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COUNTY COUNTS

Nineteenth-century church historians are greatly in the debt of the Hertfordshire Record Society for the latest volume in their publications, entitled *Religion in Hertfordshire, 1847-1851*, edited by Judith Burg. [xxxviii + 226pp, 1995, from the Honorary Treasurer, HRS, 14 Westbury Close, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 2NE, £19.60 home, £23 overseas]. This sets side by side William Upton’s ‘Statistics of the Religious Condition of the County of Hertfordshire’ with the enumerator’s returns for the Ecclesiastical Census of 1851 for the same county, enabling the reader to compare one individual’s evaluation of the Hertfordshire ecclesiastical scene with that produced by many informants in 1851. William Upton was son of James Upton, founding chairman of the Baptist Union and associate of Joseph Belcher, the first secretary of the reconstituted Union who was also much interested in collecting statistical data. It is not clear what prompted Upton’s collection of material. He was pastor of the Baptist Church in St Albans for more than forty years, and secretary of the Hertfordshire Union of Independents and Baptists, writing its jubilee

history in 1860. Part of his motivation seems to have been to indicate the strength of the dissenting presence in the county, and to identify those situations in which the Union could strategically take action through such means as tent campaigns, the founding of branch Sunday Schools, the hiring of rooms for services and the deployment of missionaries to visit in these areas. The effectiveness of this strategy is seen in the establishment of many village causes recorded by Upton - a remarkable tribute to this joint Baptist-Independent endeavour.

Upton's survey, though primarily the work of one hand, has the advantage of his wise judgement. His position is that of a warm evangelicalism, equally opposed to high ritual and high doctrine - Puseyism and hyper-Calvinism. The Vicar of the parish church of Hemel Hempstead is characterised as offering 'direct Puseyism', and the curate at Boxmoor Episcopal Chapel 'rank Puseyism', a combination which had served to make some Anglicans attend dissenting chapels. Of Tring he writes, 'This place painfully illustrates the paralysing influence of Ultra Sentiment', noting the well-attended first Baptist church as offering 'Very High Calvinism', and the Baptist Chapel at Long Marston presenting merely 'High' Calvinism, whilst the Baptist Chapel at New Mill is 'high, but less so than most around'. The Anglican equivalent is presumably the 'Evangelical, bigotted' incumbent of the District Church in Hoddesdon. The Welwyn Independent and Baptist [Ebenezer] Chapels, reveal the cause of his concern with high doctrine: both 'Ultra-Calvinistic. No preaching to *sinners*'. This was doubtless also true of Gilead, Watford, simply described as 'Antinomian'. Of Welwyn he adds: 'An awfully necessitous place, the light in it is darkness', and suggests the desirability of placing an evangelist there who would not find it easy: 'saints (so called) would sneer at him, but sinners would be converted.' This marked antipathy to hyper-Calvinism is the more interesting given that William Upton's father produced an edition of John Brine's works.

Church parties were apparently less well defined in 1847 than later, leading Upton to note a number of interesting combinations. Dr Lee, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge and incumbent of Barley, is described as 'Evangelical, amiable, Catholic'. Elsewhere the ministry seems to move in different directions: the Revd John Smith, Rector of Baldock, 'read Evangelical sermons' though of 'doubtful piety' and employed a curate who was 'Rather Puseyistic'. Cheshunt is a 'wealthy, respectable, high-church parish', though its clergy are 'Truly pious and Evangelical'. Again, the characteristics of the ministry at Hatfield are described as 'generally reputed Evangelical but rigidly high church'. The ministry at St Stephen, Park Street, is 'Puseyistically Evangelical'. More often the judgment is either an applaudatory 'useful' or a condemnatory 'useless': the Primitive Methodists in St Albans are described as 'Energetic but wild'.

The overall impression of the two calculations is remarkably close: best attendances according to Upton are 41,430 Anglican and 25,250 nonconformist, whilst the Census provides 40,500 Anglican and 27,800 nonconformity attendances. An easier system of cross-referencing from one set of statistics to the other, rather

than by way of place/name index, would have been helpful, even if incomplete. The Hertfordshire Census Returns are of most significance for their statistical import, other information given by way of comment being sparse, save in the area of pews, weather, finance and illness [which Upton gives as explanation for lower than average attendance in his own church, the 420 at morning worship in 1851 not matching the 600 in 1847]. Rebound, however, throws up a church described as 'Primitive Baptist' which Upton advises was 'hyper-Calvinist'.

The editor's introduction is helpful though I would question her distinction between ministers, 'otherwise described as preachers, deacons or priests', and officials designated as either steward or manager. With one exception those returns made by women were all for Methodist churches.

Given the riches of these two returns now made available in printed form, might the Hertfordshire Record Society also print the county series for the registration of dissenting chapels and meeting houses, as provided for Staffordshire and more recently for Wiltshire? Cross-referencing between the three documents could prove very rewarding.

SOCIETY NEWS

At the Baptist Assembly in Blackpool, the Baptist Historical Society will hold an Open Forum on Wednesday, 1 May 1996, 2.15 to 4.15, at North Shore Methodist Church. The subject will be *The 3Rs of Local Baptist History: recording, writing and retaining*. It will include some consideration of oral history. All members of the Society have a potential role in this work: come and hear what you could be doing and tell us about initiatives already taken.

The Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday, 6 July, at Stoneygate Baptist Church, Leicester. Dr Rod Ambler will speak on 'General Baptists in Lincolnshire' and the Revd Thornton Elwyn on '18th-Century Calvinistic Baptists in Northamptonshire'.

In April 1994 the *Quarterly* carried a review of *Chard Baptists*. The author, Malcolm Bonnington, wrote to draw attention to two errors: his name had been given incorrectly as Michael and the date 1742 should have been 1842. The sub-editor can only apologize for these errors, and for the delay in getting his letter to her to make these corrections. Anyone wanting a copy (£14.95 + p&p) should write to Dr Malcolm Bonnington, 16 Elizabeth Way, Chard, TA20 1BY, as Forum Books is no longer operating at the address originally given.

And there is still time to enter the Payne Memorial Essay competition - October's 'last chance' was premature! See inside back cover.