

Martyrdom of William Tilsworth

It appears that as far back as the year 1495, some of the followers of Wickliffe, who were baptists, were organized into a church in the town of Amersham, and continued in a flourishing state for many years, notwithstanding the severe persecutions they were called to endure. Amersham is rendered memorable by the martyrdom of William Tilsworth, a faithful minister of Christ, who was burnt in a field adjoining the town, his own daughter being cruelly compelled to set fire to the pile which consumed her dear father.

At the time Tilsworth, suffered martyrdom, several had their cheeks burnt with a red hot iron, and were compelled to do penance at his burning, amongst who were the following persons, Thos. Harding and wife, Henry Harding, and Robert Harding. About three years after this, Thos. Harding was brought to the stake in Amersham. This is stated in "Fox's Book of Martyrs" (Edition 1583) he says, "Thos. Harding being one of the company then molested and troubled as a foresaid in the town of Amersham for the truth of the gospel, after his abjuration and penance was done, was again sought for and brought to the fire in the days of Henry the VIII." There is reason to believe that Thos, Harding was baptist, for there were some of that denomination in the town of Amersham at the time Tilsworth was burnt, and the Harding family were for many generations the chief supporters of the cause of Christ in Upper Meeting, and there is now a member of that church, a pious young woman, who bears that honoured name — and is a descendant of that ancient family

At what period a baptist church was formed in this town I am unable to ascertain but, from an old General Baptist church book, it is evident there was a church of that order here in the year 1626. In these days the baptists were called to endure a great fight of affliction. The leading men of the town encouraged it by countenancing informers. This church possessed a most liberal spirit, not only towards their own poor persecuted members, but to others who were confined in Newgate for the truth's sake. But although they suffered severely by fines and imprisonment, they continued to flourish, and in the year 1694 were obliged to enlarge their place of worship. About this time, a church of the same faith and order at Aylesbury, fifteen miles from Amersham, was also called to drink deep of the bitter cup of persecution. Many of the magistrates distinguished themselves by zeal against the nonconformists. In the reign of Charles II., 1664, they filled the county jail with dissenters; and not contented with imprisoning their persons, and robbing them of their property, they endeavoured to take away their lives. Twelve of the brethren were apprehended while quietly worshipping God in their meeting house, and dragged before the magistrates. Having been convicted under the "Conventicle Act," they were confined in gaol three months, and then brought forth and arraigned like felons. They were required to conform to the Church of England and take the oaths, or abjure the kingdom; if they refused to do one of these sentence of death should be passed on them. They unanimously and firmly declared, that they could neither conform to the Church of England, nor leave the land of their fathers and their dear connections in life. They were instantly declared felons, and sentence of death was passed on them; and the rapacious officers were sent immediately to seize all their property as forfeited to the crown. Through the influence of the Rev. Wm. Kiffin, a Particular Baptist minister, and to whom King Charles was much indebted for the gift of ten thousand pounds when he was in distress, a reprieve was obtained; and at the next assizes the judges brought down the majesty's pardon. J.C.

P.S. — The field where poor Tilsworth was burnt, was anciently called "Stanly close." It is now known by the name of "Ruckles." It is opposite my house, and I often look at it with mingled emotions of grief and indignation. Last August I went over and examined the spot. Although the rest of the field was waving with a luxuriant crop of wheat, the spot where he suffered, which is a large circular place, was barren; and although they have dug deep, cleared the stones, and manured it, still it remains a barren spot from year to year!

[Return to Gallery Writings](#)