

X.—THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT MORPETH.

By the late WILLIAM WOODMAN, V.P.¹

[Read on the 28th of February, 1906.]

The earliest knowledge of the Presbyterians in Morpeth is the tradition that they assembled in a cottage by the side of Cottingburn, where there is now a tanyard, in Newgate Street. In 1715 the Presbyterians in Morpeth must have been numerous, as on 15th October, in that year, when lord Derwentwater and lord Widdrington, with about 370 horsemen under the command of General Forster, proclaimed the Pretender at the market cross and invited recruits, they expressly excluded Presbyterians.

Six years afterwards, on 20 July, 1721, the deed which embodied the Presbyterians was entered into between William Crawford and Sir William Middleton, bart., John Cay of South Shields, Reynold Hall of Newbigging, Cumberland Leach of Belsay, Benjamin Bennett of Newcastle, Jonathan Harle of Alnwick, and John Horsley of Widdrington. Enquiry as to these parties will show that, when founded, the Presbyterians were an important and influential body. William Crawford² must have been a wealthy man. His son was living in Morpeth in the early part of this century in a large house where St.

¹ These notices of the Presbyterian church at Morpeth, written by Mr. Woodman on 29th December, 1882, are printed as they stand save when blanks have been filled in, the added words being shown by square brackets. The footnotes are by Mr. J. C. Hodgson, F.S.A., V.P.

² William Crawford of Morpeth voted at the election of knights of the shire in 1748 in respect of a freehold at Morpeth. *Poll Book.*

James's church stands. Sir William Middleton of Belsay³ was a member of parliament for the county and well known for his whig principles; his lineal descendant, the late Sir Charles Monck, used to boast that like all his family he was a whig of 1688. John Cay of South Shields,⁴ one of whose family married a daughter of Horsley, had a large property at North Charlton, recently sold by a descendant, an advocate in Edinburgh. Reynold Hall of Newbigging⁵ was probably the founder of the Presbyterian church at Birdhope-craig. Of Cumberland Leach⁶ nothing is known. In Benjamin Bennett⁷ we have certainly the founder of the Presbyterian congregation in the north of England. He was an eminent divine, the author of numerous theological works yet read and quoted. Some of his family settled in Morpeth and the last died two or three years ago. Jonathan Harle was educated as a physician and married a daughter of an alderman in Newcastle. He was ordained in 1693 and preached for some years alternately at Alnwick and Morpeth. He was the author of a work on infant baptism and

³ Sir William Middleton of Belsay, third baronet, knight of the shire for Northumberland 1721, 1727, 1734, 1741, 1748 and 1755 married Anne, daughter and coheir of William Ettrick of Silksworth and dying *s.p.* was buried at Bolam, 30th September, 1757.

⁴ For a pedigree of Cay of North Charlton see new *History of Northumberland*, vol. II. p. 298.

⁵ Reynold Hall of Newbigging was also a trustee *circa* 1726 for Hanover Square chapel in Newcastle. *Memoirs of Ambrose Barnes* (50 Surt. Soc. Publ.), p. 473.

⁶ Cumberbatch (not Cumberland) Leech was chaplain to Sir John Middleton, the second baronet, who died in 1717, and also an executor of his will. In the library at Belsay castle there was, until lately, a volume of his transcripts of Latin discourses on theology, which showed him to have been a laborious theologian. After leaving Northumberland he resided in Westminster and died there shortly before April, 1733. *Ex inf.* Sir Arthur Middleton, bart.

⁷ The Rev. Benjamin Bennet died Sept. 1, 1726, aged 52. For a sympathetic memoir, with a portrait and a list of his principal literary works, see Mr. Richard Welford's *Men of Mark 'Twixt Tyne and Tweed*, vol. I. p. 254.

another upon the diseases of Scripture. He died in 1729. Horsley preached his funeral sermon, which was printed⁸ with a sketch of his life and two posthumous sermons which, [the Rev. John] Hodgson says, are 'rich in piety and thought.' Of Horsley⁹ it need only be said that he was the author of *Britannia Romana* and other works. He was buried in Morpeth churchyard on the 15th January, 1731/2. The incumbent would not enter the name in the register of burials but made a note at the end of his book, and to quote [the Rev. John] Hodgson, 'such was the brief chronicle which the parish clerk entered in his register to the memory of a man whose learning, and knowledge in science, had far outstripped the acquirements of his northern neighbours.' But 'nomen quaesitum ingenio non excidit.' What a lesson to the mind that riots in posthumous fame.

Horsley was succeeded¹⁰ by the Rev. [James] Simpson and he, in 1754, by Rev. [William] Acheson. Rev. Robert Trotter,¹

⁸ TWO DISCOURSES, | I. On the Frailty of Man. | II. On Conformity to Christ. | By the late Reverend and Learned | JONATHAN HARLE, M.D. | To which are added | HYMNS and PSALMS | By the same AUTHOR | Publish'd at the Request of many of his Hearers | WITH | An ACCOUNT of his LIFE and a | SERMON | preached on Occasion | of his Death. | By JOHN HORSLEY, M.A. & F.R.S. | LONDON | Printed for RICHARD FORD at the Angel in the | Poultry near Stocks Market 1730 | Price 2s. stitch'd. |

⁹ For memoirs and notices of the Rev. John Horsley see *Memoirs of the Lives of Thomas Gibson, M.D., Jonathan Harle, M.D., John Horsley, M.A., F.R.S., and William Turner, M.D.*, by the Rev. John Hodgson, Newcastle, 1831; 'Notes on the Rev. John Horsley,' by J. H. Hinde, *Arch. Ael.*, 2nd series, vol. vi. pp. 174-182; and *History of the Berwickshire Naturalist Club*, vol. xv., pp. 242-244.

¹⁰ The Rev. William Richardson followed Horsley and was predecessor of the Rev. James Simpson. Cf. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England*, p. 575n.

¹ The Rev. Robert Trotter, eldest son of Robert Trotter, portioner, of Melrose, was married at Falstone, 15 Dec., 1774, to Mary, sister and heiress of William Akenhead of Highfield in the chapelry of Falstone. He had issue four sons, viz., Robert Trotter, commander R.N.; Thomas Trotter, surgeon, East India Company's Service; John Spottiswoode Trotter, captain of the 16th Regt Madras Native Infantry; and William Trotter of Morpeth, M.D., all of whom died unmarried:

born at Melrose in 1731, graduated at Edinburgh, was for a short time minister at Harbottle, chosen at Morpeth in 1757, and died in 1807. He was a man of great energy of character, unwearied in his duties and ever active in public affairs. He had been a supporter of lord Gairlies when a candidate to represent the borough. His lordship wrote to Mr. Trotter with the offer of a Scotch living, but he replied in a letter dated 31st May, 1763, saying, 'I beg leave to mention that my obligations to the congregation with which I am connected are so many and so great that I must consider myself bound in honour and duty to support their cause at least for some considerable time if I shall so long live, and not to leave them in a worse situation than I found them. The truth is, they have considerably augmented my salary and rendered my living superior to many settlements in Scotland. They have, moreover, involved themselves in debt by enlarging and repairing the meeting house and till these expenses are cleared off I could not think of leaving them on any consideration whatever.' Mr. Trotter was the owner of house property in Melrose, his wife of estates on the borders.

The following was Mr. Trotter's stipend in the years noted. [Here follows a list from 1758 to 1804 inclusive, the stipend varying considerably, the lowest being 54*l.* 12*s.* 9*d.* in 1794, the highest 100*l.* 3*s.* 5*d.* in 1763.²] In 1758 the communicants were 132.

he had also three daughters, viz., Hannah and Margaretta Maria, who both died unmarried, and Mary Anne, wife of William Pawson of Shawdon. Mr. Trotter died at Morpeth, 14 Feb., 1807, and his widow died at Shawdon 13th May, 1834.

A collection of letters addressed to Mr. Trotter by Mr. Spottiswoode is in the Woodman Collection in the possession of this society.

² 1758, 59*l.* 9*s.* 8*d.*; 1759, 87*l.* 3*s.* 10*d.*; 1760, 88*l.* 4*s.*; 1761, 82*l.* 14*s.* 9*d.*; 1762, 92*l.* 9*s.* 1*d.*; 1763, 100*l.* 3*s.* 5*d.*; 1764, 93*l.* 2*s.* 7*d.*; 1765, 94*l.* 7*s.*; 1766, 90*l.*; 1767, 90*l.* 13*s.* 9*d.*; 1768, 87*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.*; 1769, 90*l.* 2*s.* 3*d.*; 1770, 85*l.* 7*s.* 9*d.*; 1771, 80*l.* 11*s.* 11*d.*; 1772, 81*l.* 4*s.* 4*d.*; 1773, 83*l.* 2*s.* 9*d.*; 1774, 77*l.* 6*s.* 9*d.*; 1775, 71*l.* 9*s.* 6*d.*; 1776, 76*l.* 19*s.* 11*d.*; 1777, 71*l.* 9*s.*; 1778, 68*l.* 13*s.*; 1779, 67*l.* 4*s.*; 1780, 68*l.* 4*s.* 3*d.*; 1781, 63*l.* 4*s.*; 1782, 64*l.* 11*s.* 5*d.*; 1783, 70*l.* 12*s.* 1*d.*; 1784,

During Mr. Trotter's ministry the congregation comprised the most wealthy and leading tradesmen in the town. Some difference arose a few years before Mr. Trotter's death between him and his hearers on the appointment of an assistant, and on the election of his successor a split took place, when most of the local leading members left the congregation.

The Rev. George Atkin succeeded Mr. Trotter; he died in 1829. He was a worthy man but of no weight or energy; his congregation was small. During his time Christianity was almost dead in the town, all sects alike, and the clergy performed their duties in a very easy, perfunctory manner, and few attended to listen to them. On Mr. Atkin's death the Rev. Matthew Brown was elected, and again another split took place, a number of the congregation passing over to the Independents. On Mr. Brown being appointed to a parish in Scotland, he was succeeded by Dr. Anderson, a scholar, a theologian and a gentleman, respected by all who knew him.³

65*l.* 4*s.*; 1785, 66*l.* 2*s.* 3*d.*; 1786, 69*l.* 5*s.* 11*d.*; 1787, 66*l.* 2*s.* 1*d.*; 1788, 60*l.* 18*s.* 6*d.*; 1789, 59*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*; 1790, 59*l.* 8*s.* 2*d.*; 1791, 60*l.* 2*s.* 6*d.*; 1792, 61*l.* 9*s.* 11*d.*; 1793, 60*l.* 7*s.* 9*d.*; 1794, 54*l.* 12*s.* 9*d.*; 1795, 54*l.* 17*s.* 9*d.*; 1796, 54*l.* 16*s.* 7*d.*; 1797, 68*l.* 15*s.* 11*d.*; 1798, 67*l.* 17*s.* 3*d.*; 1799, 67*l.* 17*s.* 10*d.*; 1800, 67*l.* 8*s.* 9*d.*; 1801, 70*l.* 12*s.*; 1802, 82*l.* 16*s.* 5*d.*; 1803, 91*l.* 9*s.*; 1804, 92*l.* 5*s.* 3*d.*

³ The Rev. James Anderson, D.D., who died in 1882, was followed by the Rev. A. H. Drysdale, M.A., author of a *History of the Presbyterians in England, their Rise, Decline, and Revival*, London, 1889.