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David Lazell, *Gipsy from the Forest*, Gwasg Bryntirion Press 1997, ISBN 1-85049-132 1, 256pp. £7.99.

Rodney 'Gipsy' Smith (1860-1947) was a gifted British evangelist who worked initially for the Salvation Army but later became a Methodist. Through his unique combination of preaching and singing he became well known internationally, particularly in the United States. David Lazell has devoted some years to the study of Gipsy Smith and this book is a thorough revision of a previous volume produced in 1870. It does not claim to be a scholarly treatment, but it provides important insights into aspects of the history of evangelism in the earlier twentieth century. Smith had connections with Methodism's Cliff College, and more work remains to be done on Wesleyan spirituality in this period. The book has a sympathetic and illuminating foreword by Thomas Acton, Reader in Romani Studies at the University of Greenwich, who notes that since the 1970s Smith has been rediscovered by leaders of Romany evangelicals.

IAN RANDALL *Tutor in Church History and Spirituality, Spurgeon's College*

## REVIEWS

**B.G. Owens, *The Ilston Book: Earliest Register of Welsh Baptists*, The National Library of Wales, 1996, cxii + 142pp, ISBN 0-907158-87-0, £19-50.**

Historians of Dissent owe a debt of gratitude to those who make available source material. This book is a significant addition to the all-too-short list of early Baptist records, alongside Hexham and Fenstanton, Broadmead (Bristol), and Chesham, the latter published by the Baptist Historical Society.

It is the story of the book that bore witness to the endeavours of John Myles to establish Calvinistic Baptist congregations in Wales, and after the Restoration crossed the Atlantic with Myles to Swansea, Mass. The records were unknown in Wales for nearly a century and Joshua Thomas had to revise substantially the first edition of *Hanes y Bedyddwr ...* (1778) when, through Isaac Backus, he became aware of the document. At the end of the nineteenth century the efforts of Welsh Baptist historians to establish its whereabouts were hindered by false trails and hearsay, until in 1929 it was located in a bank vault in Massachusetts. It was a seminal work often quoted yet rarely seen; only re-crossing the Atlantic piecemeal and in transcriptions, some more accurate than others, until facsimiles were made available in Wales in the 1930s.

This is the reconstruction that B.G. Owens unfolds in the first part, where he discusses methodology, pagination and the search for the manuscript, historical detail being supplied through footnotes. It is an exhaustive treatment. There follows the complete text (for the first time in English) with membership list, church records, association meetings (*vide* B.R. White's *Association Records*), an account of the church's formation and sundry correspondence. Finally come three appendices of related material.

It is the breadth of the material that gives this book particular interest, as the reader sees the church developing simultaneously its Baptist identity, its links to other local Baptist fellowships and to the wider Baptist community. In John Myles' words, the records show how this pioneering community emerged and how personality clashes put its mettle to the test. The need for fellowship and counsel are grounded in a network of Baptist churches in Wales. The letters in particular locate these dispersed communities within a supportive relationship nurtured by the London church that had sponsored Myles' initial activities. This work has the hallmarks of the author's years of patient labour. Certainly a bibliophile's book, it should be in the bibliography of every serious student of seventeenth-century Dissent.

**STEPHEN COPSON** *Secretary, Baptist Historical Society*

**Muriel James**, *Religious Liberty on Trial: Hanserd Knollys - Early Baptist Hero*, Providence House Publishers, Tennessee, 1997. xix + 204pp.

Mrs James is an established author on transactional analysis and now she has turned her hand to Baptist history. The impetus emerged from some family history study and primarily the book is aimed at American students generally unfamiliar with the course of English history. With this in mind Mrs James seeks to set the life of Hanserd Knollys against the background of his times and show that his beliefs, and religious dissent in general, did not take shape in a vacuum. Knollys was a pioneer Dissenter and one of the small number of clergy to embrace Baptist convictions. The desire to cover so much context in a relaxed style on occasion gives rise to the sort of compressed narrative, but there is good spadework done on the background in Lincolnshire, Hanserd's maternal and paternal families are profitably examined, and his time in America is well described. The author highlights the struggle for religious freedom in the face of religious or political absolutists in the Old Country and the New World.

There are places in the book, however, where Mrs James' lack of familiarity with English terminology or the significance of Baptist vocabulary shows. Sometimes she is too ready to take seventeenth-century authors literally - if Daniel Featley excoriated Anabaptists it does not mean there were members of the Continental Reformation movement in England in 1646 - and this includes what Knollys himself wrote in his autobiography. Conversely the most significant claim is underplayed. It is asserted as a matter of fact, and without supporting reference, that Hanserd took the living of Scartho, Lincolnshire, in 1648. If this were true, historians would look in a very different light at the man who had to all intents renounced his orders and steadfastly held to his Baptist convictions, setting himself beyond the pale of the established church that had been home to so many of his forefathers, and indeed his son.

It is encouraging to see a modern biography of Hanserd Knollys in print. The attempt to set him and the early English Baptists in the weft and warp of political and ecclesiastical currents of the late Middle Ages and early modern period is to be applauded, and the warmth of feeling the author has for her 'hero' is palpable, but the tapestry is broad and it is to be hoped that those whose interest is caught by the period will be motivated to delve for greater detail.

**STEPHEN COPSON**

**Paul Weller**, *Religion in the UK: a multi-faith directory*, is now available in a second revised edition, ISBN 9-901437-68-9, £29-50 + £3-50 p&p, from the University of Derby, Mickleover, Derby DE3 5GX.

**Kenneth W. Bennett**, *God at Work with Men: 80 Years of the Baptist Men's Movement*, BMM, n.d. but 1997, 80pp, £2-50.

The Movement began during the First World War as the Baptist branch of the National Laymen's Missionary Movement. The founders were members of the BMS General Committee, and their aim was to stimulate interest in and raise funds for missionary work. The organization has always been ready to develop new ventures. One of its success stories is Operation Agri, which began in 1961 although the author reminds us that William Carey founded the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India. The Baptist Housing Association (initially the BMM Housing Association) was launched in 1966.

The author has been associated with the Baptist Men's Movement all his life and that is both the strength and the weakness of his writing. It is a strength because he has known personally most of the leading characters and he has been part of the story himself. His obvious affection for the people and concern for the work comes through. His closeness to the subject is a weakness because he cannot stand back and assess BMM in the wider context of Baptist and other work over the last eighty years. There are thirty photographs, but unfortunately no index. Nevertheless the story should be an inspiration to present readers and the wealth of detail will be valuable to future historians writing about Baptists in the twentieth century.

**BRIAN BOWERS** *Member, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church*

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### **Baptist Historical Society Summer School 1998**

Members are reminded that it is time to book for the Summer School at Westminster College, Cambridge, 16-19 July 1998. Speakers include Professor Ronald Clements, Dr John Coffey, Revd Kenneth Dix, Revd Ruth Gouldbourne, Revd Peter Shepherd, Dr Brian Stanley and Dr David Thompson. Inclusive conference fee £100 (day visitors £20). Booking forms available from the Secretary, Revd Stephen Copson, 60 Strathmore Avenue, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1ST, tel: 01462 431816.

### **Cumulative Indexes**

Indexes to Volumes XXI-XXXi and XXXII-XXXVI are available on disc in ASCII format, price £10-00 each, from the Treasurer, Revd T.S.H. Elwyn, 28 Dowthorpe Hill, Earls Barton, Northampton, NN6 0PB.

NB: In bibliographic references in the *Baptist Quarterly*, if the place of publication is not given, London should be assumed.