumberland (John Burke, *History of the Commoners*, I (1836), pp. 588–9) although it was not of Aynsley Hall but of Little Harle. The surname seems however to have been fairly common. One John Anesley was exempt from the Hearth Tax on the grounds of poverty, M. H. Dodds, *History of Northumberland*, XII (1926), p. 335. It is therefore difficult to know what social status John Aynslo was born to, before he married Tabitha Beadle of Bedfordshire in 1657 and settled in Over, when he was known to the bishop in 1669 as a ‘farmer’.

<sup>2</sup> G. F. Nuttall, *Early Quaker Letters from the Swarthmore MSS, to 1660* (1952), no. 367.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 78.

the Quakers at over £100 in all were taken from him. In 1679 he was still being presented with his wife and two daughters for not attending church, and he was imprisoned in 1686. His influence must have drawn the meeting at Fulbourn to Little Wilbraham, when it was later listed in the Quaker register, for his was the only Quaker family there whose births, marriages and burials appeared in the register.

The meeting at Linton incorporated a handful of convinced Quakers from the parishes round about, most of whom had appeared in prosecutions since the 1650s, like Walter Crane of Horseheath, Richard Webb of West Wickham and John Webb of Balsham. John Webb's family were the only Quakers in Balsham, but he held meetings regularly in his house. Before 1670, the family of John Harvey, a grocer of Linton, seems to have been the only Quaker one in Linton, from the register, although as many as ten people were caught attending meetings there in that year. The movement obviously gained momentum after 1672, and half-a-dozen families in Linton town then had their family events recorded in the Quaker register. Linton Meeting grew into a sizeable and strong one and had its own meeting house by the early eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> although it may have suffered a little from the arrival, relatively late on the scene, of Congregationalism in the place.

#### CONCLUSION

The distribution of early dissent in Cambridgeshire shows that, on the whole, once a parish was touched by dissent, it was vulnerable to dissenting opinions in more than one form. Once nonconformist ideas were circulating at all, argument could easily develop, and the nonconformists of a single parish were liable to split their allegiance between the Baptist, Quaker, or Congregational churches. This did not always happen, but it happened in a significant number of places.<sup>2</sup> The Baptists of Over were of course early engaged in theological debate with the Quakers, and by 1669 Congregationalism had got a considerable hold there as well. The dissenters of Willingham were divided between Quakerism and Congregationalism and so were those of Oakington. Balsham had both early Baptists and early Quakers; and Meldreth, which was sending a couple of Quakers to meeting in Royston in 1655, was a Congregationalist stronghold by 1663. Doctrinal convictions not only divided villages, but even families within them. The uncommonly named Peacheys of Soham not only provided elders of the Quaker church, but also a member of Holcroft's church, listed in 1675, who was later admitted to the Rothwell congregational church. The process of fission and struggle amongst the denominations continued, not only in the period of the conversion under the Commonwealth, but under persecution, when Quakers first appeared in Little Wilbraham to challenge the Congregational family there. It also continued after Toleration. The Congregationalists then moved into the Baptist centre of Melbourn, and the Quaker centre of Linton.

<sup>1</sup> This was demolished after purchase by the Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds in 1921. Cambridge University Library, W. M. Palmer Collection B4/1.

<sup>2</sup> See Map A (p. 70).

This pattern of the distribution of early dissent within Cambridgeshire, and its definite regional concentration, deserves further explanation. No doubt the simple process of discussion and argument was partly responsible. Once established in one village, nonconformist ideas tended to spread to the villages round about. But other factors must surely have been involved to explain the definite lines of demarcation which appear on the map between dissenting and conformist areas, and these would repay investigation.

#### NOTE ON THE COMPTON CENSUS

The degree of reliability of the Compton Census has been a matter of debate for some time (see the bibliography given by H. C. Johnson in his introduction to the *Warwick County Records*, VII (1946), pp. lxxviii-lxxx). One party feels that the number of dissenters was deliberately underestimated for political reasons in the return. C. W. Chalkin, in his article ('The Compton Census of 1676—the dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester', *A Seventeenth Century Miscellany*, Kent Archaeological Society Records Publication Committee, XVII, 1960, pp. 153-74), agrees that there was probably underestimation of nonconformists, although this may not have been intentional. The other side feels, from a comparison of the numbers of presentations in Act Books and Quarter Sessions minutes with the number of dissenters recorded in the census, that at least all *active* dissenters were probably numbered in it.

I have found that the census certainly records far more dissenters in the diocese of Ely than the visitation returns nearest to it in date. Whereas a group of ten or more dissenters stand out as a significant number in 1676, a group of only five presentations for dissent stand out in the same way in the episcopal visitations of the diocese in 1679 and 1682. Even where an impeccable nonconformist source of the right date provides evidence on the size of one particular dissenting group in various parishes, like the list of members of the Baptist congregation of Fenstanton and Caxton in 1676, or the names of those Quakers distrained on for meeting under the Conventicle Act of 1670 in the Volumes of Sufferings, the numbers given never approach the numbers given for the same parishes in Compton, which should, of course, have included dissenters from all groups, and which should therefore be larger. The only exception to this, which might cast doubt on the accuracy of the census rather than tending to confirm it, is provided by the Congregational church list of 1675, in which the total number of Congregationalists given, for instance, in the parishes within and around Cambridge exceed the total number of all dissenters for the area in Compton. However, the list is so corrupt (see above, p. 76, n. 1) that it cannot carry much weight. On the whole, therefore, the Ely section of the census seems to give a more complete record of the strength of dissent in the diocese than any other which is available.

On the other hand, I have also found that calculations based on the frequently made assumption that the census includes all adults aged 16 and over, give total population figures considerably below those based on, for instance, the 1664 Hearth

Tax. (Contrast C. W. Chalkin, *art. cit.*, who feels the chief use of the census is as a guide to the size and distribution of population.) Miss Anne Whiteman, of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, who is at present editing the census for the Staffordshire Historical Collections, has been good enough to tell me that those original parochial returns which survive for the census indicate that the figures were made up on all sorts of different bases: inhabitants over 16 including servants; inhabitants over 16 excluding servants; men only; families; and so on. In the circumstances, unless the original parochial return exists, it is impossible to be certain exactly what the figures entered in each column of the census represent. No original returns have been found for the diocese of Ely. This means that great caution must be employed in using the census, and that it is a difficult or impossible source on which to base estimates of total population, even if not of dissenters.

I am very grateful to Miss Whiteman for letting me have this information before the publication of her definitive edition of the census, and for sparing time to comment on an earlier draft of part of this paper. I am also much indebted to Mrs Dorothy Owen, the Ely diocesan archivist, as well as to those ministers and chapel secretaries and elders who have helped me at various times by producing their records, and to Mr Tibbutt, who lent me his transcripts of the Great Gransden Church Book and the Rothwell Church Book. I should particularly like to thank Mr Andrew Smith, of Emmanuel Congregational Church, Cambridge, who, with extreme generosity, lent me his own notes, and guided me to much material I would otherwise have missed.

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

VOLUME LXI  
JANUARY 1968 TO DECEMBER 1968

4os. net.

## CONTENTS

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| <i>Officers and Council of the Society, 1967-1968</i>   | page vi |
| A Collection of Flint Implements from the Hunstanton District<br><i>By</i> HAMON LE STRANGE                                       | i       |
| A Neolithic Hut and Features at Little Paxton, Huntingdonshire<br><i>By</i> GRANVILLE T. RUDD                                     | 9       |
| A Romano-British Settlement site at Brickhills Estate, Eynesbury, Hunts.<br><i>By</i> GRANVILLE T. RUDD <i>and</i> COLIN DAINES   | 15      |
| A Roman Farm-settlement at Godmanchester<br><i>By</i> W. H. C. FREND, D.D., F.S.A.  | 19      |
| The Anglo-Saxon S-Shaped Brooch in England, with Special Reference to one from<br>Lakenheath, Suffolk<br><i>By</i> TERESA BRISCOE | 45      |
| The Hidation of Huntingdonshire<br><i>By</i> CYRIL HART   | 55      |
| The Dissenting Churches in Cambridgeshire from 1660 to 1700<br><i>By</i> MARGARET SPUFFORD  | 67      |
| Review Note: West Cambridgeshire (R.C.H.M.)<br><i>By</i> MARY D. CRA'STER   | 96      |
| <i>Index</i>  | 97      |