

A WILDERNESS JOURNEY

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*God's Faithfulness to a People
Seeking their True Identity*

**The Winchmore Hill Baptist
Story**

by

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Rosebud  Books

A WILDERNESS JOURNEY

Introduction

When James I came to the throne in 1603, there was no such thing as a Baptist church in this country – but that was soon to change, with the complicated journey of our little group of believers eventually becoming the focus of this story. In fact it was, in many ways, a wilderness journey for the denomination as a whole, played out for around 250 years as it struggled to bring unity and order within various churches with differing beliefs and doctrines, and finally union for the denomination itself.

Most of the 17th century was a time of turmoil for both the state and the church. No one knew quite what to expect from one decade to the next. As soon as things seemed to have settled down, everything was in confusion again. The government itself never quite knew where it stood, even under the same monarch. For a while Parliament would be valued and its advice followed – and then arbitrarily disbanded, sometimes for years. Hopes regarding a new king were often dashed and people in high positions might fall in and out of favour and sometimes even have to flee abroad for a few years!

With regard to the church – at the beginning of the 17th century at least – everyone was expected to attend the Church of England or they would be in trouble. However since the time of Henry VIII the Catholics, often referred to as ‘Papists’, had continued to see themselves as the true church and were a constant ‘thorn in the flesh’ for the monarchy. On the other hand there were also substantial Protestant groups who were not happy with the Established church and set up their own meetings. These included the Puritans, the Presbyterians, the Independents (later called Congregationalists) and the Calvinists, whose doctrines gained a strong footing in this country from the middle of the 16th century. These non-conformists or Protestant-dissenters (the terms being interchangeable) were generally called ‘Separatists’ and suffered persecution to a lesser or greater degree according to whoever was in power at the time. When the name ‘Baptist’ appeared, it was widely used as a derogatory term, for very small ‘Anabaptist’ groups (meaning re-baptized) who practised adult baptism had actually existed in Europe throughout the previous century, and had always been severely persecuted. A minimal number may also have existed in this country but little is known of them and they never became an established sect.

The Reformation in Europe, dating back to the beginning of the 16th century, was at the root of many of the changes that were taking place. It was Martin Luther particularly who began to challenge the authority of the Pope in different areas of spiritual life, including the belief that salvation was by faith and not works. Others such as Calvin and Zwingli followed his lead, although not necessarily agreeing with all his points of doctrine. Meanwhile the Bible was gradually being translated into other languages and by the middle of the century the development of printing meant that for the first time ordinary people could read God’s Word for themselves – and found it very different from the teaching and practice within their Catholic community. This then led to a widespread disaffection with Catholicism and the growth of many new Protestant sects, the influence of which naturally spread to this country. This is not the time to follow this process in any detail, except to say that the ideas taught by these new sects were often radically different from each other and not all, unfortunately, true to

the Gospel. This is seen in the teachings of Arminius (called Arminianism) and of Socinus (called Socinianism), both of which were widespread in Europe; but whereas the first was generally acceptable, the second would sadly prove in the years to come, to have a very negative role in the wilderness wanderings of some of our Baptist churches.

The Baptists

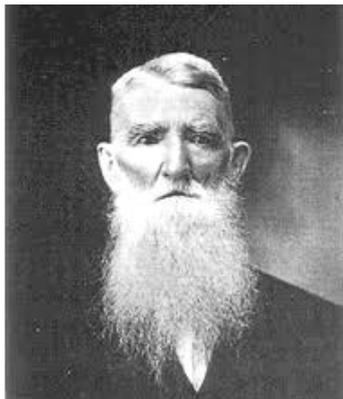
The word 'Baptist' is obviously not foreign to Christians in any age, since Jesus himself was baptized and his early followers were instructed by Him to baptize new believers. However, once the Christian faith was adopted by whole nations and they could be called Christian – particularly the Roman Empire, through Constantine – people began to think that a child born into a Christian home needed only to be baptized (or christened) as a baby and then confirmed when they were considered old enough to understand, to be a Christian. Some believed that a baby who died unbaptized would not go to heaven, and since many babies died soon after birth in those days, obviously the sooner it was done the better. Others believed that a baby was without sin and only needed the act of baptism to formally include them in the church family. Infant baptism then became an integral part of faith and practice in the Christian Church. The other factor that needs to be born in mind is that baptism had very soon ceased to be by immersion but in the Roman and in the Anglican church, just entailed sprinkling or pouring water over the head.

So we come to the origins of the Baptist Church as we know it today. It all began with a certain John Smyth, who although having been ordained in the Church of England in Lincoln in 1594, became a Puritan preacher with a great desire to 'purify' the manner of worship in the Anglican Church, wanting to create a church like the one described in the Book of Acts. However this proved impossible, so he left the established church and he and his followers set up their own Separatist group in Gainsborough. When James I began his reign, at first it was just the Presbyterians against whom he expressed his opposition, and he favoured lenient treatment of the Catholics. However after the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 his attitude changed and he began persecuting all the Separatists and Catholics alike and vowed,

"I will make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse",

which meant that Smyth's group felt in constant danger and had to meet in secret.

Smyth published several papers about his beliefs, particularly with regard to baptism, which he felt strongly should be for believers only, not infants. He stated that it should *follow* not *precede* a declaration of faith, and wrote:



John Smyth

"Baptism is not washing with water, but it is the baptism of the Spirit, the confession of the mouth, and the washing with water: how then can any man without great folly just wash with water which is the least and last of baptism?"

To bear witness to this belief he desired to be baptized himself, but of course there was no vicar to perform this act, especially as presumably he had already been baptized as an infant. So he took a very unusual step of asking an elder of his group to baptize him. In the *'General Baptist Magazine, vol.1'* of July 1879, there was an article by the Revd John Clifford about this event. Obviously this was written a very long time later, but Clifford must have had access to some earlier account, as it contains so much detail; although it is not widely known, it is

therefore reasonable to assume its accuracy. This baptism would probably have been by pouring rather than full immersion.

Clifford quotes:

“ . . . in 1606 on March 24, . . . this night at midnight elder John Morton baptised John Smyth, vicar of Gainsborough, in the river Don. It was so dark we were obliged to have torchlights. Elder Brewster prayed, Mister Smyth made a good confession; walked to Epworth in his cold clothes, but received no harm. The distance was over two miles. All of our friends were present. To the triune God be praise.”

Soon after this the group, now grown to well over sixty members, divided into two, the second group meeting at Scrooby Manor under John Robinson and others. In fact, later in 1620, this second group became the nucleus of the ‘Pilgrim Fathers’ who sailed to America on the Mayflower! However in 1607 there had been a church authority clampdown and dissidents were even threatened with being burnt at the stake for heresy. So in 1608 Smyth, John Morton, Thomas Helwys (whose name will become familiar) and around forty others fled to Amsterdam, which was known for its religious toleration and already had a sizeable community of Separatist exiles. Soon after their arrival, Smyth suggested to the group that they allow him to baptize them as he had been baptized, to which they all agreed. The popular theory is that it was in Amsterdam that Smyth baptized himself before baptizing the others, but the account from the Baptist Magazine would appear to be far more feasible. In fact the others may also have been baptized earlier – we shall never know. Some Separatists in Amsterdam nicknamed Smyth a ‘Se-Baptist’ (self-baptiser) and this was later shortened again to ‘Baptist’, which became the rather derogatory name by which they were known. Even when they had become a distinct church group they actually preferred to be called ‘Brethren of the baptized way’, or even just ‘Brethren’. They were sometimes also called Anabaptists (meaning re-baptized) to which they also objected and even as late as the 18th Century, many Baptists referred to themselves as ‘the Christians commonly (tho’ falsely) called Anabaptist’.

The group in Amsterdam were closely associated with the Mennonites (an off-shoot of the earlier Anabaptists) and John Smyth became influenced by them and joined their congregation, thus separating himself from the rest. Then in 1610 Thomas Helwys, with twelve others, decided to return to England and speak out against the religious persecution. They sailed up the Thames to the London Docks and travelled up the old Roman Road to Spitalfields, where they found somewhere to stay. As they shared their new understanding with others, a little group began to grow and by 1612 they had found a more permanent home at White’s Alley, Moorfields, where they set up the first Baptist congregation in England and Helwys drew up for them the first Baptist confession of faith. For him, religious liberty was the right of everyone, even for those with whom he disagreed and a year or two later he wrote the following appeal to James I, arguing for liberty of conscience:

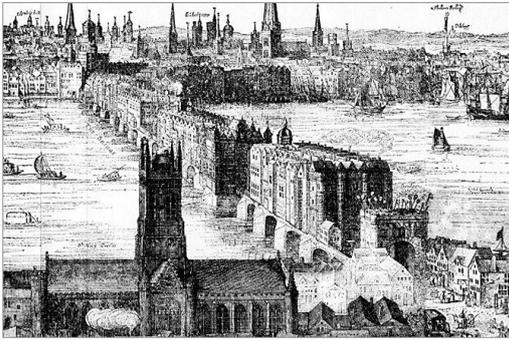
“The king is a mortal man, and not God, therefore he has no power over the mortal soul of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual laws over them”.

Sadly the king, who believed in the ‘Divine Right of Kings’ was not impressed and threw him into Newgate prison, where he died in 1616, aged 40.



Thomas Helwys

His life may have come to an untimely end, but not the new Baptist cause which he and John Smyth had been the very first to introduce. In spite of the repression of James I, the numbers of new believers continued to grow and little by little more groups began to form, meeting wherever they could find a quiet spot in someone's home or even workplace, and over the next few years persecution abated somewhat.



London Bridge in 1616

They usually met outside the City of London, where it was safer, and it is interesting to note that there must have been considerable movement by these new Baptists backwards and forwards across London Bridge (the only bridge across the Thames at that time) to Southwark, for it was there in Fair Street, Horsleydown that the second Baptist group was formed.

The following year James I died and he was succeeded by Charles I. For a while life then became a little easier for the dissenters as Charles

had a Catholic wife, so he had to be a little careful about how he treated the nonconformists!

There were a number of Calvinist chapels in London who were drawn to these new ideas and in 1633 a breakaway Calvinist group under John Spilzburg adopted believers' baptism. However there was a very important difference between these two groups. The Calvinists believed that only God's 'chosen' were saved, so they were described as 'Particular Baptists', whereas Smyth and Helwys taught that salvation was available to all (Arminianism), so their church was described as 'General Baptist'. Although similar in many ways, this doctrinal difference meant that for many years to come there would be little communication between the two of them.

Both these groups continued to expand, especially the Particular Baptists as there were a good number of Calvinist churches already in existence, many of whom now accepted the act of adult baptism. Then, in about 1640, the Particular Baptists took the radical step of baptising believers by full immersion, a few years later to be followed by the smaller group of General Baptists. To begin with, these baptisms took place in streams or pools off the Thames (the river was, in places, up to five times wider in those days) and as can be imagined, they attracted crowds of people, some of whom were very scathing of these strange folk who 'plung'd over head and eares', making the nickname 'Baptist' even more popular. In 1644 the Particular Baptists then published their London Confession of Faith in which baptism was included.

Of these two groups it is the smaller General Baptist community that will become the focus of our story. They were obviously here to stay and were starting to increase rapidly. These enthusiastic believers would soon include the very beginnings of our own church, whose story is now to come.

Part 1: GLASSHOUSE YARD

Chapter 1

A CHURCH IS BORN

The first General Baptist churches in London were very closely linked. From the first two in White's Alley and Southwark, a significant number of new groups began to appear, but in some ways it was almost like one community. Each had their own Elder (as they called their pastors), but many decisions were made jointly and they also appointed 'messengers' who would travel round, evangelise and oversee the churches in their care. The Elders made their own living and found fairly private places to meet, in homes or rented accommodation mostly just outside the city, where there was less likelihood of persecution.

It is within this framework that our own church had its beginnings, but tracking its inception is not as easy as one might think as no specific mention is made of it at all until 1670. However there are strong grounds for believing that its first members may actually have gathered before 1652, having good reasons for keeping their presence secret for so many years.

Francis Smith

Our story begins with a young Baptist called Francis Smith, the son of a Yorkshire farrier in Bradford, also called Francis. He first comes to notice on the 3 May 1647 when he was officially apprenticed to Thomas Hazard, a stationer living in Queen's Head Alley – probably not far from Fleet Street. Whether his family had come to London earlier, or contact had been made with him through Baptist sources is not known. There was a General Baptist church in Warton, near Bradford in 1654, so contact is a possibility.

Apprentices at that time came from all over England and in fact teenage boys from Yorkshire were just as likely to be found in London as those from nearby counties in the South East. They had to be at least eighteen years of age and were bound to serve for at least seven years, not being allowed to finish before the age of twenty-four. Only about 60% of them ever completed their training, but Francis was obviously keen and a good worker for he was made a freeman of the Stationers' Company on the 5 May 1654, exactly seven years after he started, so we can estimate his birth to have been no later than 1629.

Becoming an apprentice was not cheap – they were rarely paid, instead they often paid the master to take them on in the first place. In return the master would feed, clothe, house and instruct them. Their indenture also stated that they were not to marry, gamble or 'stay out' at playhouses or taverns without permission. Then the whole process of becoming a 'freeman' itself involved costs, fees, gifts and payments to various authorities. The local Baptist community, of which Francis was obviously a part, may well have met these for him. It is possible that they just couldn't wait to have their own 'Baptist' printer and publisher, a real gift of God in such turbulent times! They would not be disappointed as he was to become one of the main Baptist printers in London. It was the best time possible to be involved in the printing industry as new automatic presses had been invented fairly recently (although all type still had to be set by hand) and printed material was absolutely flooding the market. Before and during his apprenticeship the country had been through the most extraordinary period in history, from the great rebellion of 1642, the beheading of Charles I in 1649, and the beginning of the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell in 1653, so there was a constant flow of newsworthy

material to print. One item must have kept the presses incredibly busy, for at the time of Charles' death there was a very powerful belief amongst many of the Protestants, that the event marked the beginning of the new Millennium and the reign of the Saints (or the 'Fifth Monarchy') before Jesus came again. This idea swept the country and many young men, passionately religious, had joined the army in what they saw as a 'holy war'. Another interesting factor to bear in mind was that there was an 80% literacy rate among the male population at this time, so not only was there no shortage of news, but no shortage of readers either!

The young Printer gets started

The first Baptist treatise produced by Smith appeared in 1653 – regarding the very first meeting of the General Baptist Assembly in London – the year before his freedom was granted, which may have been his 'test piece', often required of apprentices to prove their ability. In



1654, as soon as he was qualified, he opened business at Flying Horse Court in Fleet Street, 'with the aid of several Baptist Leaders' we are told, where he began distributing Baptist pamphlets.

The next three years during Cromwell's Protectorate, were probably the most peaceful he would have for the rest of his working career. He wasted no time in getting material published from various local General Baptist churches, including a pamphlet against the Quakers, followed by one on church order and then others on justification and baptism. He also published one of several by Thomas Kirby of White's Alley, Moorfields (which may have been the church he

originally attended) called 'Christianity Indeed: or the Well-developed Christian, the delight of Christ'. There were many more, as it is apparent that the churches were delighted to have someone to publish for them. He even produced a pamphlet of his own with the very long title of 'Symptoms of Growth and Decay in Godliness: in Eighty Signs of a Living and Dying Christian; with Causes of Decay and Remedies for Recovery', which he reprinted a few years later. Then he produced a Newsheet entitled 'Smith's Protestant Intelligence, Domestick and Foreign', the first copy of which came out on the 1 February 1656 and which continued for some time. Thus he had already established himself as 'the General Baptist Publisher to whom men from Stafford, Lincoln, Kent and Huntingdon sent their works' (*W. T. Whitely*). However it was not only Baptist material he was dealing with, but political tracts and pamphlets also and that began to bring in a whole lot of trouble.

First however, we need to record a very special event, for it must have been around 1656/7 that he was married to Eleanor. Nothing is known of her background but they had at least four children. She can hardly have known what this marriage might entail, but over all the difficult years to come she was always there for her husband and was his greatest supporter. If he was in prison or away for some reason, it was she and two or three of his children who would carry on the business.

The churches under Cromwell

As the leaders of the local General Baptist churches were so fully involved in assisting Francis, it is highly likely that early in his apprenticeship, at least by 1650-52, he was already

preaching regularly to a small group of people who would form the nucleus of our future church. He later proved himself to be a very popular and accomplished preacher and there is no doubting his energy, enthusiasm and total dedication to the Baptist cause. Nonconformist churches were growing fast during Cromwell's time, so large numbers coming to hear him may well have led to him being ordained as an Elder as soon as he had completed his apprenticeship in 1654, at least we do know that it was well before 1660.

During the Protectorate however, we note that while the nonconformists had their greatest freedom, the Anglican Church became more and more sidelined. There are some interesting entries about this period in the contemporary diary of John Evelyn. Many people have heard that Cromwell 'cancelled Christmas' but possibly it is not so well known that he did not permit Anglicans to use the Book of Common Prayer or administer the Sacraments, even using nonconformists to lead Anglican services. Evelyn, being a very devout Anglican, was disgusted with Cromwell's stricture that there were to be no special services and only 'extempore prayer after the Presbyterian way' and in 1654 he writes:

" . . . it being now a rare thing to find a priest of the Church of England in a Parish pulpit, most of them filled with Independents and Phanatics" (meaning nonconformists). Later he goes on:

" till now I had met with no Phanatical Preachers, but going this day I was surprised to see a Tradesman, a Mechanic step up . . . and I was resolved to stay and see what he would make of it" (the text he was using).

He was shocked when the preacher then seemed to suggest that 'now the saints were called to destroy temporal Government', which Evelyn called 'truculent anabaptistical stuff' and he deplored 'the Crisis things were grown to'. In fact in January 1656 Cromwell gave a proclamation that 'none of the Church of England should dare either to preach, administer Sacraments, teach school etc, on pain of imprisonment or exile'. Evelyn called this 'the mournfullest day of his life' – but nevertheless was able to continue regular Anglican worship in the privacy of his own house, with invited Anglican vicars and preachers. For Evelyn the difficulties were surmountable and short lived, but for our fledgling, rapidly growing congregation it was likely to be a much greater problem to find somewhere to meet after Cromwell was gone and Charles II came to power.

An interesting connection

Stemming from Evelyn's comments, it needs to be mentioned that these separatist believers, or 'phanatics' as he called them, were certainly not just the workers, tradesmen and poorer members of the community as he seems to suggest. In fact their meetings actually included people from every level of society, from the fairly destitute to those in parliament, the judiciary, or even at court – except that this allegiance was usually kept secret. Some of them may well have been the ones who enabled the churches to survive financially in difficult times – which leads to the introduction of George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham, who will have an important part to play in this story.

He was born in 1628, only six months before his father (a favourite of James I) was assassinated and was then brought up in the court of Charles I along with the King's own children, the future Charles II and James II. He had spent some time with the family abroad, later fighting for the King as a royalist in the Civil War. However he led a very complicated life, never it would seem, quite sure which side he was on. In 1651, after falling out of favour with Charles I, and even negotiating at one point with Cromwell's government, he had his considerable lands, money and most of his property confiscated and had to flee to France. He

obviously made many bad decisions in his life and in an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1911 he is later described as 'one of the archetypal restoration rakes'; but even his critics seemed to agree that he was at heart 'good-humoured, good-natured and generous'.

By 1657 he decided to return to England, hoping to have his assets restored. However that didn't immediately happen, in spite of the fact that he had just married the daughter of the man who had charge of them, Lord Fairfax! His main residence was York House, but it seems that around this time he first stayed for a while in Rutland House, a family home handed down from his maternal grandfather, the Duke of Rutland; a very splendid mansion on the north-eastern corner of Charterhouse Square and once owned by the Venetian Ambassador.



**George Villiers
Duke of Buckingham**

So what is his connection with Francis Smith? To answer that question we first have to understand a few more things about him, particularly that in spite of being a Royalist he definitely had strong nonconformist leanings, which he mostly kept to himself, but which would become more obvious some years later, when at one point he was referred to as 'favouring religious toleration'. In April 1658 he was suspected of organising a Presbyterian plot against the government and put under house arrest in York House from which he escaped and was re-arrested and actually imprisoned in the Tower. However during that period Cromwell died and the country became, in Evelyn's words 'all anarchy and confusion'. Eight months later Evelyn states that the Army had turned out the Government, and without them:

"all in Confusion; no magistrate either owned or pretended, but the soldiers, and they not agreed. God have mercy on us and settle us."

Under these circumstances it was not surprising that the following February Villiers was freed, after 'promising not to assist the enemies of the government' - a promise it is doubtful if he kept! However although he must have been very relieved, he could hardly have expected to receive his money and lands back at that point - which brings us to his very probable involvement with Smith, the full import of which will soon become apparent.

Some of this is simply conjecture but later events seem to suggest that once the Duke was back from France he might well have met Smith - possibly first in his printing and publishing role - but also in connection with the little nonconformist group of which he was a leader, since he may well have been favourably disposed towards them. We shall never know where the group met in the early years, probably moving from place to place, but in this difficult time after the death of Cromwell, life for Smith and for the nonconformists was getting more complicated and Smith the printer would probably not have wanted his leadership of a group of dissenters to become public - a situation that was to escalate in the next few years. At some point during these years it seems possible that Villiers allowed the group to meet secretly in Rutland House. He had already allowed Sir William Davenant - a one-time poet laureate who he probably met in France when he'd also had to flee the country - to secretly produce one of the first operas in Rutland House in 1657 (a clever ploy to get around Cromwell's edict against 'theatre' by putting words to music!). The large salon or 'state-room' at the rear of the house had been adapted for these performances by seating the audience on benches arranged at an angle to a small stage, to accommodate the numbers who came. This would certainly have made an ideal place for Francis Smith's group to gather on a Sunday. It seems very plausible that out of that 'generous, good-natured' side of his character the Duke made this possible,

especially since Smith's troubles at work were beginning to escalate. It would certainly account for the fact that no-one has ever known where the church met at this stage, for it would not have been good publicity for Smith or the Duke if anyone had found out!

Trouble brewing

The first sign of trouble for Smith was when Thomas Venner, a leader of the 'Fifth Monarchists', was imprisoned in 1657 following a plot to overthrow Cromwell. This group, which was very large and included many Baptists in its ranks, saw Cromwell and the Protectorate as betrayers of the cause. Francis Smith had published some material regarding this, which angered a lot of people. A mob broke into his house and destroyed his property, threatening to kill him and treating him so badly that 'for some time afterwards he was not able to turn himself in his bed'. It was a horrible experience – but it was not going to stop him from publishing what he considered right and it was clear that life was not going to be so easy for any of the nonconformists from that point on. In the political turmoil following Cromwell's death, it appears that Francis also started publishing politically radical and republican tracts, as well as books on religious matters, which marked the beginning of having his premises regularly searched. In 1659 his windows were broken and his lodgers frightened away which led to him leaving those premises and starting up a new business with a shop near Temple Bar under his own sign of 'Elephant and Castle'. He subsequently became known as 'Elephant Smith' on account of that!

When Charles II returned in 1660, to be crowned king the following year, he brought with him his 'Declaration of Breda', a document he had previously prepared in Holland, with the intention of trying to calm things down when he arrived. It promised 'liberty to tender consciences' in matters of religion as long as it 'didn't affect the peace of the realm'. But sadly it wasn't going to work, for once the Cavalier parliament was in power they wouldn't sanction it. Their minds were set on 'retribution for the Republican past' for which the nonconformists would have to pay the price, while for the Established Church it felt like payback time at last for all the 'evils' they had endured under Puritan Cromwell.

In spite of the political situation however, in 1660 (before things got too bad) the first General Assembly of all Associations of General Baptists was organised in London. At this meeting the first Baptist 'Confession of Faith' was published, printed by Francis Smith, and bearing his name as one of the signatories, which suggests he certainly was an Elder by that time. This was an important document covering many areas, including the focal element upon which their doctrine and practice were based, namely Hebrews 6: 1-2. One of the crucial points here for the General Baptists was 'the laying on of hands after baptism as necessary to the reception of the Holy Spirit'. In fact this 'Confession' was presented to Charles II in July 1660 to show that the Baptists were not in opposition to the throne.

During that year Francis published a great number of papers on a wide variety of subjects – including some 'Profitable Meditations' by a certain John Bunyan, and also got himself imprisoned three times for his efforts – presumably for short periods. Unfortunately, for those who really believed the Fifth Monarchy was near, the return of the earthly Monarchy (with Charles II) was the final letdown and major cause for confusion. In fact the following year Venner, who had been released from prison after Cromwell's death, started another rather pathetic uprising in London with just fifty men, which was very quickly quashed in a street battle and Venner was hanged. This event, small though it was, actually became a trigger for much of the trouble that would shortly follow.

Glasshouse Yard

In this auspicious year of 1660, it is now time to return to George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham. Now he was a free man and back in Rutland House again and having, we believe, accommodated our infant congregation, he looked around for something new and interesting (possibly non-political!) to get involved with. The idea he came up with was to build a glasshouse – but this was not to be just any glasshouse, it would be the first in England to make and sell the new, beautiful Venetian glass which he had probably seen on the continent and which (he hoped) would eventually be a very lucrative venture. The only problem was that he had no money! He wasn't going to let that stop him however and soon found someone willing to loan him all he needed on what he expected to be a short-term basis, as he was sure his assets would very soon be returned. The next question was – where should he have it built? Now Rutland House in which he was staying, had a court and a very large garden, extending north for about a hundred metres, bounded on the west by the walls of Charterhouse, and on the east by Aldersgate Street/Goswell Road – so he decided to have it built in the garden. It was erected on a plot at the southern end near the house, leaving plenty of open garden space to enjoy. It was a very splendid building, described as having, 'recessed and glass-fronted lower storeys behind concrete piers, protruding second storey and further accommodation above'. (*The London Encyclopaedia*). It was duly registered and although not completely finished, actually went into business by the end of the year – although it would take time to actually make a profit. There was just one other important requirement; it needed access from Goswell Road. An alley was duly put in place and simply named 'Glasshouse Yard'.

All went well for a year or so but his creditor was pressing for his money back, and he was running out of time to make the repayment. Since it was obviously a very substantial sum and he had no idea when he would be able to meet it, he decided that his best option was to surrender the whole of his property of Rutland House and land – which included Rutland Court and the extensive garden (with the glasshouse) – to his creditor, John Eaton. This was in fact a common way of settling a debt in the 17th century. Actually it was less than a year later when, back in favour with Charles II, he finally had his assets returned in full, but it was too late to reverse the arrangement. Perhaps it was just as well that he got it back relatively quickly, before he could get himself into any more debt! This apparently then made him the richest man in England (for a while at least). Eaton and his partner John Nelthorpe decided not to keep the garden as it was and by 1664 they had divided the whole area into building plots, which they set about selling on lease. The Glasshouse itself had to be closed, although the building remained (presumably needing capital that was not forthcoming); however one has to wonder if another, rather more successful one, that Buckingham then built in Kensington may have had an impact!

The first buildings to be erected on these new garden plots were, we are told, mostly coach houses, stables and workshops, with two public houses. There was also a sawmill at the northern end and the only other building mentioned was a Baptist meeting house, established by Francis Smith! (*The London Encyclopaedia*). This opens the way for a lot of interesting ideas! To begin with it seems fairly obvious that Buckingham was involved – possibly suggesting to John Eaton that an opportunity to buy a lease be given to Frances Smith. That however brings up another fairly obvious conclusion that Eaton and Nelthorpe would need to have been, at least, sympathisers with the nonconformist cause – if not actually dissenters themselves, for they must have known what the land was going to be used for. These were some of the most

difficult years, as we shall see, for the dissenters; yet a chapel had been newly built for them – certainly not something the ‘powers that be’ would be happy about! Another issue could have been a financial one. Smith and his congregation may have been able to raise money for the ninety-year lease, but since Buckingham had suddenly become a rich man may he not have personally assisted in the cost of building the chapel itself? The plot appears to have been of a good size, the chapel being quite a substantial building with a gallery down each side and having a graveyard attached, so not a ‘cheap option’. We shall, of course, never know.

Once the garden had been divided into plots for sale, the original alley leading to the Glasshouse was extended northwards throughout the garden area, with another access from Goswell Road at the northern end, the whole of it still just called Glasshouse Yard. The plot with the meeting house was situated about half way along. An archaeological dig by the Museum of London Archaeology Service, which took place around 2006, when the area was being cleared, found graves from this period behind the present Therese House, at 29-30 Glasshouse Yard. Since the actual glasshouse itself only lasted for four years, it is quite amazing that Glasshouse Yard still exists today.

This whole situation leaves plenty of room for conjecture – but is it not possible that God had a hand in keeping Villiers’ money back for long enough to provide our church with its first home? If he had received it immediately on his return, he would not have needed to sell the estate and it would have been a very different story. Our group may even have had to disperse amongst the other local congregations and we would then have never existed. As it is, not only does Glasshouse Yard still exist today, but so does the descendent of the church that first had its home there.