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REGIONAL STUDIES IN LATTER-DAY SAINT CHURCH HISTORY,
VOLUME 7: THE BRITISH ISLES

Reviewed by David M. Morris

Cynthia Doxey, Robert C. Freeman, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, and Dennis A. Wright, eds. *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History, Volume 7: The British Isles* Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Center, 2007. 281 pages. ISBN: 9780842526722 \$14.95

A recent addition to the historiography of British Mormonism is an anthology of scholarly papers from Brigham Young University's Religious Studies Center. As part of an ongoing series, *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*, the *British Isles* is the focus of Volume 7, which is dedicated to aspects of the British Mormon experience. Previous treatments in this series also include California, Ohio & Upper Canada, Missouri, New England States, and Europe amongst others. Each of these volumes was the result of a Church history tour in different parts of the U.S. and Europe by faculty and students mainly of Brigham Young University's department of Church History and Doctrine. As part of the tour the participants were required to prepare papers that dealt with that particular region.

These tours commenced in 1985, but it was the 1987 tour that first visited the British Isles in its celebrations of the sesquicentennial establishment of the Church in Britain. Resulting from this visit was the 1990 volume of the same name as the reviewed, which represented papers from scholars of that period, however, 20 years later from that first visit, sees the publication of papers from a new generation of academics that revisited Britain in 2006. Although both volumes share the same name and initially confusing in terms of referencing, they are as different in contributors as they are in subject matter. Too frequently attempts by scholars to discuss British Mormonism results in publications that mainly deal with the periods 1837-1838 and 1840-1841 that corresponds with the first two apostolic missions. Subsequently, well-

rehearsed and repeated accounts neglect a rich seam that is still waiting to be mined, accordingly this regional history remains unknown to the general audience. This collection, however, addresses some hitherto neglected areas of historical enquiry and is a welcome addition to the growing interest in the international development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This volume includes an introduction of the series and an overview of the tour itself by Paul H. Peterson, Professor emeritus Church History and Doctrine. Peterson also provides a summary of the papers that compile this work. This volume presents its 12 papers in mainly chronological order dealing with periods between 1837 and 1990's covering an eclectic range of topics including readdressing possible injustices against Isaac Russell, one of the early Mormon missionaries to the British Isles, a photo essay of the Church history sites in Liverpool and North East, an account of the voyage of the *Titanic* from the perspective of some Latter-day Saints, ongoing persecutions and the LDS Church in the media.

The collection commences with "Remembering the Impact of British Missionary Isaac Russell" by Scott C. Esplin, who focuses his paper on Isaac Russell (1807-1844), an Englishman who formed part of the initial seven that established Mormonism in Britain. As a preacher in Britain (1837-8), Russell was considered a faithful missionary, however, for many years since, Russell has been viewed as an apostate of the Church for his actions in 1838, in leading a small group of emigrants from DeWitt to Far West during the persecutions in Missouri. It has often been contended that Russell was leading them away from the Church both physically and spiritually rather than guiding them to a place of safety. Other factors have contributed to this status but Esplin makes a compelling argument to at least revisit the account of this man and reserve immediate judgment. By reviewing some of the circumstances from the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, personal letters and family papers a different picture is constructed. Esplin in his attempt to redress the reputation of Russell also includes the accounts of family members, particularly the daughters

who bore much of the apparent rejection from “faithful” Church members. For them, the account of their interview with Heber C. Kimball, a member of the First Presidency and fellow early missionary to Britain encouraged a restoration of status in the Church.

For the daughters the opportunity of Russell being ‘restored’ might be seen to them as an indication of the innocence of their father. With Kimball’s desire to see Russell ‘righted’ he also noted to the daughters of Russell that others had gone further than their father including Orson Hyde and that if similar events had happened in 1862 it would have gone unnoticed. Esplin concludes by reminding the reader of the difficulties of judging where there is a lack of crucial details of the story and the assessment is left to the reader. Although much of the article is drawn from secondary sources, the use of the relatively unknown 1920 letter from Russell’s youngest daughter Isabella to B. H. Roberts and use of other primary sources adds robustness to the scholarly approach. Arguably Esplin’s paper might be applied in a wider context with respect to the many accounts of those who have become removed in like manner from the historical narrative of the LDS Church. In these cases the minimising of their earlier contributions to the Church mainly go unknown, however, they are slowly coming to light in an era when sensitivities are less acute.

Arnold K. Garr in “George A. Smith’s Mission with the Twelve in England, 1839-41” reviews the role of George A. Smith and his experience of the Second Apostolic mission in Britain. This article provides a good quality survey of the mission and the general movements of Smith, particularly his work in North Staffordshire locally known as the ‘Potteries.’ Much of the account has been sourced from a reprint of George A. Smith’s journal, which was serialised in *The Instructor* in 1947, which provides a renewed introduction to the work of the youngest of the 1840 Apostles to a new generation of students and scholars, and hopefully will stimulate further research. One incident noted, provides an insight of some nineteenth-century British Mormons who initially adopted some unorthodox practices.

While Smith was making his way to the Staffordshire Potteries from Preston, he stopped in Manchester for a few days, where some local members of the Church met him at the train station and took him to the home of Alice Hardman where about 20 sisters met him. They had taken seriously Paul's admonition to "greet one another with a holy kiss" when "one of them, decidedly a little beauty prompted by the rest approached" to ask permission to kiss him. He was having nothing of it and commented that he had "never felt so foolish" and quickly ended the practice. There were a number of such practices that the newly established members of the Church seemed to cling to. It would have been enlightening to have included more interactions or experiences with local members, particularly the notable work that he carried out with Alfred Cordon, the first convert in Staffordshire, particularly as Cordon was the first branch president in Staffordshire and later the first Staffordshire Conference President. Arguably the narratives of the unknown grass roots members will become of a greater interest to scholars, as more records are made available and published electronically.

Whereas the first two papers dealt with personalities, the following two deal with a more geographical orientated matter. The third paper from Carol Wilkinson deals with "The Restoration of the Gadfield Elm Chapel" and the difficulties that developed in first acquiring the field and ruin, the subsequent forming of the Gadfield Elm Trust through to the dedication in 2000 by Jeffrey R. Holland and its later dedication in 2004 by Gordon B. Hinckley. Wilkinson details the history of the chapel, initially belonging to the United Brethren and then the LDS Church. Although the chapel was extensively used by early Mormon converts for worship services, within two years it was sold in order to provide necessary funds to aid emigration to America. This paper is a useful account of firsthand experiences of the restored Gadfield Elm chapel and thus provides other scholars access to private accounts of those involved.

Craig James Ostler provides a “Photo Essay of Church History Sites in Liverpool and the Ribble Valley” which follows an iconic journey from Liverpool to the Ribble Valley in Lancashire. He identifies images of prominent Mormon Lancashire landmarks including modern place markers as well as the Preston Temple in Chorley. The accompanying narrative is mainly a recounting of the established familiar experiences in Lancashire. The paper also includes some twentieth-century accounts such as Gordon B. Hinckley’s visits and recollections in Preston. These images will no doubt help stimulate the understanding of those who are interested in British Mormonism by identifying the physical locations with the historical accounts that are being researched.

The final paper to deal with nineteenth-century Mormonism is Clyde J. Williams, “‘More Value...Than All the Gold and Silver of England’: The Book of Mormon in Britain 1837-1852.” Williams has produced a very high quality analysis of the use of the Book of Mormon in nineteenth-century Britain and its often-limited availability. As Latter-day Saints consider the Book of Mormon as its ‘keystone’ it is still a little known entity as to how often it played in an epiphany or religious conversion for British Mormons. Most of the accounts highlighted are of those that were able to record their experience in a diary and consequently more likely to be able to read. One must ask, however, what of those who were unable to read, or failed to own or see a copy of the *Book of Mormon* prior to baptism, which in areas like Staffordshire and West Midlands was a large number, was it read to them or did they experience a post-baptism conversion? Williams has identified a remarkable amount of people who were somehow affected by reading the book, which they believed contributed to their conversion.

However, a number of those cited did not join the Church immediately but months or years later raising the need for further research into their actual conversion story. Clearly later conversions were not reliant solely upon their treatment of the Book of Mormon. During the years of 1837 - 1852 over 58,000 converts were baptised into the Church in Britain, based on those figures we know very little regarding

what the majority of their experiences resulted in. Williams, however, has provided a strong springboard for further research into an exciting and previously neglected area of Mormon concern.

The remaining seven papers deal with the twentieth-century experiences of the Mormonism in the British Isles. Richard E. Bennett and Jeffrey L. Jensen write a curious original paper dealing with the LDS response to the sinking of R.M.S. *Titanic* in 1912 entitled “‘Nearer, My God, to Thee’: The Sinking of the *Titanic*.” Considering its place in the anthology only a small part of the paper actually deals with the British experience, however, that said it is very informative and offers a new perspective regarding this infamous international disaster. The inclusion of accounts from the *Millennial Star* of British Mormons involved with benefit concerts and activities not only shows the charitable nature in response to the disaster, but also the musical talent that existed in London branches. Much is made of a non-Mormon passenger William Stead, editor of *Pall Mall Gazette* who prior to his departure on the *Titanic* challenged anti-Mormon sentiment through the media and his influence prior to his drowning. He may well have been considered a loss to the Church, as it was one less advocate to raise a voice against apparent unfounded bitterness that were so prolific against the Church at the time. Overall this paper provides a well-researched and interesting work.

Mary Jane Woodger offers an insightful treatment in “David O. McKay’s European Mission [1922-1924]: Seedbed for his Administration.” Woodger is best placed and well informed to write this paper as her previous publications have dealt in-depth with David O. McKay and his life. This paper provides a revealing study of McKay’s influence and organisation of the Church in Britain and Europe during difficult times in terms of struggling branches and increasing persecution. McKay’s significance is seen in the increased Church membership and expansion of the building programme of the Church making it a worldwide Church. Jerome M. Perkins, “The Story of the British Saints in Their Own Words”, follows this study. In 1987, Brigham Young University sponsored the oral history project, which commenced to gather and

document the experiences of British Mormons. Perkins' selections begin to bridge the historical gap between the written sources of the nineteenth-century and present day accounts. Each account describes experience of either conversion or the day-to-day living including the pulls of emigration and calls to serve full time missions for men in a time of persecution. As the role of the media became more important Alan K. Parrish in "Turning the Media Image of the Church in Great Britain, 1922-1933" details the struggles that the Church had in trying to promote itself through newspapers. With the efforts of Mormon leaders such as David O. McKay, James E. Talmage and John A. Widstoe some success was found which Parrish very competently details.

Like many millions of people during the years of 1939-1945, organisations were disrupted almost to the point of standstill; the LDS Church was no different. David F. Boone in "The King of King Needs a Few Men': British Saints during World War II" discusses the impact of the Second World War on the day-to-day running of the Church. Boone captures the essence of the organisational and administrative difficulties to the local Church. Boone discusses the difficulties with the Church programmes, priesthood leadership, increasing financial difficulties and the slowing of the missionary programme following return of all Americans to the United States. This valuable study provides an excellent introduction for further research. Following the ending of the war, Church programmes returned to normal and membership increased. This new period of growth encouraged a building programme of chapels and temples. Temple building is the focus of Richard O. Cowan's paper entitled "A Tale of Two Temples." From the decision of the First Presidency of the Church to build a temple near East Grinstead, Cowan rehearses the role of David O. McKay in purchasing the land and the subsequent development of the London Temple. More importantly for the membership of the Church there seems to have been a rededication to their beliefs and practices. This subsequently began a period of growth that began to establish a firm base to build on encouraging local members to remain in Britain rather than to emigrate. Cowan further discusses the London Temple follow-

ing remodelling and the second LDS temple at Chorley, Lancashire and considers the role of Gordon B. Hinckley, who as a newly appointed Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve assisted in the London Temple dedication in 1952, and as President of the Church rededicated the London Temple following its refurbishment in 1992 and the Preston Temple in 1998.

Concluding the volume is Alexander L. Baugh's "The Church in Twentieth-Century Great Britain: A Historical Overview." Baugh surveys the progress of the Church in Britain and adds to the volume by reviewing the 1960's with its greatly increasing membership on account of 'tools' such as the 'Baseball' baptisms, and the establishment of Church Educational programs such as seminary. The 70's saw the rise of what Baugh calls 'Osmondmania' which he describes the Osmond family as becoming indirect ambassadors for the Church. In the 1980's and 1990's the Church continued to grow and saw the building of a second temple and the establishment of a large purpose-built missionary training centre, replacing the smaller manor house in the grounds of the London Temple. Baugh helpfully provides some sociological studies that "suggest Mormons have essentially become part of the mainstream Christian society in Great Britain."

This volume is a welcome contribution to Mormon research in the British Isles and apart from the periodic devotional register it remains a scholarly contribution by experienced and respected academics.