

# DISSENT IN A MIDDLESEX PARISH: THE STORY OF EARLY DISSENTERS IN PINNER

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## SUMMARY

*Dissent in the parish emerged from a period of disturbance and alternating fortunes but showed broad similarities in most places. The parishes of rural Middlesex could not avoid the influence of the metropolis, but it seems not to have overwhelmed them, as might have been expected. Each parish has its individual history, worth following for the tint it gives the county picture. This is just one of them, sharing common characteristics, yet having a distinction of its own.*

## THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Church of England was firmly embodied in the state. Once the monarch had become the supreme governor of the church, so opposition to its tenets and practice was automatically a matter of concern to the state. Its compromise between Catholicism and Calvinism, embodied in the codification of canon law at the Hampton Court conference of 1604, failed to satisfy the more extreme Protestants who continued to increase in numbers. In pressing their desire to purge church doctrine and practice of all that had no scriptural basis they were perceived as disobedient. Their goal was exemplified in Walter Travers's *Book of Discipline*, wherein the rule of bishops was denied in favour of organisation by ministers and congregational elders, within a system of provincial and national synods.

Nonconformity arose out of opposition from Protestants to the established church. The use of the Book of Common Prayer and vestments were an abomination to them. Their favoured channel

of teaching was the sermon, feared by the authorities for its potential to propagate subversive views. In the established church only clerics of safe opinion were licensed to preach; most clergy could meet their obligations by reciting the service from the Prayer Book and reading one of the homilies approved by the authorities. Puritanical pressure was assuaged in some parishes by the appointment, usually at the instance of parishioners, of a 'lecturer' or preacher to preach in the church on Sunday afternoons in addition to the incumbent.

The rise of the High Church party under Charles I, whose chief instrument was Archbishop Laud, continued to polarise attitudes. Practice varied enormously from place to place as factions argued, even while the more traditional ordering of the church itself was regularly enjoined. In the earlier years of the Civil War and inter-regnum, Presbyterianism, with its ministers and synods, was in the ascendant, but by 1650 the more puritan element dominated. Parliament established the Grand Committee of Religion, with various sub committees to administer religious affairs and regulate the conduct, provision and maintenance of the clergy. In 1641 the communion table was ordered to the body of the church and incumbents were obliged to allow the use of the pulpit to lecturers; in 1644 vestments and fonts were ordered to be removed; in the following year the Directory of Public Worship superseded the Book of Common Prayer.

At the Restoration, as a consequence of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, non-conformists were not allowed to remain in the established church.

Two years later the Conventicle Act forbade meetings for unauthorised worship if they consisted of more than five people from more than one household, while the Five Mile Act of 1665 prevented nonconformist ministers from going within a five mile radius of corporate towns, or their former place of ministry, unless they took an oath of non-resistance to authority.

The first Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 at last allowed dissenters to hold meetings, provided that preacher and meeting place were granted a licence. After the Toleration Act of 1689 nonconformists were allowed their own places of worship, teachers and preachers, and some of the civic disabilities imposed upon them were removed.

## MIDDLESEX

In rural Middlesex, as elsewhere, Protestant dissent had beginnings in many places. Its Elizabethan clergy made a poor showing at the episcopal visitation of 1586, the brightest comment being 'tolerable', applied to the vicar of Ruislip, and not all established ministers were licensed to preach. Rather exceptionally, the Jacobean vicar of Isleworth, Nicholas Byfield, preached twice on Sundays and twice in the week. In the reign of Charles I lecturers appeared at Isleworth and Ealing, but as the influence of the High Church party grew preaching was stifled there and in other places. Communion rails were brought back at Acton. A new church was consecrated by Laud himself at Great Stanmore, but the puritans called it a private chapel.

Once parliament had begun to prevail over the king the effects of the Grand Committee were apparent in the ejection of many ministers in Middlesex; some for disorderly behaviour, as at Edmonton; some for desertion to the royal army, as at Ickenham; some for using the Book of Common Prayer, as at Hounslow, or using superstitious practices at Staines; others for speaking against the new order, as at Shepperton. Two ministers were imprisoned.

In the period between such ejections and the Restoration, the ministerial role was filled in many parishes by more than one replacement. The rapid turnover might have been the result of confusion or dissatisfaction on the part of either parishioners or minister, but which it was cannot easily be discerned. Thomas Fuller,

author of *The Church History of Britian and The Worthies of England*, rather like the Vicar of Bray whose comments he recorded, managed to negotiate a successful but perilous course throughout until the Restoration. Finance was a problem, despite Committee recommendations that some maintenance should be increased. Ejected ministers were, in theory, allowed to keep one fifth of tithes, or similar income, but several of the ejected in Middlesex complained that it was not forthcoming. Well over half of the parishes in the county showed signs of some disturbance between 1640 and 1660.

Little iconoclasm has been recorded. The custom of distributing two cakes on Easter Sunday, said to be the occasion of profane scrambling and fighting, was forbidden at Twickenham in 1645, and at nearby Staines in 1650 the font and royal arms were removed. The overturning of the font and breaking of windows at Acton a few years earlier in 1642, was more the action of riotous troops after the Battle of Brentford than of local people.

Some 27 ministers of the new order departed from the outer Middlesex parishes, either at the Restoration or as a result of the Act of Uniformity in 1662. Once the Five Mile Act was law, small groups of such ministers, chiefly from London or urban Middlesex, were to be found at Middlesex towns outside the limit, such as Brentford and Enfield, and also at one or two villages like Acton, Tottenham and Edmonton, where nonconformist feeling had been particularly strong. The most notable individual was Richard Baxter from Kidderminster, who settled at Acton and held illegal conventicles there.

After the Declaration of Indulgence 28 nonconformist ministers were licensed to hold meetings in rural Middlesex, some of whom had served in the locality during the Commonwealth. The number increased in the more settled period of William III following the Declaration of Indulgence in 1689.

Specific names for sects were very much a product of the period of inter-regnum. The Presbyterians wished to replace episcopacy by a system of delegates and synods, which, after 1660, they realised could only be achieved outside the Church of England. The Independents opposed all forms of superior church government in favour of independent self-governing local congregations – they gradually became known as Congregationalists after about 1662. The Baptists' primary characteristic was the adoption of adult

baptism, because of their belief that only committed Christians, of necessity adult, should be baptised. The Quakers rejected all organisation or regulation of creed.

Presbyterians and Independents were the predominant nonconformist sects in 17th century Middlesex, though Baptists – generally more prevalent in towns – Congregationalists, and Quakers were well represented too. As elsewhere in the country, nonconformist enthusiasm declined in the first part of the 18th century, but picked up towards the end, particularly under the influence of Methodism. This was originally a grouping within the Church of England characterised by evangelism and open-air meetings, and by concentration of attention upon those lower sections of society which the established church had come to neglect. It became an independent church in 1795. Congregationalists had the most nonconformist meeting places in the county in the early 19th century. By 1851 they were more closely rivalled by Methodists and Baptists.

## PINNER

### The earliest times

Pinner was part of Harrow parish until 1766. St John the Baptist's Church was the chapel-of-ease to St Mary's, Harrow, and was the responsibility of the Vicar of Harrow, who, at his discretion, might or might not appoint a curate for Pinner and pay him out of his own income. In the reign of James I Pinner had a minister named John Dey, though it is not known for sure whether he was appointed and paid by the vicar of Harrow. He did have funds of his own. He is not recorded anywhere as a curate, but the position of his memorial on the north side of the chancel, the traditional place for commemorating an incumbent, implies that he had been officially allocated to Pinner. He lodged with Margaret Edlin, widow of yeoman Richard Edlin, at a house called Antoneys (where Antoneys Close now stands).<sup>1</sup>

The desire for more sermons appears in Pinner during the 1620s. It looks as though Richard Street had a lecturer in mind when, in 1622, he directed his executors<sup>2</sup> to pay £2 a year '... forever...towards the maintenance of a preaching minister...at Pinner...when there is any that

preacheth there usually twice upon a Sabath Day...'.<sup>3</sup>

Soon after this bequest John Dey died and he too was worried about the future. He bequeathed<sup>3</sup> money for the provision of a 'preaching minister' for Pinner '...a man well qualified and a Master of Arts at least...chosen by the honestest... inhabitants of Pinner.' It was conditional upon a failure of his family's heirs to survive (Dey himself was unmarried and childless). Presumably they did survive for there is no evidence that the bequest ever took effect.

Dey was followed by John Willis. He described himself as curate in 1630<sup>4</sup> and on the Protestation Oath Return of 1641, so he may have been officially appointed by the vicar of Harrow. The £10 a year paid him by the vicar, reserved out of the Pinner tithes, seems to have bought a man's time for the conduct of services, but was not enough to maintain a man who would devote as much of his time to giving sermons as the inhabitants clearly desired. A bequest of ten shillings from William Edlin of Hatch End was made in 1630, a rather small, though no doubt welcome, sum.

By now some of the inhabitants were sufficiently concerned about the adequacy of financial support to make longer term arrangements to supplement whatever was officially provided.

Francis Tyndall, a yeoman living along the Uxbridge Road at what is now the site of Dove Park, bought a field in 1630 and gave it to the parish, that it might be let at a profit. The deed of gift sets out the situation; '...there is a chappell of ease...in the hamlet of Pynnor...used for the administration of the blessed sacrament and celebration of divine service and preaching of the word of God...which chappell, being served without a curate, who wanting sufficient provision and means of livelihood may thereby be much discouraged'. Therefore Tyndall 'for some help towards the maintenance of a *preaching minister* to exercise the said function in the said chappell and his better encouragement therein and especially of John Willis, Clarke, the present minister, who now with much care and conscience doth discharge the said place' gave a close of land in trust for the benefit of John Willis and his successors who 'serve the said cure, being a *preaching minister*' (my italics).<sup>5</sup>

As time went by, John Willis gave less satisfaction. He had been in post for 20 years – maybe he had grown neglectful of preaching –

maybe there was a stronger current of nonconformism in Pinner by then – when some members of his flock took more formal steps to secure what they wanted. In 1642 they complained to the Grand Committee of Religion that he ‘seldom preaches or procures any other to perform that duty for him’, and they petitioned for a lecturer, offering to maintain him if they might choose him themselves. Philip Goodwin, MA was appointed as a lecturer to provide sermons in addition to the normal services.<sup>6</sup> Who did choose or pay for him is not stated.

No-one had reckoned with John Willis. So galvanised was he by the prospect of competition in his pulpit that on the day of Goodwin’s arrival he himself went into St John’s Church and preached all Sunday afternoon until six o’clock in order to deny Goodwin the opportunity. This happened several times, and eventually the Parliamentary Committee had to order him to allow Goodwin to preach.<sup>7</sup> In 1645 Goodwin became Vicar of Watford, so presumably his activity in Pinner was at an end. There is the suspicion that the short period denotes a man seeking a more permanent appointment.

John Willis continued as curate, perhaps preaching more satisfactorily, until his death in about 1649. He lived at Mosslane Cottage, which he had bought in 1634,<sup>8</sup> with his wife Joan, two sons, both of whom became clergymen in the Church of England,<sup>9</sup> and three daughters. He must have had private funds to be able to do all this. There were certainly financial problems in the parish. From about 1642 the inhabitants kept back the tithes due from Pinner to Harrow<sup>10</sup> – it was from these, worth £19 6s 8d pa, that the vicar had spared £10 for the curate – but who can now tell whether the benefit went to Willis, Goodwin, or the parishioners’ pockets.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Commonwealth**

William Rowles was named as ‘Mynyster of the said Chappell’ (of Pinner) and called a preaching minister in an official report to Parliament in 1649.<sup>12</sup> Rowles (or Rolles), born about 1625–30, probably in Devon, was educated at Exeter College, Oxford. His local commitment was strengthened by marriage to Martha Edlin, daughter of William and Mary Edlin of Pinner Marsh, whose house used to stand on the site of Pinner Grove and Grove Avenue. The Edlin family was extensive and locally important, its

several branches owning or tenanting many of the larger farms between them, but not all of them may have been of the same mind. William and Mary Edlin would have been able to ensure that Rowles did not want, but in 1649 Parliament had authorised an augmentation of £60 to his official £10 from the vicar of Harrow.<sup>13</sup> This seems good, but augmentations were not always soundly financed and Rowles’s increase may or may not have been paid. Robert Stanbrough of East End Farm Cottage left him a lump sum of £5 in 1660.<sup>14</sup>

There was at least one other lecturer present in Pinner. In 1651 William Adderley left the village to become a minister to the Navy at Chatham. He was addressed as ‘Minister at Pinner’ but could not have been other than a lecturer. The letter of appointment says ‘...we shall expect only preaching, expounding of Scripture and catechizing of youth from you’ which may indicate near enough the duties of a lecturer. He was also to be paid £100 a year!<sup>15</sup>

### **Ejection**

After the Restoration of the Monarchy and the requirements of the Oath of Uniformity it was no longer possible to use St John’s church for the more radical practices of the inter-regnum. William Rowles refused to take the Oath and found himself ejected in 1662. Pinner’s old ecclesiastical dependence on the vicar of Harrow was restored.

William Rowles was the first person in Pinner to be licensed after the Declaration of Indulgence ten years later – several early licensees had been ministers in their parish before the Restoration. He was licensed as an Independent minister and allowed to hold meetings at his house.<sup>16</sup> The Edlins had rallied round him, providing him with a house, by sale or gift, which was the same Antoneys where John Dey had lodged.<sup>17</sup> Four local householders, all yeomen, were also licensed to allow meetings to be held in their houses, John Winchester, William Edlin, Richard Stanborough and John Finch. John Winchester’s residence is unknown – he was probably renting someone else’s place. There is more than one William Edlin, but the likelihood is that this one was the brother of Mrs Rowles, living at her old family home, The Grove. Richard Stanbrough owned East End Farm Cottage (Fig 1) and John Finch was the owner of Waxwell Farm (Fig 2).



Fig 1. *East End Farm Cottage, licensed for dissenters' meetings in the 17th century (Courtesy of Pinner Local History Society)*

These last two houses still stand today, houses where the earliest nonconformist meetings in Pinner were held. Nowadays the second, the home of 'The Grail', is once again a place of religious activity and worship, though the denomination is now Roman Catholic.

Rowles had some property in Devon, but it is not known whether he had a steady income as a sectarian minister. In 1671, before he was licensed, William Street had left him £10 pa for life,<sup>18</sup> and in 1683 Richard Stanborough of East End Farm Cottage left him a lump sum of £3.<sup>19</sup> By this date Rowles himself was declining; his assistant, Joseph Heywood, described him as a 'very faithful, laborious ancient minister, whose strength is decayed, being in a languishing consumption, that he cannot preach'.<sup>20</sup> A month later, in August 1684, Rowles was dead. The two other descriptions of him likewise portray an earnest character; in 1649 it was said that he 'diligently serves the said cure';<sup>21</sup> and after his death he was called 'a very grave and pious man and very useful in his place'.<sup>22</sup> He probably spent all his working life in Pinner.

### **An academy**

The next recorded nonconformist minister, Thomas Goodwin (no known relation to Philip) had much wider experience. He was educated partly in Holland, where his father had sought refuge after being driven from his post as President of Magdalen College, Oxford. Thomas the father (1600–80) was a notable leader among the Independents in London. He was an author, and like several other divines had collected a large library of his own. He was interred in Bunhill Fields burial ground, where his name is inscribed on the wall, facing Wesley's Chapel. Thomas junior, born about 1650, was the son of his father's second wife Mary Hammond; there had been two sisters who died in infancy, and a brother named Richard who died on a voyage to the East Indies. Thomas entered nonconformist ministry in 1678, joining with three others to lecture at the coffee house in Exchange Alley. During 1683 he toured Europe with friends, and then, in 1684, with a colleague named Stephen Lobb, he became minister of an Independent



*Fig 2. Waxwell Farm, licensed for dissenters' meetings in the 17th century (Photo Patricia A. Clarke)*

Congregation in Fetter Lane which is thought to have been founded by his father. Like his father, Thomas enjoyed fame as an author, for his history of Henry V, and for religious writings.<sup>23</sup> Calamy says that he was 'a person of good standing and an excellent temper'.<sup>24</sup>

By 1690 the younger Goodwin had settled in Pinner, where his own son Thomas was baptised in September 1690. He rented a house from William Edlin (brother of Martha Rowles) who left it to his daughter Martha Richmond, wife of an apothecary, on condition that she allow Goodwin to continue residence there on the same terms for as long as he 'shall bee minister or Teacher of ye Congregation of Pinner' or else to 'pay unto ye said Mr Goodwin the summe of £3 yearly...during such time as hee shall continue or bee Minister att Pynnore'.<sup>25</sup>

At Pinner Goodwin kept a school, not for children, as is usually assumed, but for students of divinity.<sup>26</sup> This was an activity only recently made legal by the Toleration Act of 1689. It was one of the early nonconformist academies

maintained by the Congregational Church to train its ministers, and Goodwin was asked to conduct it in June 1696. These schools were generally based in the master's home, as was Goodwin's. His students boarded with him, and the Congregational authorities provided him with linen for their use.

Records for the first eight years of the academy show that a great deal of care was taken by the Congregational authorities. Students must have a satisfactory ability to read and speak Latin before beginning; they were given a quarterly discretionary allowance, with an upper limit of £16 pa; at the conclusion of their studies they were placed in positions by the authorities. There was no fixed period of study, and no information about the curriculum has survived.

The first two students were transferred to Goodwin from another academy at Gloucester. At the end of the first year a Congregational elder named Lobb (very likely his old friend Stephen) was sent to examine the students and make a report, which must have been satisfactory

because the academy continued. A new arrival, Mr Oddy, was sent to him to study and assist with teaching philology, and for this Oddy was to be paid £30 pa. In October 1699, having received a total of £37 10s to date, Oddy was 'discharged with £5 in satisfaction of all demands'. This suggests disappointment – or maybe more than that when taken with a comment three months later that 'Before any student be taken into our care his character to be reported on'. Twenty-eight further students at the Pinner academy are known by name: Mr Wilson, Mr Wills, Caleb Wroe, Mr King, Mr Delemer, John Guyse, Mr Keith, Mr Jolly, Stephen Lobb, Mr Holland, Henry Shepherd, John Green, Mr Mason, William Scott, Mr Hill, Nathan Hickford, Mr Shuttlewood, Jabez Hughes, Mr Millway, Mr Bentley, John Phillips, Samuel Saddington, Mr Tingey, James Watson, Theophilus Lobb, Mr Olliffe, T. Linnet, Mr Keen.

The two Lobb students were presumably relatives of Stephen. No records survive for the period after 1704 so it is not known when the school came to an end.

William Edlin's house, where Goodwin lived, and must have kept his school, was the one later known as Pinner Place. There is no evidence that Goodwin left it before his death in 1708. Apart from *An History of the Reign of Henry V* (1704), and the theological tracts (*A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification* in 1693, *A Discourse on the True Nature of the Gospel* in 1695) Goodwin published various funeral and thanksgiving sermons, a common practice. He bequeathed the manuscripts of his own father's works, published and unpublished, together with his library of 5,000 or 6,000 volumes, to his only son Thomas, and was buried in his father's vault at Bunhill Fields.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas Goodwin the third died in 1711, scarcely 21 years old and not famous, leaving all his estate to his widowed mother Abigail Goodwin.<sup>28</sup> The next known dissenting minister of Pinner lived elsewhere, which could mean that Goodwin occupied Pinner Place. Photographs of the Pinner Place demolished in 1953 show that the Goodwin house had been rebuilt soon after their time.

### The early 18th century

Meanwhile a new licence for a meeting house was granted on 5th June 1700, this time for

'Protestant Dissenters called Quakers' but no location is shown beyond 'At Pinner parish in ye County of Mid'.<sup>29</sup> There is no other contemporary reference to Quakers in Pinner, but there may possibly have been a connection with the next known dissenting minister Stephen Crisp, who could have been the son of Stephen Crisp of Colchester (1628–92), a notable Quaker buried at Bunhill Fields.

John Evans's List of Dissenting Congregations and Ministers, made between 1715 and 1729, records the existence of an Independent Congregation in Pinner ministered to by Stephen Crisp.<sup>30</sup> Stephen Crisp had witnessed the wills of both Goodwins of Pinner Place. He lived at Antoneys, owned at this time by Thomas Child, nephew by marriage of the William Edlin to whom William Rowles had left it in 1684.<sup>31</sup> Crisp was buried in Pinner on 22/11/1729. The parish registers show several possible family members, though only one is identified as such, his daughter Mary, buried on 1/6/1711. No more nonconformist ministers of Pinner are recorded by name until 1806.

During Crisp's time the dwelling house of Henry Street at Woodlane End was licensed for 'the worship of Protestant dissenters from the Church of England',<sup>32</sup> upon the application of John Street, John Street, Daniel Street, Thomas Hunt and John Bell, made on 4th September 1711. This house was the one later called Dears Farm (Fig 3), which stood at the top of Bridge Street until demolished about 1935.

### The Meeting House

In April 1714 John Street of West House took a 21 year-lease of Elizabeth Lawrence's barn,<sup>33</sup> and within a month he had, with others, obtained a licence to use it as a meeting house – the first in Pinner which was not at the same time a dwelling house. The document<sup>34</sup> read as follows:

'This is to certifie to whom it may concern that an adjacent outhouse of Elizabeth Lawrence, widow standing in Pinner in the parish of Harrow in the County of Middx lying by the yard where John Tame now dwells north and the highway leading to Pinner Town south is the place Appointed for the meeting of protestants dissenting from the Church of England commonly called Independants we whose names are hereunto subscribed humbly pray it may be licensed according to law.

Date 15th May 1714

John Street John Robince Daniel Street  
John Street Stephen Crisp Robert Stanbrough junr  
Robert Stanbrough Phill. Aldwin Henry Street  
Endorsed – Mr Crisp Meeting House 28th May 1714'



Fig 3. Dears Farm, licensed for dissenters' meetings in 1711 (Courtesy of Harrow Reference Library)

Mrs Lawrence mortgaged the whole property to John Street's son for £157 10s in 1732<sup>35</sup> and he left the mortgage to his daughter Mary Rawlings of Cloth Fair in London. When she died in 1765 an actual meeting house on the plot was mentioned, the first proper meeting house for nonconformists in Pinner.<sup>36</sup> In view of the paucity of nonconformists in Pinner by this time, the odds are that the meeting house had been built very close to the year 1714, financed by the worshippers or John Street. Elizabeth Lawrence's house was in Love Lane near the site now occupied by St Luke's Roman Catholic Church; her outhouse was along the south-west side of the plot, and the meeting house is identifiable from later documents as standing just south of this on a piece of waste she rented.

### The late 18th and early 19th centuries

The brevity of the references to nonconformity in Pinner as the 18th century progressed gives an appearance of decline, as was the case generally, but it may have been an illusory one. There were small bequests of financial support from members of the Street family. One of £3

pa from John Street of West House and another of £4 4s pa from his brother Henry of East End Farm Cottage, both of whom died within eight weeks of each other in 1750, are couched in almost identical terms – 'unto such protestant dissenting Minister Dissenting from the Church of England as shall from time to time Preach to the Congregation of Protestant dissenters that now do or hereafter shall meet for the worship of God in Pinner'. John's widow left a further £2 pa for the term of 20 years from 1757 to 'the Protestant Dissenters meeting Place in Pinner'.<sup>37</sup> The list of Middlesex congregations in 1772 notes a congregation with a minister at Pinner,<sup>38</sup> though the denomination was not specified nor the minister named. Lysons, writing his *Environs of London* in 1795, refers to a small Independent meeting house at Pinner,<sup>39</sup> implying that there was still a congregation.

The Pinner congregation of nonconformists survived into the 19th century and was joined in the early years by two dissenters from Harrow, Joseph Holder Freshwater and Henry Puddyfoot, who were wont to walk over to Pinner, or even into Watford, to find co-religionists in worship, there being no nearer place. In 1806, on the advice of Mr Schofield 'of the ministry of Pinner'



(minister? worshipper?), they began to meet in Harrow, presumably because numbers were increasing. Pulpit and seats were provided at no charge by Mr Woodbridge – probably one of the Woodbridges of Pinner, carpenters by trade, who had had no hesitation about charging for repairing the pews in Pinner church – an indication of their religious sentiments perhaps. The house of John Kidney in Hoggot Lane (Crown Street?), Harrow, was licensed in 1809, and in 1812 another licence was granted for ‘... a building lately erected on...land...fronting the Road leading from Harrow to Pinner situate...in the Hamlet of Rochsey’ (Roxeth).<sup>40</sup>

The visits of Freshwater and Puddyfoot provide the last known reference to active nonconformists in Pinner called by the various and perhaps imprecise names of Independent, Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian.

### The Meeting House re-appears

But what was the fate of the meeting house? If it existed today it would be tucked tightly within the curve of the back yards of the shops curving around the northern corner of Love Lane and Bridge Street. How curious that, as at Waxwell, the site of the property to which it was attached should have become a place of Roman Catholic worship. The site was originally a small piece of waste ground adjoining Mrs Lawrence’s plot, and rented with it. The whole property, including the meeting house, was sold with the mortgage in 1784 by the Street heir, William Finch, to William Mondet. Mrs Mondet died in 1791 and was buried in her own garden, the only recorded case of burial outside the churchyard in Pinner.<sup>41</sup> In 1808, at long, long last, the old mortgage of 1732 was redeemed by John Shaw, great-nephew of Elizabeth Lawrence, and he remortgaged it all to Edward Howard for the larger sum of £300. The following year he sold the piece of waste to Howard, and in 1810 converted the rest of the mortgage to a sale.<sup>42</sup> When, towards the middle of the century, Howard’s daughter Charlotte had the old house demolished and replaced by Howard Place, a group of three almshouses, the meeting house had gone.

It had gone, but not very far. The records of the Harrow Baptist Church recount that two Baptists ‘In 1811...purchased a building at Pinner, previously used as a Presbyterian Church, and had it erected at Byron Hill, Harrow. The

cost of its removal and re-erection was £421...’. Byron Hill is in Roxeth and this same meeting house must be the one licensed for ‘Rochsey’ in 1812.

Moreover, there is included among the records a sketch by Mr A.B.Smith, senior deacon ‘...of the first Dissenting Place of Worship at Harrow-on-the-Hill’. This can have been no other than the meeting house built by the Independents at Pinner sometime after 1714, sold off by Howard once he was the owner. The dates fit and accord with the fading out of the Independents here. There may have been some change upon re-erection, but nevertheless it resembles the general style of earlier nonconformist chapels, having the entrance in one of the long sides, and windows high above the seats (Fig 4). The energetic Mr Puddyfoot and Mr Freshwater became stalwart members of the Harrow Baptist congregation.<sup>43</sup>

### Attitudes in the parish

Pinner’s experience of early nonconformity demonstrates an apparent lack of animosity in the parish towards dissenters, John Willis’s stand in the pulpit being about the most vehement manifestation. Nor is there any indication of iconoclasm. It was not until the act of Uniformity caused the ejection of Rowles that there was any split from the parish church, the earlier activities being contained within it, even physically. The parish church continued to be used by dissenters for baptisms and burials, though there was, in fact, little alternative. In responding to Bishop Compton’s official enquiry in 1676 about the number of residents ‘who either obstinately refuse



*Fig 4. The first proper meeting house of dissenters in Roxeth, probably brought there from Pinner (Courtesy of Harrow Reference Library)*

or wholly absent themselves from the communion of the Church of England', the vicar of Harrow said that there were none, neither Papist nor other nonconformist, in either Harrow or Pinner. Though this was patently untrue as far as Pinner was concerned, and the figures of population used by the vicar have all the appearance of the very roughest of estimates, Pinner dissenters were clearly not alienated from their parish church. They did want more than it offered, and of a different tenor, but those very people who financed Rowles, or made their houses available for meetings, took their turn as churchwardens in the 17th century;<sup>44</sup> the same ones succeeded each other well into the 18th century as trustees for Francis Tyndall's gift of 1630.<sup>45</sup> When some extra land was purchased for the parish in 1732 with profits from Tyndall's land, it was the two John Streets, plus Henry and Daniel who were the trustees for the transaction.<sup>46</sup>

Those early dissenters whose names we know came almost entirely from yeoman families, Edlin, Stanbrough and Street in particular. There was a good deal of intermarriage among them. In the 17th century they flourished and were able to accumulate properties so as to provide holdings for younger sons, and even daughters. The Edlin family was already sending some sons into the church or into commerce – Richard, one of the sons of Margaret and Richard, was Master of the Tallowchandlers' Society at the time of the Great Fire. By the early 18th century however the male line of this family was much diminished in Pinner. There is no trace of the name Edlin in the nonconformist records after 1700, and the husbands of the heiresses Martha Richmond and Elizabeth Child do not figure as nonconformists. The Stanbroughs had all but died out by the middle of the 18th century – their last local representative married into the Street family. The Streets flourished well into the 18th century – John Street of West End, as executor and chief trustee of the large estate of Sir Edward Waldo, was virtually a gentleman; many of them began to move into trade, leaving Pinner in the process, and by the end of the century they were all gone.

The Edlin family had had a special influence on the course of nonconformity in Pinner. During the reign of James I Margaret Edlin had welcomed John Dey, the preaching minister, as a lodger in her house called Antoneys; the property passed to her clergyman son Philip (established church), and then to his son

Christopher, who conveyed it to the Independent minister William Rowles, husband of Martha Edlin, who was, like Christopher, a grandchild of Margaret. It was Martha's brother William, another grandchild of Margaret, who put his house Pinner Place at the disposal of Thomas Goodwin, the Independent/Congregational minister. Meanwhile Antoneys had reverted to the Edlin family after the death of Martha Rowles, and Margaret's great grand-daughter Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Child, made it available to the last named nonconformist minister Stephen Crisp. This probably occurred after the death of Martha Rowles in 1699. Perhaps Goodwin also would have occupied Antoneys had Rowles's widow not been there. This steady provision of good accommodation for dissenting ministers for over a century by the same branch of one family, may have been a significant reason why the movement both flourished and dwindled when it did in Pinner.

It was people like these, who tended to be the public figures in local organisations, whose names were recorded. Of those who signed the 1711 application Thomas Hunt and John Bell are otherwise unknown; of those in 1714, John Robince (Robins) was a Street grandson, and Philip Aldwin was a tallowchandler fairly new to Pinner. There are no records to show whether there were any other adherents, nor how many, nor what station in life they held. As the old leading families gradually left the scene during the course of the 18th century it may be that the congregation waned accordingly. Perhaps those left were too few to afford regular provision, having visiting preachers from time to time paid out of the three Street bequests. Maybe the existence of the meeting house encouraged a congregation from other parts, like those we know of from Harrow, who had none of their own, when perhaps the local support was already ebbing. Maybe the position was then reversed, with Pinner adherents (Woodbridge perhaps?) going elsewhere. The growth of other denominations in the 19th century perhaps offered an alternative.

With the Methodists the cycle was repeated. They are said to have held 'cottage meetings' in Pinner in 1795.<sup>47</sup> By November 1830 a barn and stable attached to an old wooden house in Chapel Lane had been fitted out as a Wesleyan Chapel,<sup>48</sup> and here the members worshipped until 1844,<sup>49</sup> when a proper chapel was opened on part of the orchard of the old house, taken

on long lease by the trustees. But that is another story.

## CONCLUSION

Pinner appears to resemble other places in Middlesex in its use of lecturers, in suffering the ejection of its minister in 1662, in the licensing of nonconformist ministers and of local houses for meetings. It was similar also in its apparent preference for the Independent sect, insofar as nomenclature has a meaning in the later 17th century. It enjoyed a distinction in being host to a nonconformist academy, and a novelty in the fate of its meeting house. Research into other parishes would show whether its apparently continuous history of nonconformism between the Restoration and the arrival of the Methodists was common in Middlesex.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Greater London Record Office: Acc 76/1095c

<sup>2</sup> Lambeth Palace: VH96/2484

<sup>3</sup> GLRO: Acc 76/1095c

<sup>4</sup> GLRO: DRO8/A9/2

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Journals of the House of Commons, vol II, p723

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> GLRO: Acc 974/IV m 17,3

<sup>9</sup> Calamy Revised, ed Mathews

<sup>10</sup> *Home Counties Magazine* vol 1, p321

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> PCC 80 May

<sup>15</sup> Ware, EM *Pinner in the Vale* para 401

<sup>16</sup> Cal SP Dom 1672, p677, 680

<sup>17</sup> Acc 276/435; PCC 104 Hare

<sup>18</sup> PCC Shoreham & Croydon Reg I fo 181

<sup>19</sup> PCC Shoreham & Croydon Reg II fo 122

<sup>20</sup> Calamy Revised, ed Mathews, p416

<sup>21</sup> *Home Counties Magazine* vol 1 p321

<sup>22</sup> Calamy, ed Palmer vol II, p461

<sup>23</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*

<sup>24</sup> Calamy Revised, ed Mathews p241

<sup>25</sup> Acc 76/2433, 4.5 1696, 20

<sup>26</sup> Dr William's Library: *Trans Congregational Hist Soc* vol 6 p137

<sup>27</sup> PCC 39 Barnet

<sup>28</sup> PCC 81 Young

<sup>29</sup> Guildhall MS 9579. This is the same as the Quaker certificate referred to in VCH Middx, vol IV, p261 n47. M.Watts in *The Chapel and the Nation* (Historical Assn 1996) warns that the denominational labels in certificates were often wrong.

<sup>30</sup> Dr William's Library: J.Evans's list of Dissenting Congregations, ref 706.E.33, p79

<sup>31</sup> GLRO: Acc 76/29

<sup>32</sup> MSP 1711 Seq 1/89

<sup>33</sup> GLRO: ACC 76/2433, 23.4.1714

<sup>34</sup> Lambeth Palace VP 1C/46

<sup>35</sup> GLRO: Acc 76/2434, 24.4.1732

<sup>36</sup> GLRO: Acc 76/507, 19.6.1765

<sup>37</sup> PCC Shoreham & Croydon, Reg VII, fo 439; Reg VII fo 432; PCC 64 Heming

<sup>38</sup> Dr William's Library: J.Evans's list of Dissenting Congregations ref 706.E.33

<sup>39</sup> Lysons *The Environs of London* ii, 586

<sup>40</sup> Harrow Reference Library: R.A.Smith, Centenary Souvenir of Harrow Baptist Church, Byron Hill 1906

<sup>41</sup> Pinner Parish Registers. No later reference to this grave has been found even during redevelopment

<sup>42</sup> Acc 507/3; 7.6.1808; 17.12.1809; 6.4.1810

<sup>43</sup> R.A.Smith *op cit*

<sup>44</sup> DRO8/B1/1

<sup>45</sup> DRO8/A9/3,4,6,7

<sup>46</sup> DRO8/A9/5

<sup>47</sup> Pinner Methodist Church Golden Jubilee Brochure 1937-1987, p63

<sup>48</sup> Middx Deeds Reg 1830 Bk 9, no.34

<sup>49</sup> Harrow Reference Library: Pinner Methodist Church Centenary Brochure