

Baptist Members of Parliament: A Supplementary Note

D. W. Bebbington

A series of previous articles in this journal has assembled evidence about Members of Parliament who have been Baptists. A list of those who sat in parliaments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries appeared in 1980; an equivalent list for the nineteenth century, published in the following year, was followed by a fuller discussion of the role of Baptist MPs in the period 1847 – 1914; and in 1986 there appeared a list for the twentieth century.¹ Over the years since that time, several correspondents have kindly supplied additional evidence about MPs mentioned and unmentioned in the articles, and in 2004 the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* came out with further information. The present note, which should be read in conjunction with the previous articles, is a summary of the extra material now available. It is arranged in three sections: the first catalogues the eight additional Baptist MPs who have come to light; the second section provides information on two MPs who had close Baptist connections but who properly belong with the previously published supplementary lists of supposed Baptist MPs; and the third supplies amendments to the earlier lists. Each section is divided by century. There must still be errors and omissions, but at least this note makes the series more accurate and complete.

Of the newly listed MPs, two were returned to parliament in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Together with the thirteen Baptist MPs catalogued in 1980, that makes a total of only fifteen for the two centuries, and their identification is often no more than probable. Both the newcomers to the list were London merchants, in one case, Sir John Eyles, an extremely prosperous trader to the West Indies and Africa, and in the other, Thomas Guy, an equally successful dealer in books whose investments turned out to yield a bonanza. These men were similar to the other two Baptists in the eighteenth-century parliaments, one of whom was Lord Mayor of London and the other its sheriff. Likewise Eyles was Lord Mayor and Guy would have been sheriff had he not preferred to pay a fine to escape office. Eyles is interesting as a prime collaborator with James II during his attempt to woo Dissenters to his side so as to weaken the Church of England. All Eyles's prominent offices came to him during James's brief reign. Guy, on the other hand, left a name to posterity through his benefaction. The hospital he founded, one of the best in the country, called itself 'Guy's'.

There are three new nineteenth-century MPs, making a total of twenty-two. The amendments list adds a fresh MP, Henry Havelock-Allan, who had previously been supposed to have shed his Baptist convictions before entering the Commons. It is now clear that he remained a Baptist, at least for the earlier part of his parliamentary career. There is also, however, a subtraction from the previously published list. Alfred Illingworth, who was included in the earlier catalogue of MPs, turns out not to have joined the churches where he worshipped. So these two individuals, both close to the boundary between actual Baptists and others, exchange sides of the line. Of the three newly discovered MPs, John Heathcoat is still near the boundary because further research may show that in later life, when he sat in parliament, he was no longer in Baptist membership. Sir Reuben Barrow was

definitely a Baptist, active in denominational affairs at a national level, but it is not yet clear to which church he belonged. Benjamin Shaw was even more fully involved in denominational life, serving as treasurer of the Baptist Missionary Society. He was one of the figures of the early nineteenth century who sponsored a wide range of societies for doing good, the 'Evangelical united front'. Shaw, like Barrow after him, was a London merchant, though he represented a Wiltshire seat, and Heathcoat, a textile manufacturer of the new industrial age praised by Samuel Smiles as an example of self-help, lived in Devon while in parliament. So all three belonged to the south of the country rather than the north, helping to redress the geographical balance among the MPs of the period. When they are included, ten Baptist MPs sat for southern constituencies whereas sixteen represented the north. The most important alteration to the previous conclusions, however, is that it was mistaken to claim that there were no Baptists in parliament between 1784 and 1847. On the contrary, Shaw sat from 1812 to 1818 and Heathcoat from 1832 to 1859. The arrival of Morton Peto in the Commons in 1847 was not so momentous a development for the denomination as had previously been supposed.

For the twentieth century, there are two additions, making a total of fifty Baptist MPs for the period, and there is also a twenty-first-century newcomer. The three, significantly, represented Labour, Conservatism and Nationalism, with none of them standing for the Liberalism that had once been the virtually unanimous choice of Baptists. One, Robert Gibson, was a Scot and another, Ieuan Wyn Jones, a Welshman, each representing a constituency in his own land. The effect on the statistics is to increase the number of MPs sitting for Wales to the high proportion of seventeen out of the fifty, illustrating the strong sense of civic responsibility that marked the denomination in the principality. Both Gibson and Jones were lawyers, pushing the number who had no occupation other than the law to eight, higher than any other occupational group. Jones was to reach the position of leader of his party, the third Baptist to do so, but only after he had left the Commons to marshal the Plaid Cymru forces in the new Welsh Assembly. The third new MP, entering Westminster only in 2001, was Andrew Selous, but by the time of writing he had already become a front-bench spokesman for the Conservative opposition. He was a fresh type of Baptist MP, identifying himself with pan-Christian causes that drew as much support from Catholics as from Protestants. His predecessor as a Conservative Baptist MP, Ian Twinn, had still thought of himself as a Nonconformist, even while worshipping as an Anglican.² Selous, however, declared himself on his website (itself a sign of a new age) to be an Evangelical who drew inspiration from Wilberforce and Shaftesbury.³

Less needs to be said about the list of supposed Baptists. There are only two entries, for the lawyer Russell Gurney and the politician Sir Joseph Cleary. Gurney left behind the Baptist allegiance of his family by the time he graduated from Cambridge in 1826, but he retained strong Protestant convictions that led him to pilot the anti-ritualist Public Worship Regulation Act through the Commons in 1874. Gurney must have been chosen, in 1865, to travel to Jamaica to deal with the sensitive question of the overly harsh suppression of rebellion on the island by the governor because it was an issue that particularly concerned Baptists.⁴ Gurney, it was known, would be sensitive to their anxieties because his uncle, W. B. Gurney, had previously been treasurer of the Baptist Missionary Society. Cleary, too, was probably not a Baptist, although he was a prominent figure in a crisis at a Baptist church in 1930-32.

The extraordinary events at Liverpool surrounding Cleary's involvement as a socialist in the last days of Pembroke Chapel are summarised in his entry.

Most of the amendments, apart from the inclusion of Havelock-Allan and the exclusion of Illingworth in the roll-call of Baptist MPs, are on points of detail. The church membership of two nineteenth-century MPs, Briggs Priestley and Samuel Woods, has been discovered, and there is a little extra evidence relating to others from that and the following century. Two entries help to bring the story up-to-date. After the publication of the earlier articles, in 1989, there occurred the death of Sir Raymond Gower, the long-serving MP for the Vale of Glamorgan. In the following parliament, that elected in 1992, there were still two sitting Baptist MPs. At the next general election, in 1997, Ian Twinn was defeated, and so in the ensuing House of Commons there was only a single Baptist, Ieuan Wyn Jones. At the same time that he left Westminster in 2001, however, he was replaced by Andrew Selous. Thus the tradition of Baptist representation in the parliament of the United Kingdom continues.

Abbreviations

<i>BQ</i>	<i>Baptist Quarterly</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Baptist Times</i>
C	Conservative
JHYB	Information from Professor J. H. Y. Briggs
L	Liberal
Lab	Labour
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004)
Thorne	R. G. Thorne (ed.), <i>The House of Commons, 1790-1820</i> , 5 vols (London, 1986)
<i>WWBMP</i>	<i>Who's Who of British Members of Parliament</i> , ed. Michael Stenton and Stephen Lees, 4 vols (Brighton, 1976-81)
<i>WWW</i>	<i>Who Was Who</i> (London)

1. List of Additional Baptist MPs

Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Sir JOHN EYLES

d. 1703

MP for Devizes, 1679-81

London merchant and financier. Alderman of City of London, 1687-88; temporary Lord Mayor, 8 September – 3 October 1688. Does not seem to have taken seat as MP. Contested Devizes 1681 and 1689. Knight, 1687. DL, 1687-88. JP, 1688. Acquired country estate at South Broome, Wiltshire. Member of Old Baptist Church at Devizes (John Hurley, *Two Hundred Years New: A History of the New Baptist Church, Devizes* (Devizes, 1996), p.4, *per*

JHYB). Shut chapel at Guildhall when Lord Mayor, suppressing Anglican worship. Left bequests to Baptist meetings in London and Devizes.

ODNB. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=31881#s26>
accessed 21 November 2006

THOMAS GUY

1645? – 27 December 1724

MP for Tamworth, November 1695- July 1708

Bookseller in London from 1668, specialising in Bibles and importing them from the Netherlands. One of Oxford University printers, 1679-91. Educated in Tamworth. Built its town hall, 1701, and founded almshouse. Contributed to Tamworth Grammar School and in 1686 to Lord Weymouth's Workhouse there. Campaigned unsuccessfully for parliament at Tamworth in 1690.

Freeman of City of London, 1668. Elected sheriff 1694, but paid fine to avoid office. Left management of business to partners by 1704. Governor of St Thomas's Hospital, London, from 1704. Founded Guy's Hospital, endowing it with £200,000 derived from selling South Sea stock at right time. Also left benefactions to Christ's Hospital and to debtors of London, Middlesex and Surrey. Unmarried, with a reputation for miserliness.

Son of a Baptist and himself a Baptist, but church membership unknown (A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London, 1947), p. 146).

ODNB (mentioning that father was 'Anabaptist', but omitting Guy's religion).

Nineteenth Century

Sir REUBEN VINCENT BARROW

1838 – 13 February 1918

MP (L) for Southwark, Bermondsey, 1892-95

With brother in firm of Samuel Barrow and Company, tanners and leather factors. Borough Road British School. Alderman of Croydon; mayor, 1885. Introduced bill to equalise London poor rate (Carlile, p. 301). Governor of Whitgift's Foundation. Knight, 1912. JP. FRGS. Of 9 Park Hill Road, Croydon.

Third treasurer of Twentieth Century Fund. Associated with James Spurgeon. (J. C. Carlile, *The Story of the English Baptists* (London, 1905), pp. 300-1). WWW, 1916-1928. WWBMP 2.

JOHN HEATHCOAT

7 August 1783 – 18 January 1861

MP (L) for Tiverton, 1832-59

Lace manufacturer. Inventor of lace-making machines including bobbin net machine. After Luddite riots in Loughborough in 1816, moved to Tiverton. Opened factory at St Quentin near Paris in 1818. Favoured 'the abolition of useless places, pensions and sinecures; and a more equal and just system of tax' (1859). Patented rotary self-narrowing stocking frame and other inventions. Celebrated in Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859).

Member of Loughborough Particular Baptist Church (S. A. Cramer, *Loughborough Baptists and the Town* (Loughborough, 2000), p. 12). Clearly

still a Dissenter in 1843 (*Nottingham Review*, 24 February 1843, p. 3), and there was a Baptist chapel in Tiverton where he was probably a member. W. G. Allen, *John Heathcote and his Heritage* (n.p., 1958) [only at John Rylands University Library of Manchester]. D. E. Varley, 'John Heathcoat (1783 – 1861): Founder of the Machine Lace Industry', *Textile History*, 1, 1968-70, pp. 1-45. *ODNB* (omitting religion). *WWBMP*.

BENJAMIN SHAW

1770? – 6 November 1843

MP for Westbury, 1812-18

London merchant. Director of Union Fire Company, Rock Life Assurance Office and Commercial Dock Company (chairman). Chairman of Port of London Authority, 1817. Member of Lloyd's committee from 1811; chairman, 1824-26. Director of Anglo Mexican mint and mining companies. Dissenting Deputy. Favoured Roman Catholic emancipation. Supported opening of India to Christian missions, 1813. Spoke in Commons on commercial questions. Defeated at Grampound, Cornwall, 1818; and at Hedon, East Riding of Yorkshire, 1820. Member of council of London University from 1825. Captain Commandant of Volunteers, 1803. Lieutenant-Colonel, 5th Surrey militia, 1813.

Probably member of Mare Street Baptist Church, Hackney. Certainly close to its minister, F. A. Cox, in founding University College. Treasurer of Baptist Missionary Society, 1821-26 (B. Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 209). Trustee of Particular Baptist Fund and of Particular Baptist Building Fund from 1824, member of Stepney College committee (Seymour Price, 'The Centenary of the Baptist Building Fund', *BQ* 3, 1926, p. 167). Member of twenty-eight religious or philanthropic societies, including being governor of four and vice-president of two (F. K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 352).

Thorne 5 (omitting religious allegiance).

Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

ROBERT GIBSON

20 April 1886 – 9 April 1965

MP (Lab) for Greenock, November 1936 – June 1941

Barrister. MA, BSc, LLB (Glasgow). Secretary, then president, of Glasgow University Students' Representative Council. Lecturer in Applied Science and Electrical Engineering. Served in war, retiring as captain. Called to Scottish bar, 1918. KC, 1931. Senior Advocate Depute, 1929-31. Chairman of Scottish Council of Labour Party, 1932-34. Candidate for Roxburgh and Selkirk, 1929; Edinburgh, North, 1931; Scottish Universities, March 1934; and Dundee, 1935. Chairman of Scottish Land Court, with legal title of Lord Gibson, 1941-65. Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Of 42 Heriot Row, Edinburgh.

Deacon of Dublin Street Baptist Church, Edinburgh (*Church Manual*, 1937, p. 5). Member of Scottish Churchmen's Commission, U.S.A. and Canada, 1923. *WWBMP* 3.

IEUAN WYN JONES

22 May 1949 - present

MP (Plaid Cymru) for Ynys Mon (Anglesey), 1987 – 2001

Solicitor. Chairman, Plaid Cymru, 1980-82, 1990-92; president, 2000-03. In Commons, piloted bill to assist hard of hearing, 1989. Member of Welsh Affairs and Agriculture Select Committees. Joint chair of All-Party Older Persons Group. Trustee of Industry and Parliament Trust. Governor of Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Campaign director in first election for Welsh National Assembly, 1999. Welsh National Assembly Member for Ynys Mon from 1999. Chair of Assembly's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee from 1999. Leader of Plaid Cymru Group in National Assembly of Wales from 2000, and so leader of party from February 2006. Member of Gorsedd of Eisteddfod, 2001. Honorary Fellow, University of Wales, Bangor, 2005. Author of *Europe: The Challenge for Wales* (1996); and *Y Llynyn Arian* (1998), a biography of Thomas Gee of Denbigh.

Son of Baptist minister and nephew of three others. Member of Peniel Baptist Church, Llangefni, Anglesey; deacon from c. 1992. (Emlyn John to editor, *BT*, 7 May 1992, p. 10)

http://ieuenwynjones.org/biog_en.htm accessed 21 November 2006.

ANDREW SELOUS

27 April 1962 - present

MP (C) for South-West Bedfordshire, 2001 - present

Chartered insurer. London School of Economics. Territorial Army officer. Contested Sunderland North, 1997. Member of Select Committee on Work and Pensions, 2001-05. Briefly Parliamentary Private Secretary to Michael Ancram as Shadow Foreign Secretary, 2004. Opposition whip, 2004 -06. Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions from November 2006. Vice-chairman of All-Party Group on Poverty and treasurer of All-Party Pro-Life Group. Supporter of Amnesty International and Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child. Fundraiser for CARE, CRISIS and Shaftesbury Society. Voted against his party by opposing Gender Recognition Bill on transsexual people, 2004.

Member of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church, Leighton Buzzard (Information from Dr Ian Randall). Chairman of Conservative Christian Fellowship since 2001, publishing booklet for them called *Lessons from the Frontline*. 'He is a strong evangelical Christian....He says his faith was his motivation for wanting to become an MP.'

(<http://www.andrewselous.org.uk/record.jsp?type=requiredPage&ID=2> accessed 21 November 2006)

Dod's Parliamentary Companion (London, 2006)

2. Supplementary List of Supposed Baptist MPs

Nineteenth Century

RUSSELL GURNEY

2 September 1804 – 31 May 1878

MP (C) for Southampton, 1865-78

Barrister. Trinity College, Cambridge. Common pleader in City of London, 1830-45; judge of its Sheriffs' Court and Small Debts Court, 1850; its Common Serjeant, 1856; and its Recorder, 1856-78. QC. On several Royal Commissions, 1862-77. Sent to Jamaica to investigate behaviour of Governor Eyre, 1865-66. PC, 1866. Commissioner in United States to settle merchants' claims under treaty of Washington, 1871. Carried bill to reform criminal law, 1867; and Larceny and Embezzlement Bill, 1868. Sponsored Married Women's Property Bill, enacted 1870, and Public Worship Regulation Bill, 1874. Principal Warden of Fishmongers' Company, 1876. Vice-president of Charity Voting Reform Association, 1878. Founded convalescent home for women in Bayswater, 1875. FRS, 1875.

Father, Sir John Gurney, Baron of the Exchequer, was deacon of Maze Pond Baptist Church, though he latterly attended Church of England (*ODNB* for Sir John). Russell was nephew of W. B. Gurney, treasurer of Baptist Missionary Society. But because Russell Gurney himself graduated from Cambridge in 1826 he was already not a Baptist. He showed 'low-church Anglican sympathies' (*ODNB*), marrying daughter of John Venn, rector of Clapham. *ODNB*.

Twentieth Century

Sir JOSEPH CLEARY

26 October 1902 – 9 February 1993

MP (Lab) for Liverpool, Wavertree, February – November 1935

Labour politician. Holy Trinity Church of England School, Anfield, and Skerry's College, Liverpool. Councillor of Liverpool from 1927 for forty-seven years; alderman from 1941; Lord Mayor, 1949-50. Unsuccessful candidate for Liverpool, East Toxteth, March and May 1929; for Liverpool, West Derby, 1931; for Liverpool, Walton, 1955. Defeated Randolph Churchill, 1935. Chairman of Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, 1969-70. Knight, 1965. JP. Honorary Freeman of Liverpool, 1970. Supported youth work in city.

Was 'associated' with Pembroke Baptist Chapel, Liverpool. (D. Ben Rees, obituary, *The Independent*, 18 February 1993, *per* Stephen Lees). In 1930 supported Joseph Golder, the lay pastor, in keeping the city-centre chapel open as centre of Christian socialism in opposition to efforts of Baptist Union as trustees to close it. After Golder was forbidden to preach by a court decision, Cleary took over as main speaker. When Baptist Union seized the property on 5 November 1931, Cleary denounced its 'trickery and subterfuge'. His last address was long advertised on the closed building: 'Principles stand supreme'. Although services continued elsewhere, congregation dwindled and church dissolved early in 1932. (Ian Sellers, *Salute to Pembroke: The Story of the Rise, Progress, Decline and Fall of a Most Remarkable Dissenting Congregation* (Alsager, Cheshire, 1960), pp. 38-9). Because chapel had become more socialist than Baptist, Cleary may not have been baptised. No evidence that was associated with a Baptist church when MP.

WWBMP 3.

3. Amendments to Earlier Lists

Nineteenth Century

THOMAS CAVE

Not Unitarian, but Anglican.

HENRY MARSHMAN HAVELOCK-ALLAN

Member of committee of Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1875-76 and 1876-77. Personal member of Baptist Union, which entailed membership of a Baptist church, 1874-79. Therefore remained Baptist while MP. (JHYB)

ALFRED ILLINGWORTH

Not Baptist church member. Would have joined Westgate Baptist Church, Bradford, had he not been put off by narrow views there in his younger days (memorial sermon in *Bradford Observer per* David Milner). Did not join Girlington Baptist Church (church records).

BRIGGS PRIESTLEY

Although his son W. E. B. Priestley was brought up at Kipping Thornton Congregational Church (*British Weekly*, 8 July 1909, p. 325), Briggs himself was member of Trinity Baptist Chapel, Ripley Street, Bradford (John Mitchell, *Trinity Baptist Chapel: Jubilee Souvenir, 1857-1907* (Bradford, 1907), cited by S. R. Valentine, 'The Origins and Development of the Baptist Denomination in Bradford', Leeds MA dissertation, 1994, p. 84).

CHARLES TOWNSEND

Long-term secretary of Tyndale Baptist Church.

SAMUEL WOODS

Member of King Street Baptist Church, Wigan (Information from the late Dr Ian Sellers).

JOHN SKIRROW WRIGHT

Not deacon but elder of People's Chapel, Birmingham, which was led by annually elected elders only (A. S. Langley, *Birmingham Baptists: Past and Present* (London, 1939), p. 108), notwithstanding loose reference to him as deacon by Charles Brown (Langley, p. 11). He preached regularly until c. 1865 and was Sunday school superintendent until his death. From 1862 he organised evening classes at the chapel and sponsored the first offshoot of the Quakers' Severn Street adult school there. (E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973), p. 100). First president of Birmingham Young Men's Missionary Society (D. L. Finnemore).

Twentieth Century

Lady MEGAN ARFON LLOYD GEORGE

Enrolled as member of Baptist Women's League, 1929. This suggests Baptist church membership, but since she joined by invitation of the president and she would hardly refuse, the evidence is inconclusive. (Baptist Women's League *Report for 1929*, pp. 9-10, *per* JHYB)

Sir (HERBERT) RAYMOND GOWER

15 August 1915 – 22 February 1989

MP (C) for Vale of Glamorgan, 1983 – February 1989

GEORGE RENNIE THORNE

Thorne's father was George Thorne, lay pastor of Brierley Hill Baptist Church, 1861-73 (*Montgomeryshire Express*, 25 August 1885, *per* Dr Michael Collis), who baptised his son. The MP was subsequently a regular preacher at Brierley Hill anniversaries. (Sidney Hall *per* JHYB)

Dr IAN DAVID TWINN

MP (C) for Edmonton, 1983 – 97

Deputy Chairman of Conservative Party, 1986-88. Parliamentary Private Secretary to Peter Morrison, 1985-90; to David Trippier, Minister of State for the Environment, 1990-92; to Sir John Cope, Paymaster General, 1992-94. Chairman of All-Party Lighting Group. Voted against his party in Commons to resist cut in overseas aid. Member of European Parliament for London, October 2003-04.

Member of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge. Described himself as an 'away member', worshipping at an Anglican church in his constituency (*BT*, 2 April 1992, p. 11).

¹ D. W. Bebbington, 'Baptist M.P.s in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *BQ* 28, 1980, pp. 245-62; 'Baptist M.P.s in the Nineteenth Century', *BQ* 29, 1981, pp. 3-24; 'Baptist Members of Parliament, 1847-1914', *BQ* 29, 1981, pp. 51-64; 'Baptist Members of Parliament in the Twentieth Century' *BQ* 31, 1986, pp. 252-87.

² *BT*, 2 April 1992, p. 11.

³ <http://www.andrewselous.org.uk/record.jsp?type+requiredPage&ID=2> accessed 21 November 2006.

⁴ Timothy Larsen, 'English Baptists, Jamaican Affairs and the Nonconformist Conscience: The Campaign against Governor Eyre', in D. W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies* (Carlisle, 2002), pp. 185-86.