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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

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# THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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#### CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	313
H. HOWARD WILLIAMS: Preacher, Pastor - Prophet without honour? Faith Bowers	316
DENOMINATIONAL RENEWAL: A Study in English Baptist Church Life and Growth 1901-1906 Peter Shepherd	336
DOWNGRADE DOWN UNDER: Conflict and Cohesion among New Zealand Baptists Martin Sutherland	351
REVIEW	364
NOTES	315, 335

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#### NORFOLK, 1851

The Norfolk Record Society, in a handsome presentation, adds to the number of counties which have published the details of the 1851 Religious Census, an invaluable tool for all nineteenth-century church historians. A series of maps summarizing the findings make an immediate impact: the small size of Norfolk parishes, the strength of Methodism, and Primitive Methodism in particular, across a wide range of rural as well as urban parishes, and the very limited Catholic presence. Baptists are well represented except in the north west and in a swathe of mid-county parishes stretching down from Cromer to Thetford. Ninety-two Baptist chapels made a return for the census, calculated as representing 8.2% of worshippers as compared with Congregationalism's 5.2% and Methodism's 31.3%, giving nonconformity an overall figure of 44.6% for the county.

A number of returns are of special interest: at Ormesby the minister reveals that his congregation has greatly benefited from the Wesleyan Reformers' difficulties with connexional bureaucracy, whilst at Little Fransham the Baptists had preaching

in a cottage used for Wesleyan worship once a month. At Neatishead the minister, William Spurgeon, boldly states: 'No service is performed in the aforementioned chapel but by one William Spurgeon', which is perhaps a Baptist voice indicating that the circuit system of the Methodists is not for them. The Smallburgh return appends a special note saying that evening worship had been cancelled so that the congregation could attend the Stalham Wesleyan chapel to hear Dr Shulhorf, a converted Jew, who was preaching sermons in favour of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews; its return shows an average attendance of 20 inflated to 149 for the occasion. In like manner St Clement's Particular Baptist in Norwich explains an afternoon congregation of 400 as a united service. Branch Sunday Schools and Cottage Meetings are evidenced by a number of entries, especially that for Happisburgh: 'I am in doubt about the entry of 60 sittings in this place of worship. It is in fact the large kitchen or common room of a cottage, the occupier of which has kindly permitted it to be registered and occupied for the purposes of an evening service. A moveable desk and a few moveable forms and candlesticks are all the furniture for this purpose - and whatever other sitting room is wanted beyond what the forms will supply is regularly supplied by the chairs of the cottage and others borrowed at the moment from neighbouring cottages. Last night we might perhaps have made room for three more had we wanted therefore as we had 57 persons present I have entered 60 sittings.' Class comment is embraced by the return for New Catton: 'We are Exceedingly poor In Temporal Circumstances, opposed to popery and all kinds of Error, Lovers of our Country from our Dear Queen to the poor Rustic, hoping you are doing all in the fear of the Lord through Jesus Christ.' At Bacton, Sunday School Anniversary was the occasion for catechizing the children, whilst 'in recent months it is reported that the average afternoon attendance almost doubled on account of 8 lectures on Popery just concluded'. The returns for Holt and Thornage are made by S.A. Tipple, the liberal Baptist who was to have a remarkable metropolitan ministry at Upper Norwood. Baptist returns commonly refer to the importance of the voluntary principle, but they are not alone in appealing to the weather in explaining lower than average attendances. At St Mary's Norwich George Gould returns 585, including scholars, at morning worship, and 346 in the evening. Orford Hill was converted from a factory to a chapel in 1833: it boasted 420 at morning worship and 450 in the evening, 'with 150 chiefly ... servants, invalids and persons who cannot attend on any other part of the Sabbath attending in the afternoon.' At Hemblington the place of worship is emphatically denied as a separate building, with the additional explanation that it was part of a carpenter's shop seating twenty, which must have made for certain biblical reverberations! At Claxton, which is shown as having a population of 186 and an Anglican attendance of 65, the Baptists claimed 500 morning worshippers and 600 in the evening. At Fakenham, the minister claimed those in fellowship exceeded the 119 + 174 + 90 attending worship but does not indicate by how many. In a county where free grace and election stood in increasing

tension, the records of Strict Baptists begin to separate themselves from other Particular Baptists, though it is not generally clear which General Baptists are New Connexion and which Old Connexion - Stow Bardolph General Baptist Church even managed to make its return on an Anglican form! The Chapel at Upwell seems to have some foreknowledge of how Horace Mann would attempt to convert attendances into attenders and so protests its position by observing, 'As the congregations of this chapel are composed more or less of persons who attend only one of the three services on the Sunday, the average number of attendants, considered in the aggregate may be estimated at 200': in fact the averages, excepting scholars, were 90 + 130 + 130, so the claim does not seem extravagant.

The introduction is generally well done, though this reviewer has some difficulty with parts of it, especially that on dissent where it is not clear that the figures given, which do not conform with those given on page 14, refer only to rural dissent, though this seems likely from the nature of the footnote reference. But one is extremely grateful for the volume and would commend the task of completing this series to those counties who have not yet published their section of the religious census.

[Eds., J. Ede and N. Virgoe, *Religious Worship in Norfolk: The 1851 Census of Accommodation and Attendance at Worship*, Norfolk Record Society, Volume LXII, 1998, 402pp, £15 + £2.50 p&p, available from: Mrs Barbara Miller MBE, 17 Christchurch Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 2AE, Tel: 01603 453004.]

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### OLD CHAPEL PLANS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, through arrangements with individuals, with Capel and other professional organizations, is co-ordinating the recording of the meeting houses and chapel buildings of Wales. We are at present carrying out a search for old photographs, drawn plans and specifications relating to buildings of 18th to early 20th-century date. Old photographs and original architect's or builder's proposals/working drawings and specifications, are occasionally retained on the premises or amongst Monthly Meeting or Presbytery records. These may relate to present or to previous meeting houses but, to us, such documents are invaluable in building up a picture of the approaches of previous generations to meeting house and chapel design and construction. We would be most interested to hear of any such documents and to note their existence and whereabouts on our Welsh chapels database. At a later stage in the project, may we ask to copy selected material for our public archive? We shall be delighted to hear from any ministers or church secretaries who can help us!

**Chapels Recording Project, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales . Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion yng Nghymru, Plas Crug, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 1NJ. Telephone: (01970) 621212.**