

**FISHERS OF MEN:  
THE 1921 RELIGIOUS REVIVAL – ITS CAUSE,  
CONTEXT AND TRANSMISSION**  
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Between 1976 and 1978, the Gaelic linguistic scholar, Nancy Dorian, of Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, who is best known for her work on East Sutherland Gaelic, conducted an important investigation into the social life of the fishing community of East Sutherland. Her work was subsequently published in 1985 in a very valuable book entitled *The Tyranny of Tide*. Her principal informants were Mr and Mrs A.K. Sutherland, who lived in Golspie. In conversation with Dr Dorian, Mrs Sutherland alluded to one of the bad seasons which were experienced by the herring fishermen and other fisherfolk who followed the 'silver darlings' round the east coast to Lowestoft and Yarmouth:

One year, it was an awful poor season. There were no herring, an' no money, an' ye know what happened that year? Everybody was so poor, and there were a revival. An' everybody was converted.... 'Twas the poverty an' no money or nothing.<sup>1</sup>

The reference to 'everybody' embraced the substantial squad of fishergirls and coopers and other workers who accompanied the fishing fleet southwards in pursuit of the herring. The year in question was 1921. In November of that year, the Scottish fishermen endured one of the worst seasons on record. Bad weather around the East Anglian coast, combined with an absence of fish shoals, ensured that the fishing crews remained on shore for long periods. As a result, the supporting teams of fishergirls and coopers were unusually idle in Yarmouth. This was the cause of the poverty to which Mrs Sutherland alluded.

At the same time, the fisherfolk experienced a profound religious revival which worked its way northwards from Lowestoft to Fraserburgh and beyond.<sup>2</sup> It is particularly interesting that Mrs Sutherland makes a direct link between the poverty of the season and the appearance of the revival, in which, by her account, 'everybody was converted'. Here we have

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy C. Dorian, *The Tyranny of Tide* (Ann Arbor, 1985), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent general account is Stanley C. Griffin, *A Forgotten Revival: East Anglia and NE Scotland – 1921* (Bromley, 1992). This is a well written and sensitive book, to which I am much indebted. See also Jackie Ritchie, *Floods upon the Dry Ground: God working among fisherfolk* (Peterhead, 1983).

the view of someone who witnessed events at first hand, but evidently stood outside the revival, or was by now sufficiently distanced from it, to be able to explain it in this way.

### **The Chiliasm of Despair**

Mrs Sutherland is not alone in ascribing the cause of religious enthusiasm to economic uncertainties. It is common among secular historians of certain schools (often political or economic) to ascribe religious enthusiasm of any kind to political or social uncertainty or dysfunction. Thus Dr Callum Brown writes of the east-coast revivals of the 1920s:

Slumps in fishing and in coal in the early 1920s, together with coal strikes in 1921 and 1926, instigated the growth of revivalist and teetotal movements encompassing different evangelical sects and temperance organisations. At Inverallochy on the Moray Firth in 1921, the fishing depression brought 200 men to bible readings at the harbour; a journalist reported that 'after each parable had been explained they knelt down wringing their hands and swaying their bodies to and fro.'<sup>3</sup>

While duly noting the evangelical flavour of the communities which experienced such revivals, and thus their propensity to revivals, Brown nevertheless gives primacy to economic factors in 'instigating' the growth of revivalist movements. Brown adheres to broadly the same theory as John Lowe Duthie, who regards the difficult economic circumstances of the fishing communities of the North-east as the main reason for 'the fishermen's religious revival'. Duthie summarises his theory as follows:

A sense of relative deprivation among the fisher folk helps explain the revival as well as its millennial offshoot. A buoyant pre-war market and a war-time boom in earnings were followed by the anxieties of 1919 and 1920. These bred unprecedented conflict throughout the herring industry. After two years' anxiety came the hopeless despair of an unrelentingly disastrous year. Comparing their past with their present circumstances, the fishing communities felt sorely deprived. Their loss was not only material. The patent uselessness of strikes and stoppages to improve their position in 1921, by getting the Government to repeat the guarantee scheme or by maintaining their bargaining power with the curers, hit at their sense of their own status

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<sup>3</sup> Callum G. Brown, 'Religion and Secularisation', in A. Dickson and J.H. Treble (eds), *People and Society in Scotland, Volume III, 1914-90* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 59.

and self-worth. Difficult or poor times, and the human problems they engendered, were one reason for the religious activity.<sup>4</sup>

Like Brown, Duthie accepts that there are other dimensions to revival:

Religious enthusiasm and millennial dreams cannot be reduced simply to a matter of economics. In their straitened circumstances, the fishing communities could have become apathetic and demoralised. Their psychological and cultural make-up dictated otherwise.<sup>5</sup>

The key factors in the fishing communities' 'psychological and cultural make-up', Duthie argues, were their 'deep emotionalism', deriving from their dangerous occupation, their earlier experience of religious revival in 1859-60, and the 'psychology of the crowd'. Fiery preachers were able to take advantage of 'jam-packed congregations' to instil their message deeply into a group of intense listeners who shared a common set of worries. The revival, *in toto*, 'satisfied the intense yearning for the spiritual-cum-psychological comfort of an easier future – in the next world, if not this one.'<sup>6</sup>

Explanations of this kind, which put religious revivals down largely to economic uncertainty, psychological predisposition, manipulation of the masses, and 'pie-in-the-sky' optimism, are fairly common among secular historians. Duthie's theory echoes the arguments of the radical historian, E.P. Thompson, with regard to early Methodist revivalism; it was he who famously coined the phrase, 'the chiasm of despair', for such movements.<sup>7</sup> 'Portmanteau theories' which link spiritual experience to secular dislocation may be convenient, but they are often just too handy, too easy to take off the ideological shelf. Their validity as an overarching framework is discredited by the simple, self-evident fact that economic or social changes, in and of themselves, do not automatically produce spiritual movements. If economic determinism were the main cause, the British Isles ought to have produced a significant amount of religious revivals in the 1920s and 1930s, and no small number in the last twenty-five years, but this has not happened. Revivals are, in reality, complex phenomena, and must be seen in a number of different perspectives.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Lowe Duthie, 'The Fishermen's Religious Revival', *History Today* 33 (1983), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 411.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 919, where Thompson states (in response to his critics):

Economic circumstances may indeed be one consideration, but there are others, including the theological and cultural contexts of these movements, in their wider (national) and narrower (local) perspectives. To ascribe the cause and progress of a religious movement to one particular factor, or to assign pre-eminent significance to that factor, is potentially dangerous, and may say more about the biases of the commentator than the circumstances of the revival.

The aim of the present paper is to demonstrate the different perspectives in which the 1921 revival may be viewed. The paper does not intend to add substantially to what is already known about the course of the 1921 revival. Rather, its aim is to re-assemble existing information, so as to set the revival in a number of different contexts, all of which have a bearing on the initiation and maintenance of the movement, and also on its ultimate exclusion from the mainstream of British evangelical life.<sup>9</sup>

As has already been suggested, we should not dismiss economic factors out of court. They may well be part of the reason for the manner in which the fishing communities of the North-east accepted revival movements. The loss of 'human props' no doubt helped to give a sharp relevance to the scriptural truth that 'here we have no continuing city'. Life was also fraught with particular dangers for fishermen. Furthermore, in the case of the 1921 revival, the periods of idleness resulting from the poor herring season undoubtedly allowed the fisherfolk to devote much more time to attending religious meetings, and it also seems entirely feasible that the loss of income during that period caused many to think about their lack of human security. To that extent, economic circumstances may have been a catalyst in the movement, but the poor season was not, in itself, the root cause of the revival. There is more than a semantic difference between 'instigation' and 'facilitation'. The 'instigation' of a revival may lie beyond the community which absorbs it, and the reasons for its absorption and facilitation in that community may be quite different from the reasons which triggered its 'instigation'.

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'Revivalism is not a phenomenon which admits of a single hold-all explanation.'

<sup>9</sup> For wider discussion of revivals, see (for Scotland) D.E. Meek, 'Revivals', in Nigel M. de S. Cameron et al. (eds), *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 711-18; and (for the British evangelical context) D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 14-17.

**The religious context: a national setting**

The chronology of the 1921 movement as a whole shows that the economic theory does not stand up to detailed scrutiny. When the Scottish fishing fleet arrived in Yarmouth in the late autumn of 1921, the religious meetings which generated the revival were already under way. These were associated particularly with Lowestoft, where a Baptist minister from London, Arthur Douglas Brown, had been preaching since early March of that year.<sup>10</sup> By autumn, however, Brown and other preachers were busy in Ipswich and had reached Yarmouth itself, just as the main Scottish herring fleets were coming in. What was the religious setting in which Brown worked?

The impulse which brought the religious meetings to Lowestoft, and triggered the revival, was provided primarily by the desire of Lowestoft churches to replenish their numbers in the difficult years after the First World War. To that end the churches, notably London Road Baptist Church, were holding special meetings with revival as their ultimate goal.<sup>11</sup>

The desire for revival following the First World War was related not only to the wish to fill empty pews, but also to a new sense of apocalyptic urgency which the war had generated. As Dr David Bebbington has observed in his splendid account of Evangelicalism in modern Britain, 'the apocalyptic atmosphere of wartime encouraged prophetic speculation', and evangelicals of national stature were 'reading the signs' (including the Balfour Declaration) with a view to anticipating the second coming of Christ. As a consequence, the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement was formed to promote a premillennial understanding of the Christian future.<sup>12</sup> According to this perspective, the second coming of Christ would be followed by his thousand year rule with the saints. As the world would darken before Christ returned, mission to the unconverted was

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<sup>10</sup> Aspects of Brown's life are discussed in Griffin, *Forgotten Revival*, who also gives some biographical details. Brown (1874-1940) was minister in Herne Bay, Bristol, and London (Ramsden Road Baptist Church), and latterly, from 1934, in Frinton-on-Sea, Essex. He was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1929-30. A full assessment of Brown's life and influence would be very useful.

<sup>11</sup> Griffin, *Forgotten Revival*, pp. 12-16.

<sup>12</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp. 192-3.

stimulated, and became a matter of the greatest urgency. This urgency was reflected in events in Lowestoft.

If the premillennial understanding of the second coming of Christ had not already reached Lowestoft, it did so in the preaching of Douglas Brown. Brown was a member of the Advent Testimony movement.<sup>13</sup> His sermons show that he placed considerable emphasis on the second advent. The same teaching was reaching some of the Scottish fishing-ports before the 1921 revival, through the efforts of the body known as the Pilgrim Preachers. The Pilgrim Preachers were active in Wick at the beginning of October 1921, just as the fishing fleet was arriving in Yarmouth.<sup>14</sup> In many of the east-coast ports, the type of understanding promoted by the Pilgrim Preachers and the Advent Testimony movement would not have been new; Brethren groups, which were strong in the east-coast ports, had long espoused a premillennial view of Christ's second coming. The Salvation Army was also a potent influence.<sup>15</sup>

The fishing-ports of the east coast of Scotland and England thus shared in a new sense of spiritual anticipation which was conducive to revival in the early 1920s. This futuristic view of Christian destiny was, however, linked to a sense of history, and to an intensely conservative awareness of the pivotal role of revival in creating the Christian communities of the past. In the Scottish fishing ports, there was a specially deep awareness of revival. From the time of the 1859 revival, east-coast fishermen were well used to periodic visitations of what they would have regarded as divine favour. Revival was part of their identity; it was central to the Brethren communities in the east-coast fishing ports.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as Neil Dickson has so ably shown, the Brethren movement in Scotland had been rooted in the north-east in the context of the 1859 revival, which continued into the early 1860s.<sup>17</sup> Revival, then, was programmed in to the mind-set of many east-coast fishermen. In revival, they re-lived their origins as a Christian

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Ritchie, *Floods*, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that, in addition to Brethren, several other evangelical bodies were active in the fishing ports of the north-east; see Robert Smith, *One Foot in the Sea* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 78-87.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Neil Dickson, 'Scottish Brethren: Division and Wholeness 1838-1916', in Harold W. Rowdon (ed.), *Scottish Brethren 1838-1916 and other Papers*, Christian Brethren Review, 41 (Exeter, 1990), pp. 5-41.

community; revival enabled them to grow as a community, and helped them to survive in the face of adversity. Revivals were a special reminder of the Lord's presence among them, taking them back to their foundations and giving them hope for the future.<sup>18</sup>

It is not therefore necessary or accurate to ascribe the 1921 revival which came to the east-coast ports solely to economic determinism. There were special emphases in the theological tenor of the post-war years which heightened people's desire for spiritual awakening, and the pro-revival mind-set of the fishing communities specially predisposed them to the absorption of spiritual awakening and, indeed, continuous re-awakening. When the spark was lit, the spiritual impulses ran through traditional and well-prepared channels, and were moulded by the social setting of the communities.

### **The social setting: a community context**

The fishing communities were tailor-made for the absorption and transmission of revival impulses when these were stimulated. The fishing communities of the east coast, in both England and Scotland, formed a special 'extended family' which was bonded by a common occupation. Very close bonding existed within the different segments of that 'extended family'; individual families often owned, and crewed, their own boats, and networks of kith and kin ran deep in the communities.<sup>19</sup> When revival movements came, the crews of individual boats could be converted in a group, and the impulses would spread through the family network and further afield. The *Northern Ensign* for 21 December 1921 reported the story of the Wick fishing-boat, the 'Mizpah', which

is manned entirely by men who have professed Christianity, and their departure last week for the Stornoway fishing was a scene of the greatest interest in the harbour. The boat sailed with the Salvation Army flag flying from her masthead and the crew and their friends sang revival hymns.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Such optimism was undoubtedly a great comfort within communities which drew their livelihoods from dangerous occupations such as fishing and mining. A sense of the supernatural, in all its manifestations, was also a deeply ingrained feature of such communities.

<sup>19</sup> Ritchie, *Floods*, has numerous references to such networks.

<sup>20</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p. 105.

The impulses were spread in a number of ways, but of fundamental importance was the sharing of experience. The sharing of experience, in song and story, was central to the fishing communities, in both the Highlands and Islands and the east coast. Religious experience was readily shared, especially when the sharer belonged to, or empathised with, the social group. The crews of the boats which returned from Yarmouth told what had happened to them while they were in the south, and this led to further conversions in the Scottish fishing ports.<sup>21</sup>

The absorption of the 1921 revival within the fishing communities was facilitated by the fact that the key preachers were able to empathise closely with the fisherfolk. This is evident in the case of Douglas Brown. Although Brown was primarily a Baptist minister in an unlikely urban setting in London, there was another dimension to him. He was, in fact, a seafarer himself. He did not enjoy good health, and, in order to improve his health, he used to sign on as a sailor with the White Star Line. His manse in London had a ship's wheel on the landing. When he arrived in Lowestoft, he was in poor health, but his health improved markedly in the course of the revival.<sup>22</sup> He was, of course, in his element, and he knew how to make his sermons relevant to the world of the fisherfolk. When preaching in the Seamen's Bethel in Lowestoft during the first week of his mission, he spoke of Peter walking on the water to Christ.<sup>23</sup>

The compatibility of preacher and listeners is saliently underlined in the man who is particularly closely associated with the first stage of the revival in Yarmouth, namely the Wicker called Jock Troup, a cooper who had come south with the fleet. Troup, who later lost his job as a cooper, probably because of his intense involvement in the movement in Yarmouth, epitomised the essence of the Scottish east-coast fishermen. He spoke their language, and sang their songs. He was a rough diamond of a man, but he was precisely the person to make an impression on the fisherfolk in the initial stages of the movement, when it touched the Scottish contingent in Yarmouth.<sup>24</sup> When Troup moved north to Fraserburgh, Douglas Brown (already familiar with Yarmouth) took his

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 72: 'There were impressive scenes at Hopeman and Burghhead as the men returned from Yarmouth, and likewise among the women as they made their journey home by train and bus.'

<sup>22</sup> Griffin, *Forgotten Revival*, pp. 81, 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-66.



place, and did so most acceptably.<sup>25</sup> When the movement took root in individual Scottish fishing ports, local workers and fishermen who were also preachers, such as David Cordiner in Peterhead, assumed importance as leaders of the revival.<sup>26</sup> Like Jock Troup, these men had an intimate knowledge of their own communities, and could address their people in appropriate cultural terms.

### **The making of the message: a cultural context**

We can argue, then, that the social setting of the fishing communities, and the close matching between the preachers and their audiences, were of significance in the transmission of revival impulses in 1921. But it is also important to observe that the Christian message at the heart of the revival was accepted, and readily absorbed, because it was moulded to fit the conventions of the fishing communities. The New Testament itself showed the early disciples following their occupation as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, with Christ occasionally accompanying them. It was but a short step to transfer the message to the sea-going context which the fishermen knew so well; in so doing, the fishermen made it uniquely their own. As the *People's Journal* reported in December 1921:

At testimony meetings these weather-hardened fishermen speak of 'The Great Captain', call Christ 'The Skipper', or [speak] of 'Having the Pilot on board' because they are bound for the 'Port of Heaven'. The chart is the Bible, so with such a chart and such a captain, 'We canna' gang wrang', they say.<sup>27</sup>

The fishermen had a predilection for hymnody which expressed their feelings in images derived from seafaring, and these became immensely popular in times of revival, in the early 1920s and at other periods. Their favourites included 'Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?'. They also composed their own hymns, with resounding images of seafaring which were applied to the spiritual voyage of life.<sup>28</sup>

In these ways, through testimonies, sermons and hymns which drew on sea-going metaphors, the Christian faith was contextualised in a manner which was directly relevant to the day-to-day experiences of the community. By this means the fisherfolk articulated what, to them, would

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ritchie, *Floods*, pp. 45-53.

<sup>27</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>28</sup> For an example of a local fisherman's hymn, composed by John Innes of Portknockie, see *ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

have been the main, if not the sole, reason for the revival, namely that the sovereign God of heaven and earth, in his grace and glory, had touched them savingly with the power of his spirit.

### **Marginalising the movement: a ministerial setting**

One of the great hopes created by the 'fisherfolk's revival', as it developed, was the possibility that it might instigate a wider national revival of religion within the British Isles. This hope was not, however, realised, and it is worth exploring why the revival remained 'marginal' to Britain and also to evangelicalism itself.

The most significant factor, both in introducing the movement briefly to a wider evangelical constituency, and in ensuring that in the longer term it remained safely on the geographical and spiritual periphery, was the Keswick Convention, a major annual gathering of evangelicals, initially predominantly Anglican, in the Lake District. Established in 1875 with the aim of promoting practical holiness, the convention provided a platform for prominent evangelical speakers.<sup>29</sup> The speakers often had distinctive doctrinal emphases, and the extent to which they swayed the Keswick Convention could influence not only the shape of 'Keswick' but also trends and patterns within British evangelicalism.<sup>30</sup> The 'East Anglian Revival', as it was known in England, drew the attention of key leaders of the Keswick Convention, and the report of the revival given in 1921 created considerable excitement. The ministry of Douglas Brown was brought within the Keswick network during the autumn of 1921, and in 1922 he took the morning Bible Readings at the main convention. His pivotal role in the East Anglian Revival raised expectations, and his addresses ran true to form. As a result, what Dr Ian Randall has termed 'an explosion of spiritual energy' burst upon Keswick.<sup>31</sup> Yet that 'explosion' produced varying reactions, not least the response of Graham Scroggie, the highly influential minister of Charlotte Baptist Chapel, Edinburgh, who had become a force to be reckoned with, not only in Scotland, but increasingly at the Keswick Convention. At the evening convention meeting, following one of Brown's addresses, Scroggie, sensing that

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<sup>29</sup> J.C. Pollock, *The Keswick Story: The Authorised History of the Keswick Convention* (London, 1964).

<sup>30</sup> Ian Randall, 'Capturing Keswick: Baptists and the changing spirituality of the Keswick Convention in the 1920s' *The Baptist Quarterly*, 36, No. 7 (July 1996), pp. 331-48.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-40.

emotion had outstripped reality, warned his hearers that 'Faith is not credulity; faith is not ignorance; faith is intelligent; faith is open-eyed; faith has a reason as well as emotion, and the man is in grave peril who is resting on emotion rather than upon intelligent understanding.'<sup>32</sup> Although Scroggie's remarks were doubtless not intended to be applied *ad hominem*, Douglas Brown's fate was sealed as far as future Keswick ministry was concerned; Keswick did maintain an interest in his work, but he gradually moved away from the heart of the convention.<sup>33</sup>

Theological perspectives thus played their part in keeping 'the fisherfolk's revival' from sparking a wider movement in the British Isles. Yet differences in culture and community may also have been significant. Keswick catered for a largely middle-class 'gathered' community linked by distinctive spiritual aspirations, and not by the social bonding of fishing or coal-mining. 'Raw revivalism' was apparently not its style. Its focus was on the deepening of the spiritual life of those already converted. Its unease with revivalism had already been amply demonstrated earlier in the century. After the Welsh Revival of 1904-5, several hundred enthusiastic Welshmen attended in 1906, but the convention appears to have been unhappy with the experience and was apparently relieved to return to 'customary ways' by 1908.<sup>34</sup>

Paradoxically, that same Welsh Revival had exerted a major influence in revitalising Charlotte Baptist Chapel, Edinburgh, which, in 1917, called Graham Scroggie to its pastorate. Here, an interesting parallel can be drawn with his role at Keswick. Far from perpetuating the revivalist ethos which he inherited from his predecessor, Joseph Kemp, Scroggie steered the Chapel away from its revival origins. When he arrived, vociferous 'Amens' were still prone to interrupt his addresses, but these were soon eliminated in favour of a quieter style.<sup>35</sup> It is highly likely that, in responding as he did to Douglas Brown, Scroggie was trying to steer the Keswick Convention away from the excessive emotionalism which had accompanied the Welsh Revival and its associated 'hot spots' in Scotland and elsewhere.

The hard-headed rationalism of Scroggie quietened Charlotte Chapel, and also steadied the course of the Keswick Convention after 1921. Yet, even if Brown had been able to move the convention more obviously in

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Pollock, *Keswick Story*, pp. 119-29.

<sup>35</sup> William Whyte, *Revival in Rose Street: A History of Charlotte Baptist Chapel, Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, n.p., n.d.), pp. 43-7.

his direction, would the East Anglian Revival have made a wider impact? Brown did not lack supporters. There were undoubtedly those who responded to his messages, and who, despite Scroggie's warning, saw revival as the way to spiritual renewal. Brown's addresses to the Keswick Convention were in print by the end of 1922, and immediately went through two impressions.<sup>36</sup> The punchy little volume carried a Foreword by Albert A. Head, described on the title-page as 'A Chairman of the Keswick Convention'. Head, a London banker and Keswick Trustee, had chaired the first 'Keswick in Wales' convention at Llandrindod Wells in 1903, immediately prior to the Welsh Revival.<sup>37</sup> He wrote:

I earnestly and tenderly recommend the perusal of the accompanying Revival Addresses to every one who is desirous of knowing more of the facts and features of such a Movement, and who is longing for the experience which the oft-repeated desire expresses in the words: 'O Lord, send a revival, and let it begin in me.'<sup>38</sup>

Yet, despite the interest in Brown's book demonstrated by its reprinting, there were no significant related developments in the heartlands of England, Wales or Scotland, though small-scale local revivals, possibly related to the east-coast movement and transmitted (in part) by fishermen, occurred in the Hebrides during the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> The 'East Anglian Revival' came to be associated with a particular group, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that, when a revival has been triggered and embedded in a particular context, it operates through distinct communities, bonded by their occupations and range of experiences. How large, or how small, a revival is may depend on the size of the community, or the number of communities, in which it operates. Where there is no community or sense of community, or where the community lacks social bonding (as at Keswick), there is (in human terms) little prospect of revival. The revival movement which began in Lowestoft, and influenced most, if not all, of the fishing-ports of the east and north-east coast of Scotland, from Eyemouth to Wick, also affected people who were not fishermen, but, as it

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<sup>36</sup> A. Douglas Brown, *Revival Addresses* (London, 1922).

<sup>37</sup> Pollock, *Keswick Story*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *Addresses*, p. v. A national revival of religion was also Brown's overall desire; see Griffin, *Forgotten Revival*, pp. 77-83.

<sup>39</sup> These small-scale, local revivals appeared in Lewis and Tiree in the early 1920s. My father, Hector MacDonald Meek (1906-84), was converted in the Tiree revival of 1922-4, under the preaching of the Baptist evangelist, Francis William Taylor.

developed, it functioned most effectively within a distinctive community, and sub-sets of that community.<sup>40</sup>

Douglas Brown's Keswick addresses indicate that he was very much aware that the convention was a very different theological and cultural constituency from the fishing-ports of East Anglia. 'You will forgive me, won't you,' he challenged his listeners, 'but for eighteen months I have been working in the midst of the men of this country, rough men who know nothing' about theology; and they come to me and they say: "Douglas Brown, we are going to believe the Christian Church when she is real."<sup>41</sup> 'Rough men who know nothing about theology' were not likely to attend Keswick, nor were the ways of Keswick necessarily those that would win the souls of such people. Brown was aware of what others expected from Keswick: 'A commercial traveller recently approached me in a railway carriage, and said: "You know we worldly men are looking to Keswick for a lead in regard to the great spiritual salvation of England." I am looking to the Holy Ghost!'<sup>42</sup> What Douglas Brown offered was not, in fact, an account of the East Anglian Revival; rather, he issued a challenge to the Keswick Convention at a critical time in its history. That challenge rose directly from his own experience in East Anglia. It evidently provoked a mixed reaction, as Scroggie's response and Head's Foreword indicate. Keswick was divided in the short term, but Scroggie's perspectives held sway in the long term.

Seldom has any well-established ecclesiastical institution, large or small, welcomed a revival movement with open arms. Wariness, based on a fear of subversion of the *status quo*, is perhaps the natural first response. The institutional door may then be partially opened to a revival, or completely closed against it, although the instruments and fruit of that revival may gain admission and even a position of honour. So, in broad terms, it turned out for the Keswick Convention's encounter with the man who spoke with the breath of the East Anglian Revival. Keswick and similar gatherings with a mainstream ethos were to become the theological trend-setters within British evangelicalism in the years ahead, and revivals of the traditional kind gradually lost their central significance. They could not be accommodated readily within the *douce environs* of middle-class

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<sup>40</sup> The relationship between religious revivals and the communities which they affect is worthy of much further research. This article is part of a wider project towards that end.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Addresses*, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

evangelical conventions.

It is interesting to reflect that the twentieth century has witnessed the progressive marginalisation of 'traditional' revival movements in the British context. From the time of the Welsh Revival of 1904-5, revivals were no longer likely to enter the British evangelical mainstream, though they could generate occasional 'hot spots' through individual influences. The evidence shows that such movements have tended to be restricted to the northern and western edges of the British Isles.<sup>43</sup> Some of the key figures of twentieth-century revivals have tended to become isolated, even in their own time. Evan Roberts, one of the most prominent figures in the 1904-5 Welsh Revival, lived a life of comparative seclusion thereafter.<sup>44</sup> Douglas Brown, by contrast, assumed wider roles within the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, including that of Evangelist from 1924, but his power as a revivalist preacher appears to have declined markedly.<sup>45</sup> Yet, in the early 1920s, he was a 'chosen vessel' in taking the gospel message to the East Anglian fishing ports. Without him, there might not have been a revival of any kind, despite the (seemingly) favourable economic, social and cultural factors which we have considered above. Through Douglas Brown's obedience and faithful preaching, 'rough men who know nothing about theology' came to know much about God's love, and many, both men and women, were lastingly converted. The ocean of God's grace has no periphery.

### Conclusion

In explaining the circumstances of any religious revival, it is not enough to rely solely on economic theory. A wide range of perspectives needs to be taken into account, including those of national, local, spiritual and cultural significance. Part (but only part) of the key to the success or failure of a religious revival is the way in which it is absorbed into the circumstances and social context of a particular community, or a set of related communities. One can see the general point clearly enough across

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<sup>43</sup> The most recent revival which attracted national interest was in the island of Lewis in 1949-53. There have been several smaller movements in Lewis since that time.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts suffered a nervous breakdown; see Pollock, *Keswick Story*, p. 129

<sup>45</sup> Griffin, *Forgotten Revival*, pp. 81-2. Griffin comments on Brown's recurrent ill health, including his tendency to neuritis. He also notes that, latterly, Brown himself felt that 'the power' had left him.

the centuries: the coalminers of Kingswood, Bristol, touched by the preaching of Whitefield;<sup>46</sup> the small farmers and tinminers of Devon and Cornwall, influenced by Wesleyan Methodism in the early nineteenth century in a series of revivals which were productive of the 'Bible Christian' movement;<sup>47</sup> the crofters and fishermen of the Hebrides, and of Orkney and Shetland, at different stages;<sup>48</sup> the leadminers of Lanarkshire in the 1920s;<sup>49</sup> and the east-coast fisherfolk whose experience we have discussed in this paper. This same revival illustrates the importance of a single figure (Douglas Brown) in providing the initial momentum in the national context, and of local leaders (such as Jock Troup and David Cordiner) in rooting the revival in specific communities; it also demonstrates the crucial role of a major national gathering (the Keswick Convention) and of a significant national leader (Graham Scroggie) in determining the course and development of a spiritual movement relative to the 'mainstream'. In this case, Scroggie's influence over the Keswick Convention helped to ensure that 'the fisherfolk's revival' remained largely on the coastline and also on the periphery of British evangelical life.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: Evangelist of the 18th-Century Revival* (London, 1990), pp. 48-53.

<sup>47</sup> D. Luker, 'Revivalism in Theory and Practice: the case of Cornish Methodism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34, pt 4 (1986), pp. 603-19. This is a particularly fine article on revivals in the Cornish cultural context.

<sup>48</sup> For the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides, see my forthcoming paper, 'Gaelic Bible, Revival and Mission: the spiritual rebirth of the nineteenth-century Highlands', in the special issue of the *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, to be devoted to the Scottish Highlands.

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