

near to Hepple Wood Houses. Being novices at the work, they were striking very few fish. The 'baillie,' disgusted at their want of skill in his favourite pursuit, could restrain himself no longer, but joined his quondam companions, saying, 'Yor sic fishers as aa' never saw. Lend me a leister, an' aa'll sune show ye how to spear salmon.' Snatching at the same time a leister from one of the men, he stalked into the stream, and in a short time leistered as many salmon as they could carry. Throwing down the leister, he then left them, allowing the 'Halysteun' poachers to carry off their fish unmolested, and highly pleased at the generous exploit of the water-watcher.

XVII.—AN ACCOUNT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN MEETING HOUSE AT BRANTON.

By J. C. HODGSON, OF LOW BUSTON.

[Read on the 25th March, 1891.]

IN the valley of the Breamish at Branton, an old manor of the Collingwoods, one of the oldest Presbyterian congregations in Northumberland has its 'meeting house' or chapel.

During the Commonwealth the parishes around were all ministered to by zealous and learned Puritan clergy, who, before their ejection on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1662, had sown the seeds of Puritanism amongst the scattered population. From Eglingham was ejected Mr. John Pringle, and from Ingram Mr. Jas. Aird.¹ The predecessor of the latter at Ingram was the famous Mr. Luke Ogle, M.A., a member of the Eglingham family, and the Commonwealth vicar of Berwick, where he died in 1696 at the age of 66 years. Of him Calamy says that 'he was a Man of great Learning; and particularly well skilled in Ecclesiastical History: he was a laborious, judicious and affectionate preacher, and a wise and prudent person for government.'

By the Toleration Act of 1689, the worship of those who accepted the doctrines of the Church of England, but who dissented from its

¹ Mr. James Aird, rector of Ingram, ejected in 1662; afterwards conformed in Scotland.—Calamy's *Account*.

rites or form of government, was permitted to be held in buildings for which the owners or occupiers had sought and obtained the licence of the justices in Quarter Sessions.

The Sessions Records contain the following notices of houses licensed in this neighbourhood:—

1700: Christmas Sessions: The house of Alex. Brown of Doxford was licensed.

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|-------------------------|---|---|
| 1701: October Sessions: | $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Robt. Story of Lorbottle} \\ \text{Thos: Tindle of Chatton} \\ \text{John Buddle of Netherton} \\ \text{John Chrisp2 of Reveley} \\ \text{Timothy Punshon of Beanley} \end{array} \right\}$ | $\left. \begin{array}{l} \\ \\ \\ \\ \end{array} \right\}$ were licensed. |
| The houses of | | |
| | | |
| | | |

1710: The house of Timothy Punshon at Glanton was *registered*.

1712: The house of Andrew Cregg³ at Ilderton was licensed, his signature being witnessed by Timothy Punshon.

1714-15: Robert Ogle's house at Eglington was licensed.

1716-17: Mark Bell's house at Wooperton was licensed.

After migrating from house to house and from hamlet to hamlet, the people seem to have formed a congregation under the ministry of Timothy Punshon⁴ at Branton. He was of an ancient Newcastle

² The name of John Chrisp of Reveley appears with those of Thos. Chrisp of Gallow-law [near Beanley], yeoman, Alexander Brown of Doxford, and William Brown of Bolton, as parties to a bond dated in 1706. One of the first entries in the Branton register of baptisms is that of Mary, daughter of George Chrisp of Gallow-law, 27th Jan., 1725. They were probably ancestors of the family of Chrisp of Prendwick and Hawkhill.

³ Andrew Crea of Ilderton was father (or grandfather) to John Cree of Low Barton, who was father to the late Dr. Joshua Cree of Whittingham, the father of Mrs. Blythe, wife of rev. Jas. Blythe of Greenville, the present venerable minister of Branton.

⁴ The Killingworth Punshons were also copyholders of Earsdon in the Manor of Tynemouth. In 1673 the name of John Punshon of Killingworth appears in the court rolls. In 1702, Timothy Punshon of Beanley was admitted to 4 'farms,' in Earsdon, in the room of John Punshon of Newcastle, chirurgeon. In April, 1702, Sarah Punshon, of Killingworth, widow, made her will, by which she devised all her lands in Killingworth to her dearly loved son Timothy Punshon, except that house known as Ralph Killingworth's house, which, with a pecuniary legacy, she devised to her daughter Sarah Punshon. No other children are mentioned. Timothy Punshon's wife was Margaret Salkeld of Alnwick, to whose family there is a tombstone in the chancel of Alnwick church, which also bears (without date) a Latin inscription to the memory of Timothy Punshon of Killingworth. The registers repair the defect, for they tell us under date of Dec. 29, 1716, that 'Mr. Punshon, late minister of Branton,' was buried. Mrs. Punshon was probably Margaret (b. 11th May, 1674), daughter of Nathaniel Salkeld of Bondgate Hall, Alnwick. The Salkelds were Nonconformists. She survived her husband, and occurs in church book for refusing to pay church sess. and in 1729, Margaret Punshon of Alnwick, widow, and Timothy Punshon of same place, merchant, appear as parties to a bond. The Will of Timothy Punshon

family, which owned and yet owns' lands at Killingworth, in the parish of Long Benton. Many of them would seem to have been barber chirurgeons in Newcastle.

The Branton Register of Baptisms, the only one kept, begins 1st January, 1725; in that year and in following years the entries are most numerous. The meeting house of the congregation was probably a barn or other building adapted to the purpose and lent or let to them by the proprietor, who at that time was Joseph Brown, a son of William Brown⁵ of Ewart, who about 1712 purchased Branton from the Collingwoods for £2,600. Joseph Brown voted for Branton in 1722 (*Poll Book*), and dying soon after, was succeeded by his brother, Alexander Brown of Doxford. The latter was evidently a zealous Puritan, whose house at Doxford, as we have seen, was licensed by the justices in 1700. In addition to the meeting house, he seems to have allowed the minister of Branton a house in the 'town' or hamlet, and in 1730 he gave further proof of his liberality and goodwill to nonconformity by transferring both house and meeting house to trustees for the use of the congregation in the following manner.

On the 30th July, 1730, what may be termed the foundation

of Killingworth Preacher of the Gospel was proved at Durham in 1717: he leaves portions to his sons, Nathaniel, Timothy, Edward, Jonathan, John and Nicholas and to his daughter Sarah. To Timothy he devises his freehold estate at Alnwick with the 'Golden Acres' and 'Little Cowper-hill.' He mentions his farm at 'Walsend,' and his copy hold estate at 'Munkseaton;' his books are to be reserved 'for such of my sons as have a mind to study Divinity and give up themselves to serve God in ye Ministry.' He mentions his mother-in-law Mrs. Salkeld and Mr. Nathaniel Cox of North Shields, husband of his sister Sarah. The eldest son, Nathaniel Punshon, was buried in the chancel at Alnwick in June, 1730. He left descendants, some of whom continued in Alnwick down to 1811, when his granddaughter (?) Sarah Punshon, was laid beside him. The will of his next brother is dated 7th January, 1737, and in it he is described as Timothy Punshon of Newcastle, gentleman. He states that the estate of his late brother, Nathaniel Punshon at Killingworth, is owing to him £450 for debts and legacies he had discharged. He devises his copyhold at Earsdon to his brothers John and Nicholas, whom he makes residuary legatees; a legacy of £100 is to be paid to his sister, Sarah Widdrington. Sarah Punshon, sister to Nathaniel and Timothy Punshon, was, in 1720, married at Warkworth to 'Robt. Withrington' of Hauxley. In the registers she is described as of Alnwick. She thus became ancestress to the present family of Widdrington of Hauxley, though not to John Widdrington of 'The Old Bank,' whose history is so exhaustively given by late James Clephan, *Arch. Ael.* vol. X. p. 140. It was probably in consequence of this marriage that Bondgate Hall, Alnwick, in 1710, the residence of the Salkelds, became the residence of Robt. Widdrington, and of his son, Nathaniel Widdrington, only passing out of the hands of the family in 1807, when part of the estate was sold at the termination of the great Chancery suit.

⁵ A notice of the Brown family may be found in the *Proceedings of the Berwickshire Nat. Club*, Vol. VIII., p. 244.

charter or endowment of Branton meeting was executed by Alexander Brown (described as of Hebburn) who granted to Thomas Willis of Branton—the minister—to John Hadkin⁶ of Glanton, gent., John Hopper⁷ of Glanton, gent., Joseph Mills⁸ of Glanton, gent., and Henry Haggerston of Bewick Folly, gent., a messuage at Branton, then used as a meeting house for Protestant dissenters with free liberty for the setting up of the horses of the congregation during divine service in all stables and byres belonging to the said Alexander Brown or his tenants, at Branton, liberty to cast flaggs to repair the meeting house, a site for a stable, and other privileges, for 999 years, at a yearly rent of ten shillings and ninepence. Also a house at Branton then occupied by the minister, Thomas Willis, with a small stable adjoining, horse grass in the out-field, cows grass in the in-field, liberty to cast flaggs for repairs, to cast turves, and to hoe whins for fuel, with other privileges, to hold for 16 years at a peppercorn rent, and then for 83 years at a yearly rent of £2 10s., together for 99 years. The deed also makes provision for the election of new trustees by the congregation with the assent of the minister, at the death of a trustee, or upon a trustee withdrawing himself for six months from service at Branton. There is also a provision in the eventuality of dissenting meeting houses being no longer tolerated by the law or suppressed.

In 1746, John Hadkin, Jos. Mills, and Henry Haggerston being dead, the surviving trustees, Thos. Willis and John Hopper, appointed to the vacancies John Mills of Glanton, gent., George Anderson⁹ of Glanton, gent., and Thos. Castles of Eslington. In 1756, the trustees were the rev. James Buckham [minister], Henry Ogle of Eglington, esq., John Hopper of Edlington Newtown, gentleman, John Mills of Glanton Pike, gentleman, Edward Anderson of Glanton, gent., and Jas. Reaveley of Old Bewick, gent. The congregation would seem to

⁶ 1722: John Atkin (? Hadkin) of Glanton voted for Glanton. 1774: Richard Hadkin of Glanton voted for Glanton.—*Poll Book*. The Hadkins were ancestors of the wife of sir George Bruce, and owned lands lying between Glanton and Greenville, now called Hopper's Hill.

⁷ 1722: John Hopper of Glanton voted for Glanton.—*Poll Book*.

⁸ 1722: Jos. Mills, and Wm. Mills, both of Glanton, voted for Glanton.—*Poll Book*. The Mills family owned Glanton Pike, which was carried to the Collingwoods by the intermarriage of Margaret Mills with Henry Collingwood of Lilburn.

⁹ 1748: George Anderson of Glanton voted for Glanton.—*Poll Book*. 1774: Edward Anderson of Glanton voted for Glanton.—*Poll Book*.

have increased, and the old chapel had become 'strait' for them. A plot of freehold ground was therefore purchased of Nicholas Brown,¹⁰ then of Bolton, son and heir of Alex. Brown the founder. The plot contained 368 square yards (*i.e.*, 23 yards by 16 yards), and was situate on the 'Back Riggs' near the old chapel. The tenants of the farm held the ground on lease, and were compensated for any loss by the award of an arbitrator. The new meeting house was completed before 1764.

As might have been foreseen, the stable right given in the grant of 1730 seems to have caused friction and led to disputes. The trustees sought counsel's opinion on this and other matters. The opinion dated 2nd December, 1766, was very adverse to their privileges. Counsel advised that they might indeed convert the old meeting house into 'cote houses,' but that the grant of 1730 gave the stable right, etc., for the use of the people resorting to a certain messuage *then* used as a meeting house, the people resorting to the new meeting house therefore had no right to it or to the other privileges.

In August, 1786, an appointment recited that Hopper, Anderson, and Castles were dead, that John Mills had withdrawn himself from the meeting, but joined with Mr. Somerville the minister, for the purpose of appointing new trustees. They were:—Matthew Brantxon of Learchild; Henry Coxon of Howbalk, farmer; Thomas Ancram of Bewick Folly, farmer; James Aitchison of Crawley, farmer; and John Ord of Branton, farmer. They, in 1795, agreed with the rev. Nicholas Brown, the then owner of Branton, to surrender and quit-claim to him the old meeting house with its stable right, granted to them in 1730 for 999 years; and he, on his part, released them from the payment of ten shillings and ninepence a year rent. This—to the proprietor—very important agreement was written and executed on the back of the skin containing the original grant.

The chapel, erected between 1756 and 1764, had again become too small, and must have been taken down wholly or partially, for the present building bears the date of 1781.

The manse, much enlarged and improved by the rev. Newton Blythe, was occupied by the minister for the time being (at the yearly

¹⁰ The rev. Nicholas Brown, D.D., in 1756 of Bolton, in 1795 of Rochester, in the county of Kent, was grandfather to major Brown, now of Doxford.

rent of £2 10s.) until the expiration of the 99 years' lease in 1829. It is now converted into a farm-house, and occupied by Mr. W. Pringle.

The ministers whose names are recorded are :—

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| 1. Mr. Timothy Punshon. ¹¹ | 5. The rev. — Scott. |
| 2. Mr. Thos. Willis. ¹² | 6. The rev. Jas. Somerville. ¹⁵ |
| 3. The rev. Alex. Blackie. ¹³ | 7. The rev. Newton Blythe. ¹⁶ |
| 4. The rev. Jas. Buckham. ¹⁴ | 8. The rev. Jas. Blythe. ¹⁷ |

¹¹ Buried at Alnwick, 29thth December, 1716.

¹² Minister when meeting house was granted to trustees in 1730.

¹³ Mr. Blackie, in 1753, received a call from the Presbyterian congregation at Stockton, which charge he retained for 31 years.—Drysdale's *History of Presbyterianism*, p. 551.

¹⁴ Mr. Buckham was party to deeds of 1756 and 1774.

¹⁵ Mr. Somerville's settlement was opposed by a considerable minority of the congregation who severed themselves and founded the Glanton meeting. He was party to the deeds of 1786 and 1795, and was dead by 1809.

¹⁶ The rev. John Blythe, probably a native of Scotland, had a charge at Thorney burn, a now extinct congregation near Kirkley. Whilst residing there he enjoyed the friendship of the polished and learned Dr. Newton Ogle, dean of Winchester, whose beautiful ode to the river Blyth is printed by Hodgson in his *History of Northumberland*. On a son being born to him at Kirkley, he gave him the names of Newton Ogle Blythe. The latter graduated at Glasgow University, and in 1796 entered his ministerial work as pastor of Maling's Rig meeting house at Sunderland, and there his son James was born. He came to Branton in 1809 at the death of Mr. Somerville, and for many years received a number of boys into his house. His school attained considerable fame in the county. For his congregation he began a Sunday school in 1816, and died in 1853. The rev. John Blythe removed from Kirkley to Blyth, and there died.

¹⁷ The rev. Jas. Blythe, the present minister at Branton, was, in 1835, ordained coadjutor to his father, and succeeded him in the pastorate. For 36 years he held the office of clerk to the Presbytery, and in 1861 was Moderator of Synod.

