

## The story of Thomas Kingham 1805-1861

**Note:** This is taken from Graham Thomas's website which is now removed from the internet, but can still be found on the Internet Archive website at <http://web.archive.org/web/20070510142137/www.grahamthomas.com/kinghammisc.html> and also copied onto <http://www.ourgenealogy.co.uk/kingham>

Nigel Kingham Woy's has also added the story to his Ancestry.co.uk tree – see note at end of article.

Robert Hale, September 2010  
[www.ourgenealogy.co.uk](http://www.ourgenealogy.co.uk)

**T**homas Kingham was born in Flitwick in 1805 in tragic circumstances. His mother Ann (nee Ward) was 30 years old and in those days this was old to be having a first child. The birth was difficult and Ann was so weakened by it that she never recovered and died twelve days later. The motherless, Thomas was baptised in Flitwick church on 28th April 1805, the same day that his mother was buried.

(Flitwick has always been a widespread village, made up of a number of Ends spread across the parish. It had a Norman motte and bailey. In the nineteenth century it would have been very pretty. There was the manor house owned by the Brooks family; a village green with a pond, stocks a pub and the blacksmiths; pictures show the village to have a number of very picturesque, thatched cottages and many trees.)

Thomas' father, James was a miller, working at a mill owned by the Goodman family. He was unable to look after the baby by himself and so Thomas was taken in to the home of his maternal grandmother Margaret Ward and his aunt Elizabeth Ward. Both were to exercise a strong influence on the child and it seemed he hardly ever saw his father.

(The water mill and mill house in East End had been owned by the Goodman family since 1730. In 1771, a Richard Goodman was recorded as paying 12 pounds as a half year rent to Oakingham Hospital. By 1778 John Goodman owned the mill. It is thought that a mill had been on this particular site since the time of the Domesday Book.)

When Thomas was four his grandmother died leaving him in the sole care of his aunt. He was brought up in a home where there were no brothers or sisters and the environment was strict and austere as his aunt belonged to the Strict and Peculiar Baptist Church, which strongly emphasized the worthlessness and sinfulness of humankind, and its need for repentance, throwing itself on the mercy of an avenging and righteous god.

Thomas reacted to the fears this teaching aroused in him in two ways: in one mood he would carouse, blaspheme and defy the God who would condemn him; in another mood he would repent, weep, cower and beg forgiveness from his God before whom he felt so unworthy.

When he was old enough Thomas become an apprenticed miller at the mill in Flitwick. At the age of twenty-three Thomas married Lucy Cain, the daughter of William Cain, the village blacksmith. Her family, too, were of the same non-conformist faith as his own.

A year later, in 1829, their first child, Eliza, was born.

In 1830 Thomas was involved in the riots that took place in Flitwick, organized by labourers protesting their poor working conditions and wages. As one of the ringleaders he was arrested and sentenced to fourteen days in prison. In Bedfordshire by Simon Houfe, it says:" there was quite a

serious riot at Flitwick on 6th December. About twenty or thirty labourers went round the Flitwick farms in a band, forcing those sworn in as constables to come out with them. They were debarred from entering Priestly Farm, and about eighty returned to the centre of the village with sticks and bludgeons. There they were met by a force of constables and Lord Grantham [the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire]. He urged them to disperse. One labourer was reported as saying: 'we want more money and more money we'll have and damn'd is we won't'.

Before dispersing they called on the squire J.T. Brooks, who had personally called out thirty constables who were paid two shillings for their work."

(The Brooks family acquired the manor in 1789. They were very interested in horticulture and built extensive gardens which featured ornamental buildings, rare plants and trees. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the family were responsible for restoring the church, supporting the school and helping extensively with improving the social life of the whole village.)

There was no damage inflicted at the manor house but the ringleaders were arrested and accused, among other things, of not being content to work for their usual wages and of trying to extort great sums of money from the masters who employed them as well as causing great terror to the inhabitants of Flitwick and to those 'passing and repassing'. At the Quarter Sessions the ringleader, William Mitchell, received six months hard labour and William Barnes, John Ellis and Thomas Kingham 14 days.

These riots and disturbances were seen across the country and this led to improvements in social welfare although ultimately this could be viewed as the beginnings of the major migration away from dependence on agriculture.

Three years later Thomas underwent a conversion experience in a harvest field. He writes of this in a letter to the Gospel Standard in 1838:

"Thomas Kingham was born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him. Brethren, I filled up the early part of my life in all manner of debauchery, till I arrived at the age of twenty six, when, I believe, the Lord was pleased to send an arrow in to my heart. I then knew what little was within, but, like the pious professors of the day, I was determined I would be holy. But sometimes I got again with the my companions of the ale bench. O, brethren, the corruptions of a man are too strong for him, if not kept by the mighty power of God, through faith. The Lord was pleased not to leave me here, but he made me deeply feel what an awful and a bitter thing it was to sin against God. O the distraction of mind I went through!

The devil was continually telling me I had sinned against the Holy Ghost. My sins were brought to my view, even from a child. In this kind of way I went on for about a year and a half, when it pleased the Lord to lead me to the written word, and there I found that the law was holy, just and good, and I felt that I was unholy and impure in all my thoughts and ways. I found that the law reached all my thoughts, and although I searched the word of God, I could not find so vile a sinner recorded, and I verily believed there was not such another in all the world. The thunders of Sinai roared in my heart, and I expected every moment to be sent to hell. When I read the Bible, all its warnings and threatenings came in to my guilty conscience, so that I knew that the Lord was an avenging God; and I felt that I had no more love for him than a criminal has to the judge who has passed the sentence of death upon him. I found that my mind was enmity against him. But sometimes the Lord was pleased to lay me low in the dust of self-abasement; and on one occasion, I well remember, it was in a harvest field about six o'clock in the evening, he broke in to my soul with such power that I hardly knew where I was. My soul was melted down in me so that my eyes ran over in torrents. O the love I felt in my soul, and the humble views I have of myself, no tongue can tell. After this, the law never had that power of condemnation again over my conscience, but it pleased the Lord to break up more and more the fallow ground of my

heart, and let me see the dreadful abomination that lurked there. This made me question the reality of all my past feelings, while the Lord made me know, by painful experience, that I was altogether a mass of iniquity.

About a year after this, it pleased the Lord sorely to afflict my body, mad I lay the greatest part of my time in a very dark state of mind; but my soul was, as I thought, again set at liberty on reading the hymn commencing, "Jesus, my elder brother, lives with him I too shall reign."

I ran to my Bible, and that seemed to bear the same testimony, and my soul was melted like the wax before the sun. But I ma now again in a blind state, and I verily believe I am one of the biggest lumbering fools on earth, and I know not where it will end.

Is this the real experience of a child of God? I do not ask a carnal man to judge, but a spiritual man, one who has the unction of the Holy One; and I sincerely wish I may get a reply to my soul."

This letter shows that Thomas' state of mind veered between religious exultation and the fear and torment of sinning. The same theme is repeated in another letter written in 1839:

"I trust that it is under the influence of the blessed Sprit's teachings that I have this morning taken the liberty of writing a few of the trials which I have passed through during the last twelve months. It is nearly eighteen months since I wrote to you before; but if any one had told me then what I had to pass through, I could not have believed them. How it will make the poor soul rage and roar, fet and murmur, to be stripped of all false hopes and legality! It's pinching work for the flesh to be brought here. It is not like what thousands of persons and dead professors talk about; we must keep or passions down, and we must watch more, and pray more, and strive more, and we must be more content, or God will never bless us.

This is what nearly all the pulpits of Bedfordshire are ringing with. My dear brethren, within the last twelve months I have been brought deep to feel my baseness. It has appeared, to my feelings, that devils could not be as bad as I have at times felt myself to be. I have felt as if I had all the abominable sins ever committed on earth in my heart; and as if I had all the enmity of fallen devils against God.

Last April, if I remember right, I was reading in your Standard the editors remarks upon the difference between the joy of the Holy Ghost and the joy of the stony ground hearers, when divine power fell upon my soul like lightening, and I cried out, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for raising up such men.'

My soul was melted in to nothing in a moment, and my eyes run over with tears of joy, and I said to two of the dear children of God that were with me in my house at the time, I would never doubt no more. But, alas! I have since that sunk lower than ever. In the course of the following month I was brought in to such a dreadful state that I even told the Lord that he had better send me to hell, wretch that I was. I have even gone to bed in such rebellion of soul, that I have told God that I would not pray. I know what it is like to lie like Jonah in the belly of hell, in my conscience, on account of my sins. A few Sabbath after this, it pleased the Lord to pout John Warburton's book in to my hands, and it was such a Sabbath to my soul as I have never since enjoyed. I cried, I preached, and I was certain, in the feelings of my soul, that I should someday sit down with poor John Warburton in the kingdom of heaven as I was of my existence. The union I felt to poor old John is indescribable. But the more visits of the love of Christ I have, the deeper I seem to sink afterwards, and am left to doubt it all. Sometimes I have strong suggestions that it is nothing but the transformations of the devil to deceive me, and at times it appears only to come from nature; then despair follows; then I have hard thoughts of God; then fretfulness and rebellion come on; then I am pressed down

out of measure. One evening after I had left work, a few days previous to writing this letter, as I was drawing a few straws, I was suddenly struck with deep despair of conscience, fearing that God would destroy me and my house that night with fire, and I said to my wife, "What tempest shall we have tonight." I carried the straws upstairs, and was fully convinced in my mind that those straws would be set on fire by lightning. O what I suffered that night in my conscience! I went in and out; up and down the garden to see which way it would come. But, bless the Lord, he has not destroyed me yet, and he has favoured me with one more love visit this morning, whilst reading the first four chapters of John, especially the following verse; 'And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.'

In reading this verse I was led to see that when the light of the Holy Ghost shineth in to our souls, we cannot discern from whence it cometh, but it leads the soul to see and feel what poor wretches we are by nature and by practises, and this makes us groan, being burdened.

Now I have described a few of my feelings, and if you think them worthy of a place in your standard, may the Lord bless them to some poor soul that may be tormented by the devil.'

Thomas' family was expanding. A second son Alfred was born on 5th March 1836 and a third son, Nathaniel, born 1 December 1838. All three sons were baptised together in Flitwick Parish Church on 23rd June 1839.

Around this time, Thomas first met George Squires who became a lifelong friend. George Squires' obituary in the Gospel Standard speaks of their friendship:

'In the providence of God he came in to the Company of a good man in 1839 (Thomas Kingham of Flitwick). Mr Squires was called at the age of nineteen, and is friend Thomas Kingham in 1831 at the age of twenty-six. The two men first met in a field near Ampthill, and then was laid the foundation of a warm friendship that lasted for twenty-two years – until the death of Mr Kingham in 1861. But, at the time of their first meeting, Mr Kingham had been led, during his eight years of divine teaching (1831 to 1839) more deeply into the evils of his heart than his younger friend. Mr Squires, though quickened into spiritual life two years earlier, had been suffered to proceed in his Pharisaic life for several years before meeting Mr Kingham, who was the means to bring Mr Squires to attend Westoning.'

On 24th April 1844, Thomas was present at the death of his father, James, who died at the age of 76 of asthma. He was buried in Flitwick churchyard on 27th April.

In 1847 Lucy, Thomas' wife, now aged 37, gave birth to a fourth son, who was named Daniel. The strain of the birth was apparently too much for her heart, which failed on 20th October 1847. She too was buried in Flitwick.

On 14th October 1854, the younger Thomas Kingham, who had followed his father in to the milling trade and was working with Richard Goodman, married Martha Whiteman. Sadly, less than a year later, she died, at the age of 23, of phthisis.

Both Thomas were widowed and both subsequently remarried. The older Thomas married an Elizabeth, ten years younger than him and they had a daughter Ann Elizabeth. His mental and emotional ups and downs continued and one night, when he was working late at the mill, he thought he saw the ghost of his first wife Lucy.

Thomas Kingham's contemporaries describe his rapidly varying states of mind in religious terms, from the point of view of the religion which they were all involved. For example, George Musckett, writing in the Gospel Standard, says;

'I never saw a man sink lower or rise higher...when he sank, such was the power of the adversary, such were the fears of friend Kingham, and such his extravagant language...when the Lord did again break into his soul he would be talking aloud to everyone...'

There are a number of possible medical reasons for his violent mood swings. One may be ergot poisoning, the result of eating or being exposed to contaminated grain, which is attacked by a fungus.

The second may be due to alcoholism.

The third is a form of manic-depressive. Another letter suggests this may be the reason:

"I have felt as if I had all the abominable sins ever committed on earth in my heart...divine power fell on my soul like lightening...all my soul was melted in to nothing...my eyes run over with tears of joy...I have since that sunk lower than ever...I told the Lord that he had better send me to hell...I know what it is like to lie like Jonah in the belly of hell...I cried, I preached...the more visits of the love of Christ I have, the deeper I seem to sink afterwards...despair follows..fretfulness and rebellion come on...I was suddenly struck with deep despair of conscience...'

Thomas Kingham died on 12th August 1861, at the age of 56, of a diseased spine and kidneys. His obituary, in the Gospel Standard of October 1861 gives an account of his life.

'Thomas Kingham died on August 12th 1861, at Flitwick near Ampthill. He was by nature of a desperate turn of mind, a make-sport for fools. I have heard him say that in his natural state he took delight in all manner of wanton mischief. After such conduct his natural conscience would so terrify him that he would be afraid to move in the dark, or go past a churchyard or a wood.

It appears that in or about the year 1831 his convictions became of a very solemn character, and led him to consider his state before God, to read the Bible, and attend to preaching. But these exercises can be better explained by himself in two pieces he wrote to the Editors of the Gospel Standard, which appeared in 1838 and 1839. I have heard him say that his natural convictions were not of that depth that many are, nor of that depth which they often were in his own case after he found mercy. That took place in the harvest field in the year 1833. He then discovered that nearly everyone with whom he was conversing was almost an entire stranger to what was going on in his own soul. The Gospel Standard and the preaching of some of the ministers who afterwards came to Woburn were the means, in the hand of the Holy Ghost, of establishing and building him up in the truth as it is in Jesus. One of his first enlargements was during an affliction of body, when the Lord broke in upon his soul with many passages of Scripture and the 91st hymn of Dr Rippon's selection;

Let others boast their ancient lines  
In long succession great;  
In the proud list let heroes shine;  
And monarchs swell the state;  
Descend from the King of kings,  
Each saint a nobler title sings;

Which words, and the following part of the hymn, I have heard him repeat with tears of joy, and the very glory of god in his countenance. His was a chequered path indeed in his spiritual experience. O never saw a man sink lower or rise higher. When he sank, such was the power of the adversary; such were the fears of friend Kingham, and such his extravagant language, that it was sometimes difficult for his friends to maintain their hope of him. When the Lord did again break into his soul, he would be talking aloud to everyone, saint and sinner. He would, to careless sinners, set forth the state of the damned in a fearful way, and tell them that, if they should die in their present condition, hell would be their portion. And if he could

encounter any Arminians, he would oppose them in such a manner as would completely stop their mouths, and send them away with some dreadful sentiment of God's word against despisers of His truth of election and His elect people.

But he had a keen discernment of the faintest spark of grace beyond almost all I ever knew. He seemed to have a kind of scent, if I may so speak, to detect grace in whatever heart it abode. I had an instance of this a few days before his death. Having a young man staying with me a few weeks for the benefit of his health, I took him with me to visit him. He spoke a few words to the young man, and said "Ah, my dear young friend, you have the mark of life in you; if you should live, your path will be one of great tribulation, as mine has been. You are but just entering the wilderness; I am leaving it." And he told me afterwards of the love he felt in the spirit to this youth, feeling sure he was one of God's jewels, and also said what a mercy it would be for him if the Lord called him away through his present affliction. He was a man who, during his lifetime, had walked many hundreds of miles to hear the Gospel. His favourite preachers were Warburton, Gadsby, McKenzie, Tiptaft, Philpot, and such men; but he was not always favoured to hear profitably even them. He often returned with his pitcher empty, calling himself a thousand fools for making the journey. His prejudices often rose against myself, because he could not hear with power, which I believe was partly occasioned by his deafness. He was never tired of Rusk's pieces in the Standard. He used to say he could upon the whole, walk with John Rusk better than with any other man. He much admired Mr Congreve, late of Bedworth. He was so blessed in reading Mr Charlwood's dying testimony that for days he appeared to be present with him in glory.

About last Christmas, working in a mill where he had been a trustworthy servant for more than twenty years, the cold of the night of the sharp frost struck him, from which he never recovered. His sickness, therefore, was long and painful; and, as the dear Lord was about to separate the dross of his experience from the pure gold of His own grace, He chose this furnace in which to do it; And, as 'there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good, and sinneth not' (his funeral text), so Thomas Kingham had to pass through a sharper conflict on his death-bed than many.

At the first part of his affliction, he engaged much in conversation, which was often sweet and savoury; but a cloud came over his soul about April last, which continued without intermission for three months. Satan, taking advantage of the opportunity thus put in to his hands, plundered his soul at times of even hope. His natural temper was so wrought upon, and he was such a fearful case, that he concluded that he should like Spira, die in despair, cursing God.

I have sat by him in this afflicting season, and the Lord has enabled me to be an interpreter of His mind in the matter, and made friend Kingham yield to my judgement. And now it was that the closest communion subsisted between us; all old breaches were healed and forgotten, and he found that he was not all spirit, and that he had often mistaken his own spirit for the Spirit of God – in fact, he had never felt his littleness and nothingness, and the corruption of his entire nature, so much as in this last furnace. And, though he was cutting himself off so frequently, I never once doubted that it would be well with him. About six weeks before he died I had great access to the Lord on his account, and felt the Lord would surely appear for him once more. Accordingly, I told him so, although he could not believe. I said: "Thomas, if the Lord do not once more liberate your soul from your present bondage and distress, He hath not spoken by me." About ten days afterwards, the blessed Spirit came over the work afresh, subdued his foes and fears and, for three days, such were his ecstasies that he said. "Oh, the devil is a liar now; now I shall not perish." Comforts flowed in; the gloom of the house where he laid was chased away like frogs and mists of night before the rising sun. I hoped this blessed state would continue until death; but no. He must grapple with the powers of darkness for a further period, and then bid an everlasting adieu to pain.

But though he sat in darkness another month, there was supporting hope; the devil was not permitted to tear him as in the former three months. As his time drew nearer to depart out of this world unto the Father, much anxiety and prayer was manifested in the hearts of the saints; and although his darkness continued till within one hour of dissolution, the dear Sun of Righteousness arose upon him, which was at once visible in his face. Though he could scarcely articulate, he made known by smiles, nodding his head and waving the hands in triumph, that he died in the arms of Everlasting Love. To such questions as these: "Do you feel yourself upon the rock now? Do you feel Christ precious?" it was "yes. Yes, and being requested, if conscious of all these things, to hold up his right hand, he did so till it dropped upon his breast and his immortal spirit had returned to its Redeemer. Thus died, aged fifty-six, one of the Lord's own witnesses, who is now with those he loved when living, and also with Him without whose presence all this world is death."

The non-conformist churches arose during the seventeenth century. By the end of the century the Baptists in Bedfordshire were no more than small minority groups spread across the county meeting in houses and barns. During the eighteenth century the church became more organised and several meeting houses were erected, one in the nearby village of Westoning in 1790. In the nineteenth century all churches flourished. But the Baptists also saw their congregations splinter in to factions according to the degree of strictness; hence Strict and Particular Baptists, and Gospel Standard Baptists.

Further sources: Flitwick: A Vanishing Village. A History of Bedfordshire by Joyce Godber

#### Note

Nigel Kingham Woy's has also added the story to his Ancestry.co.uk tree found at <http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/14378441/person/98041826/story/e5fac621-b98e-4528-a979-2263dfbb5dc9?src=search&ftm=1> and added the following personal note:

*The following account of the life of my great, great, great grandfather Thomas Kingham was found on the following website, <http://www.grahamthomas.com/kinghammisc.html>. There is no copyright mentioned on Graham's site so I trust I have not breached any trust by sharing this tale with others who may find it of interest. Nigel Kingham Woy*

*I am indebted to Pauline Abbott for supplying this story.*