

MILES, JOHN (1621 - 1683), Particular Baptist leader

Name: John Miles
Date of birth: 1621
Date of death: 1683
Child: Samuel Miles
Child: John Miles
Gender: Male
Occupation: Particular Baptist leader
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Thomas Richards

Born at Newton-Clifford in Welsh Herefordshire. He matriculated from Brasenose College, Oxford, 18 March 1635/6, aged 15; his stay at Oxford is indeterminate; his career from 1636 to 1649 uncertain, but probably he was a chaplain in the Parliament's forces in the South Wales campaigns of the second Civil War, and must have settled down in some guise in the Gower hinterland of Swansea. In the spring of 1649 he went to London, was baptized at the Baptist church that met in the Glass House, Broad Street, and was, by its leaders, sent to spread Baptist principles in Wales. His headquarters became Ilston in Gower; the first baptisms (as recorded in the church register) were dated at the beginning of October 1649, the last on 12 August 1660; the total baptisms were 261. Miles proved himself an organiser of the first rank, gathered adherents from Carmarthen to the Hay, formed them into subsidiary churches, arranged a circuit system for his preachers, and summoned general meetings to discuss questions of doctrine and policy. He preached a strict exclusionist dogma, maintaining that baptism was for adults only, by immersion only, that only such were to be admitted to the Lord's Table, all this against a background of advanced Calvinism as expressed in the London Confession of the Particular Baptists (1644) and operated under a close system of supervision that was for all practical purposes Presbyterian. In consequence, the strange doctrines that flourished in the heyday of liberty had no attraction whatsoever for Miles, neither the Arminianism of the Baptists of Radnor, nor [Erbery's](#) Third Dispensation, nor the Lord's imminent coming beloved of the Fifth Monarchists, nor the inner light of the Quakers (Quakerism he looked upon as an 'infection of the times,' against which he composed the *Antidote* of 1656). He was admittedly one of the Welsh Puritan leaders, was named as one of the 'approvers' in the Propagation Act of 1650, signed several certificates for ministerial appointments under the Triers, and was himself (in 1656-7) made 'lecturer' at Llanelly under that dispensation; from 1657 to 1660 the Lambeth MSS. describe him as 'minister of Ilston,' giving particulars of 'augmentations' to the natural revenue of the living. Miles was no revivalist to put a whole countryside on fire; he was the propagandist, putting forward stiff premises and drawing irrefragable conclusions, who would secure disciples with convictions as abiding as himself; in his case, notably [Lewis Thomas](#), who supervised the area between Bridgend and Carmarthen in the days of persecution, and [William Prichard](#), who had the guardianship of the eastern districts, with Abergavenny as nucleus, and who, by his baptising [William Jones](#) (died c. 1700) of Rhydwylym about 1667, opened the way for such intense Baptist activities in western Wales that they bade fair to overshadow the original movement at Ilston.

There was no hope for Miles and his preachers at the Restoration; those Baptists who worked under the Triers and received maintenance from the Trustees had to surrender their livings under clause XI of the Act of September (12 Chas. II, c. 17). He emigrated to America, but there is no proof (apart from the fact that his name does not figure in any records of the Carmarthen consistory court) that he moved out before 1663, nor any definite proof that he returned to Wales for a while in 1665. It is certain, however, that he had reached Rehoboth in Massachusetts before the end of 1663, that he organised a Baptist church there (of which Nicholas Tanner, who had been baptized by him at Ilston in 1652, was a prominent member), that effective opposition from other sects caused him and others to found a new settlement in 1667, again in Massachusetts, and called Swansea, and that a new Baptist church was established there much more comprehensive in its polity than that of the Ilston original in Wales. Records go to prove that Miles became a schoolmaster at Swansea in 1673, but had to flee to Boston during 'Phillip's War' with the Indians in 1675. Eventually he returned to Swansea, and died there on 3 February 1682/3. His son JOHN MILES was the first town-clerk of Swansea; his son SAMUEL MILES turned Anglican, graduated at Harvard in 1684, at Oxford (by diploma) in 1693, and was for nearly forty years rector of the King's Chapel (Episcopalian) at Boston.

Author

Thomas Richards, (1878 - 1962)

Sources

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Myles](#)

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