

**The Mormon Mission in Herefordshire  
and Neighbouring Counties,  
1840 to 1841**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study focusses on the Mormon mission to Britain in the nineteenth century, specifically the time spent in Herefordshire and on the borders of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire in 1840 to 1841. This mission was remarkable because of the speed with which an estimated 1800 rural folk were ready to be baptised into a new form of Christianity and because of the subsequent emigration of many of them to America.

This investigation examines the religious, social and economic context in which conversion and emigration were particularly attractive to people in this area. Following an opening chapter that sets the geographical and social scene of Victorian Herefordshire in the national context, the study asks what were the religious affiliations prior to conversion and what were the occupations, social status and educational level of the converts that combined to make them ripe for conversion. Particular reference is made to the United Brethren, a breakaway group of former Primitive Methodists, from which many of the converts were drawn. Journal entries made by the principal missionary and testimonies of the converts themselves describe their experiences of the mission, including the opposition they faced, with tracts and newspaper items of the time evidencing the hostility they encountered.

The study concludes that the converts were already religious, mainly working class people and that conversion was not undertaken in a vacuum but resulted from a combination of societal background and the appeal not only of the Mormon message but also of the powerful way in which it was delivered to a rural community.



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## **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1840, a rural area of Herefordshire and the borders of the neighbouring counties of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire was the focus of a very successful mission undertaken by Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, known as the Mormons, who travelled here from America.<sup>1</sup> This area lies between the cathedral cities of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester and is close to the market town of Ledbury in Herefordshire and the village of Dymock in Gloucestershire. The first group of Mormon missionaries arrived in England in 1837 and was successful in Lancashire, receiving 1500 new members into the Church, before returning to their homes in Illinois in 1838.<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith was the Prophet and founder of this movement in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1830 and considered the British missions as an opportunity to regenerate his following, which was experiencing apostasy from within and antagonism from those outside the faith.<sup>3</sup>

The overarching theme of this study is religion. It places the mission within the context of a proliferation of nonconformist groups in nineteenth century Britain, when popular religious belief held by the working classes included miraculous healing and physical manifestations of the devil within a framework of Evangelical theology, in which the authority of the Bible was paramount.<sup>4</sup> The study asks what made these rural folk ready to be baptised into the Mormon faith, leading to the subsequent emigration of

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Doxey Green, 'Wilford Woodruff: Missionary in Herefordshire', in *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2010), p.149.

<sup>2</sup> Doxey Green, pp.150-51.

<sup>3</sup> Agnes M. Smith, 'The First Mormon Mission to Britain' in *History Today*, 7(1987), 24-31 (p.24).

<sup>4</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), p.27.



many of them to America. Their previous religious affiliations are examined, in addition to their occupations, social status and educational level to conclude that all these factors combined to make conversion attractive to them.

### *An outline of the Mormon faith*

The distinctive features of this Christian religion are set out in the Book of Mormon which, with the Bible, is the scriptural text: it is based on a concept of continuous revelation, transmitted by God through Joseph Smith to the saints of the latter days and promising eternal salvation to believers.<sup>5</sup> Further, an area near Kirtland, Ohio, had been revealed as the 'promised land' where the imminent Second Coming of Christ would take place and followers would establish the Kingdom of God on earth, known as the principle of 'The Gathering'. This doctrine was regarded by Smith as a potential deterrent to the conversion of British people but it actually held a strong spiritual and temporal appeal for those living in poor economic circumstances, especially as an optimistic picture was painted of opportunities in America and promoted in the *Millennial Star*, the Mormon newsletter published in Britain from May 1840. Belief in the imminent arrival of the Millennium was common to many religious groups of that time but Smith instructed his missionaries to stick closely to biblical teachings and to emphasise the acceptance of Christ and the Hebrew prophets until their message was fully established.<sup>6</sup> The Mormon practices of baptism by immersion and faith healing brought criticism, as did the consecration to the

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, p.25.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, p.26.

Church of private property.<sup>7</sup> The doctrine of baptism of the dead was proclaimed by Smith in 1842; the practice of polygamy was not publicly announced until 1852, although it was included in a revelation to Smith some years earlier, and encountered fierce opposition, being officially ended in 1890.<sup>8</sup>

### *Historiography of Mormon history*

The earliest histories of Mormonism were produced by Mormons themselves, beginning in 1838 when Joseph Smith started to gather material on the history of the church he had founded eight years previously.<sup>9</sup> In 1830 Smith published the Book of Mormon, a work of scripture professed to be an account by ancient American prophets of the rise and fall of their civilisation, during the transcription of which it was claimed that the authority of Christ's priesthood had been restored to Smith. After his death in 1844, Smith's scribes carried his papers to Salt Lake City, where they continued to work on the history of the faith, under the direction of several untrained, ecclesiastically appointed church historians. In 1902, the project was taken over by B. H. Roberts, a powerful theologian and historian: he revised the material and published a six-volume *History of the Church of Latter-day Saints* between 1902 and 1912, most of this focussing on Smith's career and visionary experiences.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, pp.26-29.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Wilkinson and Cynthia Doxey Green, *The Field is White* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2017), p.173.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Bowman, 'Mormonism and its Historians: The State of the Field', *Religion Compass*, 5:12 (2011), 720-730 (p.720).

<sup>10</sup> Bowman, p.721.

Openly antagonistic reviews of the Mormon movement followed, notable among these being a book by the Rev. Henry Caswell, who claimed that the Book of Mormon was based in part upon a lost manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding in about 1812. This work linked American aborigines in remote antiquity to some ancient tribes of Israel and was said to bear no little resemblance to the Book of Mormon.<sup>11</sup>

Later approaches have ranged from the psycho-biographical to naturalistic and phenomenological studies of Smith's claims. In 1969, the historian Moses Rischin coined the phrase 'the New Mormon History', which described the first generation of Mormon historians that were graduates in history, sociology and other disciplines and who began to document the experiences of early Mormon adherents.<sup>12</sup> This approach continued through the 1990s, after which there was a broadening of perspective by sociologists and students of religious studies. Of particular interest has been the place of contemporary Mormonism in the wider American religious landscape.<sup>13</sup>

Historical writing has focussed on the church's organisational history, often in biographies of church leaders but more recent Mormon scholars have moved towards cultural history, using interdisciplinary tools.<sup>14</sup> A substantial minority of the first generation Mormons – 15% - were British converts produced by missions undertaken during Joseph Smith's lifetime. Bowman

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Caswell, *The Rise, Progress and Present State of the Mormons* (London: Rivington, 1843), pp.17-25.

<sup>12</sup> Bowman, p.722.

<sup>13</sup> Bowman, p.725.

<sup>14</sup> Bowman, p.727.

states that although there are some studies of this missionary work, much remains to be explored.<sup>15</sup>

Turning to studies of the Mormon mission that took place in Herefordshire and neighbouring counties in 1840, recent work by Wilkinson and Doxey Green has produced detailed research into the people and places associated with the mission. This book, published under the auspices of the (Mormon) Brigham Young University, was generated in response to a request made by Mormons in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, for clarification on the number of people baptised during the mission.<sup>16</sup> The result is a well-documented account of the research process and uses a variety of records to expand upon the diaries of Wilford Woodruff. The authors acknowledge that this is not a complete history of all the converts from the area but state that they have concentrated on the available primary sources rather than anecdotal accounts from the descendants of the converts.<sup>17</sup> The obvious gap in this material is any personal account from people who objected to or declined to be involved in the Mormon mission, although accounts of mob violence experienced at Dymock and Lugwardine for example, are included. Incidents of apostacy and excommunication are mentioned but numbers were not recorded before 1847.<sup>18</sup>

The Mormon mission is often mentioned briefly in locally-produced Herefordshire town and village histories where the Mormons were successful in making converts. In some of these, for example in the

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<sup>15</sup> Bowman, p.726.

<sup>16</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, p.ix.

<sup>17</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, p.xi.

<sup>18</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, pp.164-65.

histories of Bosbury, Cradley and Garway Hill, detailed research has been carried out into local families whose members emigrated to America following the mission.<sup>19</sup> Biographies of some of the emigrants have also been written by their descendants. Historical material is held in Mormon archives in Salt Lake City, with much available online, and a preponderance of any historical research is still carried out by the Brigham Young University. Although bias is not apparent, and in recent years Mormon historians have been committed to a scholarly approach, it is important to note the source and consider this.

The rationale for this study is that local histories focus on family connections, citing individual stories of emigration and subsequent events in America; this investigation will concentrate on the earlier affiliations and circumstances of the converts that made conversion to Mormonism particularly attractive to them, using the primary sources of personal diaries kept by the converts themselves and by the missionary, Wilford Woodruff, and contrasted with press items and tracts that opposed them.

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<sup>19</sup> Janet Cooper, *Bosbury* (London: VCH, 2016) p.80; Wynnell M. Hunt, *Cradley – A Village History* (Trowbridge: Cromwell Press, 2004) pp.18,19,125-127; Sue Rice, 'The Methodists and the Mormons', in *Garway Hill Through the Ages*, ed. Joan and Brian Thomas (Herefordshire: Logaston, 2007), pp.117-34.

**CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE**

This chapter investigates the geographical, social and economic context in which the Mormon mission of 1840 took place in Herefordshire and the adjoining parts of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. The chapter will begin by providing a geographical description of the area; the economic and social conditions for rural workers in the locality will also be examined. Details will be given of the rise in religious nonconformity during the first half of the nineteenth century together with information on religious affiliation in Herefordshire gleaned from the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship*.<sup>1</sup> Because many converts to Mormonism emigrated to America as a result of their conversion, this chapter will explore attitudes to and incidence of emigration at this time. It is argued that social and economic factors, as well as religious ones, influenced their conversion and subsequent emigration.

*Herefordshire and her neighbouring counties*

Writing in the early 1870s, John Marius Wilson described the geographical aspects of the county of Herefordshire and listed the counties that border it: Shropshire to the north, Worcestershire to the east, Gloucestershire to the south-east with the Welsh border to the south-west and west.<sup>2</sup> To the eastern border are the Malvern Hills, while the Black Mountains are to the west; the River Wye and other waterways are listed. In the 'rich diversity of hill and valley', which are well-wooded, Wilson noted the cultivation of hops, the suitability of the soil for cultivation of orchard and timber trees, and also the fine breeds of oxen and sheep. Manufacturing was observed to be on a very small scale, mainly

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Mann, *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales* (London: Routledge, 1854).

<sup>2</sup> John Marius Wilson, *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* (London: Fullerton, 1870-72), <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/descriptions/766010>> [accessed 25 June 2018].

comprising gloves, hats and woollens. There were seven market towns in the county, of which only Hereford, Leominster, Ross and Bromyard had over 2,000 inhabitants, according to the population census of 1861.<sup>3</sup> This indicates the rural character and sparsity of population in the county. The following map accompanies this text:

Figure 1: Historical map showing Herefordshire and the neighbouring counties



Source: University of Portsmouth, 'History of Herefordshire: Map and description for the County', *A Vision of Britain through Time*, <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/17312>> [accessed 25 June 2018]

A similar description is given by the Scottish cartographer, John Bartholomew who, writing in 1877, also mentioned the streams being well-stocked with fish.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Wilson, *Imperial Gazetteer*.

<sup>4</sup>John Bartholomew, *Gazetteer of the British Isles* (London: A. and C. Black, 1887) <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/17312>> [accessed 25 June 2018].

Bartholomew also added that in Herefordshire 'there are no valuable minerals, and the mfrs. are insignificant'. This is in contrast to his description of Worcestershire where, as well as fertile farm land, he also noted that 'coal and iron are found in the Dudley district, and the mfr. of iron and steel and of hardware is extensive'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Bartholomew observed 'a great industry in the shape of dairy farms' in Gloucestershire, in addition to coalfields in the Forest of Dean and in Bristol, and 'other minerals are gypsum, barytes, quartz, limestone and freestone'. 'Woollen and cotton stuffs' are manufactured but 'at Bristol there are also large hardware mfrs.'. <sup>6</sup>

Each county has developed differently, according to the availability of natural resources. The parts of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire that were involved in the 1840 Mormon mission were much more akin to rural Herefordshire than they were to the more populous areas of industrial development within their wider county borders. The following map shows the very rural area of Worcestershire with Gadfield Elm, the focus of the United Brethren's and later the Mormons' activities, seen at the lower left.

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<sup>5</sup>Bartholomew, *Gazetteer*, <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/17473>> [accessed 25 June 2018].

<sup>6</sup>Bartholomew, *Gazetteer*, <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/17432>> [accessed 25 June 2018].



Figure 2: Map of the parish of Eldersfield, Gloucestershire, 1880

IMAGE REDACTED

Source: <<https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/roam/map/historic>> [accessed 29 January 2018]

This map illustrates a landscape consisting of a patchwork of fields with dwelling places scattered very thinly across the parish, the village of Pendock being the largest concentration of houses.

Travel in rural areas was not easy at the time of the Mormon mission.

Herefordshire had no railway until the 1850s and toll roads were still being used as late as 1870, making journeys difficult, slow and costly.<sup>7</sup> Developments in transport came late to rural Herefordshire: the Hereford to Gloucester Canal, which operated until 1883, was built in stages from the late eighteenth century until it eventually reached Hereford in 1845, the canal being used for the transport of goods and materials.<sup>8</sup> There were also stage-wagon services operating between

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<sup>7</sup>G. Rees, 'Changes in Herefordshire During the Woolhope Years', *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club*, XLVII:III, (1993) 289-299 (p.291).

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Pinches, *Ledbury: A Market Town and its Tudor Heritage* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2009) p.60.

the market towns of the three counties and beyond, increasing their network from the 1820s onwards but these still left rural dwellers very isolated.<sup>9</sup> This paints a picture of an area hardly touched by industrial progress.

*Living conditions in Herefordshire in the nineteenth century*

Although the living conditions of the rural poor had caused riots in southern England, in Suffolk and East Anglia, for example, this did not happen in Herefordshire, one possible reason being that the diversity of agriculture led to less reliance on the wheat harvest. As well as raising livestock, crops of hops, apples, turnips, oats, beans and peas were produced in Herefordshire but, during the first half of the nineteenth century, half the county's yield was in wheat, so the people still depended on a good harvest to maintain a good income, or at least subsistence.<sup>10</sup> If Herefordshire had reasonably full employment and fewer causes of discontent, other factors in the lack of unrest were that the sparsity of population made mass meetings unlikely, apart from in the larger settlements, and the isolation of small rural communities and low levels of literacy meant that labourers were likely to be unaware of events occurring elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

However, the winters of 1838 and 1839 were especially harsh, causing a charity soup kitchen to open in Worcester.<sup>12</sup> There was a rise in the numbers of people claiming parish relief in Herefordshire because of a marked increase in food prices in 1840, 1841 and 1842: the poor were particularly affected by the rise in the cost

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<sup>9</sup> Pinches, pp.58-59.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Shakesheff, *Rural Conflict, Crime and Protest: Herefordshire, 1800-1860* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003) p.4. This study links infringement of the Game Laws to rural poverty and, with animal maiming and incendiarism, as a political protest against the landed gentry.

<sup>11</sup> John Powell, *Hard Times in Herefordshire* (Herefordshire: Logaston, 2008) pp.10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Katherine Lack, 'Family Dispersal in Rural England: Herefordshire 1700-1871' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012) p.50.

of their staple foods of flour, bacon and potatoes, while a decline in the glove trade had adversely affected the incomes of older women.<sup>13</sup> The unprecedented bad weather impeded outdoor occupations and destroyed large quantities of the potato crop, which had become an increasingly important food for the working classes, causing real hardship.<sup>14</sup>

Another reason for the agrarian riots of 1830 that took place in other areas was the imposition of enclosures, which deprived villagers of common land or waste ground. Elsewhere this process was only just beginning but in Herefordshire, however, a substantial majority of enclosures had taken place gradually, by agreement rather than resorting to an Act of Parliament, at least a generation previously. The population had therefore had sufficient time in which to adjust to a new way of life or leave the area.<sup>15</sup> All these factors indicate that a hard life was endured by rural workers in the 1830s and 1840s but that the geographic, economic and social conditions were such that protest in the form of riots did not occur. This situation suggests that the people were ready to receive messages of hope from religious rather than political sources, although these could be very closely interlinked.

#### *Growth of Nonconformity in England, 1800 to 1840*

In Clive Field's statistical analysis of religious affiliation at the national level, he estimates that nonconformity more than quadrupled in England after 1760, with

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<sup>13</sup> Powell, p.54.

<sup>14</sup> Lack, p.50.

<sup>15</sup> Powell, p.12.

particularly strong growth between 1800 and 1840.<sup>16</sup> Field writes that he has derived his figures, shown on the following page, from detailed denominational data with additional estimates and his own extrapolations, against a backdrop of the established Church of England, of which all residents were technically members.

Taking place a decade later, the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship* counted attendance at religious services and Sunday schools on a spot date (30 March) and estimated that the Church of England and Protestant nonconformist denominations had approximately equal numbers of worshippers in England and Wales, at over five million each, with nonconformity accounting for about 29% of the population.<sup>17</sup> Comparing these results with his own research, in Field's view, the proportion of nonconformist adherents is exaggerated in the *Census* by their greater inclination than Anglicans to attend Sunday school and to go to chapel more than once on the day. His estimate is therefore that there were about four million nonconformists in England and Wales in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The combined sources show that nonconformity was increasingly common at this time and that there was a proliferation of very small sects emerging at both national and local levels, of which the United Brethren was one, as doctrinal refinements were initiated by charismatic preachers.

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<sup>16</sup> Clive D. Field, *Counting Religion in England and Wales: The Long Eighteenth Century, c. 1680-c. 1840*, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 63:4 (2012), 693-720 (p.693).

<sup>17</sup> Field, p.700.

<sup>18</sup> Field, p.700.

Table 1: Estimates of nonconformity in England, 1760-1840

| <b>Nonconformists</b>              | <b>1760</b>    | <b>1800</b>      | <b>1840</b>      |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Quakers                            | 35,000         | 27,800           | 20,000           |
| Baptists                           | 26,000         | 150,000          | 500,000          |
| Congregationalists                 | 60,000         | 225,000          | 725,000          |
| Presbyterians/Unitarians           | 90,000         | 60,000           | 80,000           |
| Wesleyan Methodists                | 45,000         | 265,000          | 1,150,000        |
| Methodist New Connexion            | -              | 16,000           | 60,000           |
| Primitive Methodists               | -              | -                | 250,000          |
| Independent Methodists             | -              | -                | 10,000           |
| Bible Christians                   | -              | -                | 41,000           |
| Wesleyan Methodist Association     | -              | -                | 65,000           |
| Whitefieldites                     | 20,000         | -                | -                |
| Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion | -              | 25,000           | 25,000           |
| Welsh Calvinistic Methodists       | 35,000         | 75,000           | 125,000          |
| Moravians                          | 6,000          | 6,500            | 7,000            |
| Inghamites                         | 10,000         | 1,000            | 1,500            |
| Sandemanites                       | -              | 2,000            | 1,000            |
| Swedenborgians                     | -              | 3,000            | 7,500            |
| Churches of Christ                 | -              | -                | 3,000            |
| Christian Brethren                 | -              | -                | 7,500            |
| Irvingites                         | -              | -                | 4,000            |
| <b>Latter-day Saints</b>           | -              | -                | <b>10,000</b>    |
| French Protestants                 | 5,000          | 1,000            | 500              |
| German Protestants                 | 1,000          | 1,000            | 1,000            |
| Other groups                       | 10,000         | 20,000           | 50,000           |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                    | <b>343,000</b> | <b>878,300</b>   | <b>3,144,000</b> |
| Roman Catholics                    | 75,000         | 120,000          | 425,000          |
| Jews                               | 8,000          | 25,000           | 32,000           |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>426,000</b> | <b>1,023,300</b> | <b>3,601,000</b> |

Note: Nonconformists are listed in the following order: 'Old' Dissent (Quakers to Presbyterians/Unitarians) in order of their establishment; 'New' Dissent (Wesleyan Methodists to Latter-day Saints) in order of their respective appearance.

Source: Estimates of non-Anglican communities in England and Wales, 1680-1840. Clive D. Field, Counting Religion in England and Wales: The Long Eighteenth Century, c. 1680-c. 1840, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 63:4 (2012), p.710.

This table demonstrates the swift increase of nonconformity between 1760 and 1800, followed by a marked rise in new dissenting denominations by 1840. With regard to the Latter-day Saints, who arrived in England in 1837, Field quotes estimates of 3,600 members by 1840 and 23,200 worshippers identified by the time of the 1851 *Census* but his own estimate is that there were 10,000 Mormons in England and Wales.<sup>19</sup> The mission in Lancashire started in 1837 and the Herefordshire mission in March 1840, with converts beginning to emigrate soon afterwards, so it is unclear who Field's estimate covers. The table is included here to show the significant increase in nonconformist activity, rather than to indicate an estimate of the size of the Mormon following.

*Religious background: England and Herefordshire, 1851*

The established churches accounted for over ninety per cent of church attendance in Britain in 1750 but by the time of the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship* there had been a dramatic rise in nonconformity, resulting in about half the English congregants attending a wide range of nonconformist churches or chapels.<sup>20</sup> Reporting on the results of the *Census*, Horace Mann concluded that there were more than five million people absent from the pews and these, he deduced, were mostly from the working classes.<sup>21</sup> While this view is certainly an oversimplification of a very complicated situation, it does draw attention to the fact that many working class people did not participate in organised religion in the mid-nineteenth century. It is now apparent that there were wide variations in practice and belief even between adjacent parishes in the same diocese, as well as regional differences.<sup>22</sup> A religious revival of the 1830s and 1840s followed a

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<sup>19</sup> Field, p.709.

<sup>20</sup> David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Mann, pp.86-88.

<sup>22</sup> Hempton, p.3.

weakening of interest in religion especially after the Reformation, when rituals and visual representations of faith were reduced and the written word was given precedence. This disadvantaged illiterate people when they attended church and the growth of nonconformist congregations reflected their alienation.<sup>23</sup> The hierarchical structure of the Anglican Church was also a factor in religious affiliation with church membership becoming related to social class, rather than being the basis of community cohesion across societal groups.

At the time of the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship*, church attendance in Herefordshire was estimated to be 49%, about the national average, and details are given in the following table.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989) pp.57-58.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Shakesheff, 'Methodism in Herefordshire, 1800-1860', (2003) in *Herefordshire Through Time* <<https://htt.herefordshire.gov.uk>> [accessed 12 December 2017]

Table 2: County of Hereford: Census of Religious Worship, 1851

| Religious Denominations               | Number of Places of Worship and Sittings |          |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------|
|                                       | Places of Worship                        | Sittings |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                          | 426                                      | 69,575   |
| PROTESTANT CHURCHES                   |  |          |
| Church of England                     | 243                                      | 49,312   |
| Independents                          | 20                                       | 2,892    |
| Baptists                              |  |          |
| - <i>Particular Baptists</i>          | 15                                       | 3,394    |
| - <i>Baptists (Undefined)</i>         | 1  | 100      |
| Society of Friends                    | 4  | 1,050    |
| Moravians                             | 2  | 320      |
| Wesleyan Methodists                   |  |          |
| - <i>Original Churches</i>            | 44                                       | 4,502    |
| - <i>Primitive Methodists</i>         | 71                                       | 4,496    |
| Calvinistic Methodists                |  |          |
| - <i>Welsh Calvinistic Methodists</i> | 3  | 440      |
| - <i>Lady Huntingdon's Connexion</i>  | 2  | 526      |
| Brethren                              | 5  | 508      |
| Isolated Congregations                | 7  | 1,020    |
| OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES              |  |          |
| Roman Catholics                       | 5  | 900      |
| Latter Day Saints or Mormons          | 4  | 115      |

Source: Horace Mann, *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales*, Table C, p.CCVI.



This table shows that the Church of England had the most places of worship in Herefordshire, with 243 (57% of the total), but that the Primitive Methodists were strongly represented with 71 meeting houses (17%) and the Wesleyans with 44 (10%); in a list of eleven further denominations, four Latter-day Saints' and five Brethren places of worship are recorded.<sup>25</sup> It is unclear how the 'Brethren' are defined in this context. By the time of the 1851 *Census*, many of the Mormon converts had emigrated to America and the United Brethren were much depleted by these events. However, Mann noted that 'the missionary zeal of [the] disciples' of the Mormon movement has extended its new creed into England and 'is making not inconsiderable progress with the poorer classes of our countrymen'.<sup>26</sup> He also felt that the position of importance it had attained with the working classes should 'draw to it much more than it has yet received the attention of our teachers'.<sup>27</sup> While its detractors saw Mormonism as a passing phenomenon, Mann seemed to take its appeal and influence upon the populace more seriously.

The Methodist congregations were much smaller than the Anglican, averaging only 58 worshippers, although the intimacy of such a setting could explain a sense of social cohesion and community spirit among the adherents, especially in small communities.<sup>28</sup> This feeling of solidarity could account for the conversion en bloc of whole families and community groups to new religious sects such as the Mormons.

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<sup>25</sup> Mann, Table C, p.CCVI.

<sup>26</sup> Mann, p.47.

<sup>27</sup> Mann, p.52.

<sup>28</sup> Shakesheff, HTT website.

Taking Ledbury as an example of religious life within the market towns of

Herefordshire, the large Anglican parish church served as its centre, although nonconformist congregations grew during the nineteenth century when new chapels were erected or existing ones refurbished.<sup>29</sup> Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists already had a presence in the town and erected new, larger chapels in 1836 and 1835 respectively, while the Independents (Congregationalists) rebuilt their chapel in 1852.<sup>30</sup> Of the main denominations, on *Census* Sunday morning in 1851, there were recorded 818 people in the parish church, 110 Baptists, 234 Methodists and 140 Independents. In the evening there were 710 Anglicans, 102 Baptists, 34 Methodists and 130 Independents.<sup>31</sup> The population of Ledbury at this time was about 3,000.<sup>32</sup>

Snell and Ell have carried out an extensive analysis of Victorian religion, taking the 1851 *Census* as their starting point.<sup>33</sup> Their findings indicate a major area of Anglican adherence in the counties of the West Midlands, second only to that observed in Sussex. In Herefordshire, Worcestershire, north Gloucestershire and parts of Shropshire the general pattern was of a strong established church away from urban districts, although a number of country towns including Ledbury also recorded high attendances.<sup>34</sup> In rich dioceses such as Hereford, support for the Church of England was enhanced by wealthy Anglican landowners encouraging the attendance of their employees, who lacked opportunities for alternative

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<sup>29</sup> Pinches, p.131.

<sup>30</sup> Pinches, p.132.

<sup>31</sup> Pinches, p.133.

<sup>32</sup> Pinches, p.145.

<sup>33</sup> Keith D. M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

<sup>33</sup> Pinches, p.131.

<sup>34</sup> Snell and Ell, p.57.

employment or independence.<sup>35</sup> This pressure was also applied to the people who converted to Mormonism, some of whom lost their jobs as a result.

In a section devoted to the Latter-day Saints, Snell and Ell state that by 1851 the Mormons had established congregations in 129 (just over 20%) of the *Census* registration districts, in which there were 182 places of worship, usually one in each district.<sup>36</sup> Despite this strong-sounding presence however, it is noted that attendance did not have a significant impact on the religious character of an area. *Census* data suggested that Cheshire and south Lancashire recorded the most Mormons, as did the mining valleys of south Wales and ports including Liverpool and Bristol, but Snell and Ell conclude that it is difficult to be confident in generalising about the regional distribution of this denomination.<sup>37</sup> Because of the stress placed by Mormons on emigration to a Promised Land, significant numbers of them were concentrated in the ports awaiting their passage and, as the aim was to send them to America, networks of chapels and Sunday schools were not developed in remote rural areas such as those at the centre of the 1840 mission.<sup>38</sup>

Cynthia Doxey's article compares the *Census* results with contemporaneous reports published in the *Millennial Star* and with Mormon branch membership records held in Salt Lake City library.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of the article was to introduce the *Census* as another possible source for Mormon historians to use in their research and Doxey finds it particularly useful because it is from a source

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<sup>35</sup> Snell and Ell, p.84.

<sup>36</sup> Snell and Ell, p.163-64. This made it difficult to compensate for missing data regarding sittings, which the authors think resulted in an under-representation of their numbers.

<sup>37</sup> Snell and Ell, p.164.

<sup>38</sup> Snell and Ell, p.166.

<sup>39</sup> Cynthia Doxey, 'The Church in Britain and the 1851 Religious Census' in *Mormon Historical Studies*, 4:1 (2003), 107-138.

independent of her Church's own records.<sup>40</sup> In June 1851, the *Millennial Star* listed 572 branches in England and Wales, with 28,499 members; the library catalogue shows branch records from 386 branches in England and Wales that include the same year.<sup>41</sup> The *Census* identified 222 meeting places, of which 134 coincide with information from branch records, while 76 meeting places were recorded by the *Census* for which there are no corresponding branch records. Doxey's detailed analysis indicates that a substantial number of meeting places were simply missed by the enumerators, while many branches did not keep good records or that these were subsequently lost.<sup>42</sup> Further explanations could be that these records exist but were perhaps catalogued under a different name or that meetings were held at places more convenient than the central branch location.<sup>43</sup> In any case, Doxey sees the *Census* data as a useful starting point for further research.

### *Religion in rural society*

In his study of religion in rural Lincolnshire in the mid-nineteenth century, James Obelkevich notes that at this time, the concerns and aspirations of individuals and groups could be found in religion, while there were few other opportunities for self-expression.<sup>44</sup> This coincides with descriptions of Herefordshire at the time.

Like Herefordshire, Lincolnshire was a very rural county with an economy dependent upon agriculture and with only minimal industrial activity. The area studied by Obelkevich was well away from the urban areas, with Horncastle the

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<sup>40</sup> Doxey, p.112.

<sup>41</sup> Doxey, p.107.

<sup>42</sup> Doxey, pp.110-11. The less formal meeting places of other denominations may also have been missed.

<sup>43</sup> Doxey, p.112.

<sup>44</sup> James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsay 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.ix.

only town in the district, although with a population of 4,921 in 1851, it appears to be larger than most of the market towns in Herefordshire.<sup>45</sup> Like Shakesheff, Obelkevich finds that in Lincolnshire, rural discontent was expressed by incendiarism rather than by political protest in less prosperous years.<sup>46</sup> Lincolnshire was not the subject of a Mormon mission but Primitive Methodism spread through the county in the 1820s and early 1830s, with preachers showing great optimism and enthusiasm for converting the people: preaching was in the open air until converts provided a space for services to be held. Mirroring the documented experience of the United Brethren in Herefordshire, an emotional response was invited from the congregations; in both areas, there was also a seeming lack of direction by the late 1830s, when support for Primitive Methodism was no longer growing.<sup>47</sup>

With its appeal to the rural poor, Primitive Methodism contradicted the inferior status usually allotted to them. In Obelkevich's view, Primitive Methodism appeared as the traditional Anglican social and religious culture was in decline but before the later working class culture had developed as a secular replacement. Where there is an Established church, membership of any nonconformist group is an expression of dissent. Obelkevich sees Primitive Methodism as a religious response to social change, with the fellowship of religious gatherings anticipating the solidarity of the trade unions.<sup>48</sup>

In his study of a different part of Lincolnshire, Ambler draws similar conclusions: that in the early phase of their development in the area, the Primitive Methodists

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<sup>45</sup> Obelkevich, pp.4-5.

<sup>46</sup> Obelkevich, p.76.

<sup>47</sup> Obelkevich, p.249.

<sup>48</sup> Obelkevich, p.258.

provided rural workers with a sense of their own identity at a time of social

change.<sup>49</sup> He notes that by the 1870s trade unions had drawn their membership from the same social group, with many of the representatives in the agricultural trade union movement being local Primitive Methodist preachers, who frequently used biblical imagery in their arguments, although the official line of this denomination was one of neutrality towards unionism.<sup>50</sup> An agricultural workers' union was founded in Hereford in 1871 and, for a brief period, had a high density of membership among farm labourers.<sup>51</sup> This was, however, well after the Mormon mission of 1840, when support was sought from religious rather than political sources.

### *Emigration*

Emigration from the British Isles was not unusual in the nineteenth century and by 1830 it was felt by the authorities to be beneficial, especially for the poor.<sup>52</sup> Harsh working conditions in some rural areas of southern England resulted in riots, while industrial urban workers banded together to form the forerunners of unions, during a time in which the sharp cyclical alternation of inflation and deflation in the economy were unsettling. It was also a time of very steep growth in population. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act brought in changes in poor relief, whereby this was only available in workhouses, although parishes were allowed to use local rates to subsidise emigration.<sup>53</sup> The restructuring of the economy through industrialisation was a destabilising force for farm workers, although more labour

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<sup>49</sup> R. W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), p.85.

<sup>50</sup> Ambler, p.81.

<sup>51</sup> George R. Boyer and Timothy J. Hatton, 'Did Joseph Arch Raise Agricultural Wages?', *The Economic History Review*, 47: 2 (1994), 310-334 (p.331).

<sup>52</sup> Eric Richards, *Britannia's children: emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600* (London: A&C Black, 2004) p.117.

<sup>53</sup> Richards, p.118.

was required to feed the increased population. It is estimated that two million people left the land between 1750 and 1850, most of them moving short distances within the country, but overseas emigration appeared attractive in the context of poor living standards and low wages. Richards remarks upon the spontaneity of emigration at this time, when many people departed with 'astonishingly little framework or ideology'.<sup>54</sup> The emigration of the new Mormon converts certainly fits with the spontaneous aspect, although they were much influenced by ideology.

Reporting on emigration from Lincolnshire in 1830, the politician and writer William Cobbett concluded that the emigrants were most likely to be those who could pay for their passage, rather than paupers.<sup>55</sup> Emigrants were described by contemporaries in dismissive terms and regarded as little loss to the country in the context of rapid population growth. The main destination was the United States but Richards notes that the surviving shipping lists record only fragmentary and often ambiguous evidence of the occupations of British emigrants. Such records as survive show mid-century emigrants from better off sections of the agricultural workforce, with the poorest unable to afford the passage, although the proportion described as 'labourers' was rising by the 1850s.<sup>56</sup> In the case of the Herefordshire Mormon converts, it was certainly those with funds available who emigrated first. The generosity of fellow members and, later, a financial support scheme enabled a passage for poorer people but some waited decades in saving the money to emigrate.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Richards, p.149.

<sup>55</sup> Richards, p.135.

<sup>56</sup> Richards, p.136.

<sup>57</sup> Carol Wilkinson and Cynthia Doxey Green, *The Field is White* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2017), p.155.

State-assisted emigration was mooted as a way of reducing the agricultural

pauper population from the 1820s and various government agencies were established from 1834 to help with the process, culminating in the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission that paid for the passages of selected migrants, assisting over 340,000 people between 1840 and 1869, mainly to go to Australasia.<sup>58</sup> Under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, more than 27,000 poor, mainly agricultural labourers from the south-east of England, had emigrated by 1860. A sample of these people from Northamptonshire indicated that they were not passive victims but had actively sought emigration to improve their position.<sup>59</sup> This shows that by the time of the Mormon mission of 1840, emigration was not unusual but was viewed as beneficial on economic grounds, both by the authorities and by the rural poor themselves.

Richards only briefly mentions Mormon emigration, and that in relation to marital desertion.<sup>60</sup> He states that some men used emigration to escape from the burden of debts and family circumstances and that a few of these were among a gathering of British Mormons in Salt Lake City in 1853-54. Although Richards states that religion was a much greater element in emigration than was bigamy, the religious aspect has very few mentions in his book.

### *Summary*

The area in which the mission took place was the very rural county of Herefordshire, and the equally sparsely populated parts of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire where the three counties meet. Rural dwellers were very isolated

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<sup>58</sup> Richards, p.137-38.

<sup>59</sup> Richards, p.138.

<sup>60</sup> Richards, p.164.



and faced poor economic conditions, especially in years when the harvest was poor, although the diversity of crops was a mitigating factor. The circumstances in this part of England did not incline the inhabitants towards riot and political action in times of hardship, for reasons likely to be related to their rural isolation, while religion was a more viable outlet.

The religious character of the area, in common with that of the country as a whole, had seen a flourishing of nonconformist denominations, particularly of Primitive Methodism among agricultural labourers. This was at a time when affiliation to a church was becoming related more to social class, rather than being the basis of a cohesive community that involved all societal groups. Studies conducted in the rural county of Lincolnshire tend to confirm findings in Herefordshire that people were more inclined to find self-expression in religious activity than in political action, when there were few other opportunities.

By the time of the Mormon mission of 1840, overseas emigration was not unusual but was viewed as beneficial on economic grounds, both by the authorities and by the rural poor themselves. Previously, emigrants had been from the better-off sections of society but when assisted passages were made available, agricultural workers saw emigration as a way to improve their position.

All these factors combined to ensure that people in rural Herefordshire and neighbouring counties were ready to receive the Mormon message when the missionaries arrived here in 1840, with many emigrating to America for both religious and economic reasons.



**CHAPTER 3: THE UNITED BRETHREN**

Soon after he began to preach in Herefordshire, Wilford Woodruff baptised several members of a close-knit Methodist group called the United Brethren and was subsequently invited to preach at the venues on their circuit.<sup>1</sup> It was critical to the success of the Mormon mission in this area that Woodruff soon converted their leader, Thomas Kington, a zealous preacher who then introduced the Mormon gospel to his congregations.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will focus on the religious affiliations of the recipients of Woodruff's ministry and use the personal testimonies of those who converted to Mormonism to explore their previous religious experience. Academic writings from within the Mormon community and outside will also be referenced to identify reasons for their readiness for conversion.

*Who were the United Brethren?*

The United Brethren had a lineage of nonconformity that had in previous generations involved dissent from the Church of England; coming through Wesleyan Methodism, founded in the eighteenth century, to Primitive Methodism, the United Brethren was a group that subsequently broke away from them.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the reason given for the splitting of the Primitive Methodists from the Wesleyan Connexion was related to the well-established American practice of holding 'camp meetings', which were open-air gatherings for prayer, personal

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Doxey Green, 'Wilford Woodruff: Missionary in Herefordshire', in *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2010), p.154.

<sup>2</sup> Doxey Green, p.156.

<sup>3</sup> Doxey Green, p.153.

testimonies, hymn-sing and preaching – the Mormon religion also came from

America.<sup>4</sup> The Wesleyan authorities were strongly opposed to these meetings as they appeared to conflict with the discipline required by their ministers but, in May 1807, a camp meeting was organised at Mow Cop in Staffordshire by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the leaders of a revivalist movement. This gathering of several thousand people resulted in the expulsion of Bourne and Clowes from the Wesleyans and in 1812 the new group founded by them became known as 'Primitive Methodists'.<sup>5</sup>

Wesleyan Methodism had attracted the growing lower middle and artisan classes and could be viewed as the respectable face of religious dissent from the Church of England.<sup>6</sup> Primitive Methodism, however, appealed in particular to the working classes: the central concern of this denomination was evangelism, through which sinners could be saved by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, while eternal punishment would be the fate of those who did not accept the gospel. Bible-reading was of utmost importance for moral guidance but Primitive Methodists also looked for the divine inspiration of individuals to guide them, regardless of any conventional religious tradition.<sup>7</sup> Having sprung from defiance of Wesleyan Methodism, the Primitives were constantly harassed for obstruction of the highway during open-air preaching, as initially they had no meeting houses of their own, but this had the advantage that street meetings were easily accessible to all. This persecution of the 'Ranters', as they were known, by magistrates and clerics, gave

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989) p.26.

<sup>5</sup> McLeod, p.26.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Shakesheff, *Methodism in Herefordshire, 1800-1860*, (2003) in Herefordshire Through Time <<https://htt.herefordshire.gov.uk>> [accessed 12 December 2017].

<sup>7</sup> McLeod, pp.26-27.

them an affinity with working people at a local level: although the movement avoided political activity, some of their members became trade union leaders.<sup>8</sup> In common with other groups practicing itinerant preaching, Primitive Methodists were already used to being persecuted for their faith, so the abuse that the Brethren received when accepting the Mormon message would not have been unfamiliar or, perhaps, unexpected.

### *The Primitive Methodists in Herefordshire*

Primitive Methodist preachers began their mission to Herefordshire and the Welsh borders in about 1825.<sup>9</sup> In Cwm, in the west, the countryside was described by them as beautiful, picturesque and fertile but the 'intellectual and moral state of the inhabitants did not resemble the country and the climate': there was 'ignorance, deplorable superstition and daring impropriety'.<sup>10</sup> The Primitive preacher, Thomas Proctor, was treated very badly there by people suspicious of 'false prophets' and he was refused food and accommodation as well as suffering assault.<sup>11</sup> This shows the strong feelings engendered within a community by new religious ideas.

Thomas Kington had worked on the Primitives' Cwm circuit and there appear to have been some disturbances among the members there, which may refer to Kington's expulsion.<sup>12</sup> There is also mention of 'several untoward circumstances having occurred which retarded their progress'.<sup>13</sup> In any event, Kington then left

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<sup>8</sup> McLeod, p.28.

<sup>9</sup> James MacPherson, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (London, Dickenson: 1880) p.224.

<sup>10</sup> MacPherson, p.225.

<sup>11</sup> MacPherson, p.226.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Wilkinson and Cynthia Doxey Green, *The Field is White* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2017) pp.30-31.

<sup>13</sup> MacPherson, p.371.

the Primitives in the 1830s to found his own group, which he called the United Brethren. This title is sometimes linked with the Moravians, also known as the Protestant Church of United Brethren, which dates back to the fifteenth century Bohemian reformer, Jan Huss, and with whom John Wesley was associated.<sup>14</sup> Kington may have been inspired by this history when he chose the name for his group but there is no suggestion of links of his United Brethren to other sects within Herefordshire or beyond.<sup>15</sup>

### *A description of the United Brethren*

In an article appearing in a 1910 Mormon publication, *Improvement Era*, Job Smith, a young Herefordshire man who later converted to Mormonism, wrote about his experience of the United Brethren as an incentive for young Mormon missionaries to 'find the people who have the disposition and the courage to receive their message'.<sup>16</sup> Smith described Wesley's reasons for leaving the Church of England in the eighteenth century as being the 'dead formality' of their lessons and the repeated reading out of printed forms of prayer and sermons, completely lacking in the inspiration of God. Smith wrote that the leader of the United Brethren, Thomas Kington, was 'a preacher of John Wesley's stamp, zeal and inspiration', whose 'favourite text was "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"'.<sup>17</sup> Smith wrote that Kington began to find Methodist preachers lacking in revivalist zeal and he 'annoyed the more formal and better paid preachers of that denomination' with the result that they expelled him.<sup>18</sup> No longer a part of the

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<sup>14</sup> Miranda Greene, *Religious Persecution*, (2003) in Herefordshire Through Time <<https://htt.herefordshire.gov.uk>> [accessed 12 December 2017]

<sup>15</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, p.30.

<sup>16</sup> Job Smith, 'The United Brethren' in *Improvement Era*, XIII:9 (1910) p.818.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, p.818.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, p.819.

Primitive church, he continued to preach in the open air but, according to Smith, Kington was welcomed to speak in the homes of local sympathisers and by the time that Wilford Woodruff arrived in 1840, a society had been formed comprising between thirty and forty preachers and meeting houses organised into two circuits, Fromes Hill and Gadfield Elm.<sup>19</sup> These were lay preachers, including some women, who drew up a plan every three months, arranging the dates and places where they would speak, some of them visiting different branches and preaching up to three times on a Sunday.<sup>20</sup> This indicates the highly organised nature of the group, in line with usual Methodist practice. Kington's congregations had 'a great many poor people' and 'a few working men in fairly good circumstances', with one man who was a wealthy farmer and landowner.<sup>21</sup> Like other Primitive Methodist groups, the United Brethren had mainly attracted the least well-off people.

Job Smith recalled his early contacts with the United Brethren, which took place in 1836 when he was about eight years old: one of the preachers came to speak at Redmarley, in the home of Smith's aunt and uncle, with whom he was living.

Smith remembered that the preacher was an unmarried woman – women had an active role in this sect. She interspersed her preaching with exhortations for her congregants to pray individually, rather than just repeating the words of standard prayers, and Smith began to do this, initially in a family prayer setting, and as he gained confidence, becoming 'a very anxious candidate for baptism' by the United Brethren.<sup>22</sup> He wrote of being very impressed by the zeal of the preachers in calling their audiences to repent, holding them 'as with a hypnotic influence'.

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, p.819.

<sup>20</sup> Gadfield Elm Chapel collection: United Brethren Preachers' Plan of the Frooms Hill Circuit, 1840, April - June.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, p.819.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, p.820.

Indeed, Smith described young people, mainly women, falling to the floor in a 'fit of noisy desperation' over their sins and pleading with the preacher for Christ's forgiveness. The preacher would then exhort the person to 'believe' and so be saved, and after repeated exclamations of 'I do believe' the preacher would glory in the salvation of a soul and the subject would dance around in ecstasy. Smith noted that this scenario was often enacted immediately following baptism but usually ceased after that.<sup>23</sup>

A powerful influence on members of the United Brethren at this time was *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, which Job Smith felt provoked more genuine religious thought in working people than any formal sermonising by conformist churchmen.<sup>24</sup> In summary, he stated that the tone of the Brethren was deeply devout, unostentatious and quite opposed to 'all forms of pride, profanity and every form of immorality', with vocal prayer to be practiced by all, with 'all formal prayer ... done away'.<sup>25</sup> These writings provide a flavour of the religious background of the devout people who greeted Wilford Woodruff when he arrived in this area in 1840.

A telling incident was related to Smith by Thomas Steed, regarding a conversation between two preachers on their way to an appointment to speak. Just days before the arrival of Wilford Woodruff, each of them claimed that they had 'preached all I know', with one adding that she 'hope[d] the Lord will send us light'. Steed declared that this 'was the condition of nearly all the preachers'.<sup>26</sup> Wilford

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<sup>23</sup> Smith, p.821.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, p.821.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, p.821.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, p.823.



Woodruff also commented that the United Brethren 'were searching for light and truth but had gone as far as they could'.<sup>27</sup> This is an indication of the readiness of pious local people to receive a new and refreshing message.

Job Smith was baptised into the Mormon faith on 18 May 1840 by Thomas Kington, who was by then a Mormon Elder.<sup>28</sup> Smith definitely made an impression upon those he met as, in his diary entry of 5 June, Wilford Woodruff reported that Job Smith, at the age of eleven, had accompanied him on walks to different preaching appointments, commenting that 'he had the longest head I ever saw upon a boy and the most in it. He had a great mind and it was well stored with knowledge and understanding', and also noted that 'He is almost a Proverb among the people where he is known, and I think he will be a useful character in his day and generation'.<sup>29</sup> On 25 December that year Smith was ordained as a Teacher, although he was only twelve years old. In an unpublished memoir, Job Smith recollected that most of the people in the branches where he taught were 'extremely illiterate and ... many of them unable to read a hymn from the book, and no one capable of keeping a record of their council meetings', so his ability to read and write reasonably well made him popular as a clerk as well as a teacher, despite his youth.<sup>30</sup> This is an illustration of the low level of education within the rural communities in the area.

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<sup>27</sup> Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from my Journal*, (Juvenile Instructor Office, Salt Lake City: 1882) Amazon Kindle ebook, (2009) (chapter XXIV, para. 3, location 1835).

<sup>28</sup> HARC, BA33/2: Wilford Woodruff's Baptismal Record, 1840.

<sup>29</sup> Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983-85) Vol. 1, 1840-41 extract, p.41.

<sup>30</sup> Job Smith, *History of Job Smith (Life in England)*, Typescript, n.d.

Thomas Steed's own diary traced his religious journey from attendance at a Church of England Sunday school and, from the age of nine, joining his parents at United Brethren meetings held in their house.<sup>31</sup> He enjoyed singing with the United Brethren and was interested in their meetings but he found the repetitive nature of Anglican worship to be sterile. When he questioned his Sunday school teacher about the nature of God and of Jesus, Steed was told that he ought not to ask such a question but 'ought to believe': the teacher did not know the answer and did not know who did.<sup>32</sup> At the age of fourteen, Steed had concluded that 'there was nothing in religion' but when he listened to Woodruff's preaching he 'heard the first principles of the Gospel ... preached in all simplicity and plainness' and was convinced that the principles were true.<sup>33</sup> Steed and almost his whole family were baptised as Mormons over the next few months and he emigrated in 1844.<sup>34</sup> The important features of the Mormon message to the local people were a return to what they saw as the first principles of Christianity and the simplicity of the way the gospel was communicated.

Another eventual convert to Mormonism was William Williams. In his diary he wrote of being 'brought up in the bosom of the Church of England', although he and his family would go to hear speakers from other sects but this 'would offend our worthy Minister who thought we would begin to think too liberal and feared he would lose us'.<sup>35</sup> Williams's mother was paid as an Anglican Sunday school teacher. She came from a religious family, one of her brothers being a Calvinist and the other a Methodist – later, they found the Mormon gospel blasphemous.

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Steed, *The Life of Thomas Steed from his own Diary, 1826-1910*, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> Steed, p.4.

<sup>33</sup> Steed, pp.4-5.

<sup>34</sup> Steed, p.8.

<sup>35</sup> William Williams, *Reminiscence*, p.1.

Williams described the local minister, Thomas Philpott, as 'a good man to the poor but he had so much aristocracy in him that he thought all his parish should think as he thought'.<sup>36</sup> This demonstrates the class divisions within religious denominations that existed at the time and the awareness of the power of the local minister, who seemed remote from his congregants.

Williams himself was apprenticed to a cordwainer (shoemaker) when he was in his teens and his boss, Samuel Jones, who lived in the Malvern Hills, happened to be a preacher in the United Brethren and pressed Williams to attend a meeting.<sup>37</sup> When he did so, he 'thought them a people sincere in their devotions' but was confused because he 'soon found that Spirit was catching' and 'had lost all relish for the Church of England'. At this time the Minister, Thomas Philpott, called to see Williams hoping that he would go to Church and 'not be led by enthusiasts', even giving him five shillings.<sup>38</sup> When he attended a prayer meeting of the United Brethren with his employer, Williams was 'called upon to lead in prayer'. Although he had never before attempted to 'pray extempore', Williams, like Job Smith, found that he had the ability to do so and after that began to 'lead and exhort in prayer meetings'.<sup>39</sup> In due course, Williams was asked to attend a quarterly meeting of the Brethren, presided over by Thomas Kington, at which preaching appointments would be assigned. He noted that there were about forty preachers with between four and five hundred members, scattered over a number of parishes. Williams recorded that he was added to the plan as a trial preacher and his initials appear

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<sup>36</sup> Williams, p.2.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, p.2.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, p.2.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, p.3.

on the Preachers' Plan for April to June 1840.<sup>40</sup> This exemplifies a willingness to change religious affiliation when the Anglican church was found to be uninspiring.

### *The arrival of the Mormons*

At this time, in March 1840, Wilford Woodruff had just begun his mission in Herefordshire.<sup>41</sup> There was apparently some consternation among the Brethren that some 'strange men' had arrived from America, travelling 'without purse or scrip' and baptising people for the remission of their sins.<sup>42</sup> Williams did not go immediately to hear Woodruff preach, partly because he lived some distance from the initial meeting places, but also because of a sense that these strangers with their 'strange doctrine' were encroaching upon the Brethren's territory. In fact, Williams and his employer gathered a group of five preachers to speak in resistance to the newcomers and their message. This they did each Sunday for nine weeks.<sup>43</sup> However, Williams recorded that they all had a secret longing to hear what was being preached and eventually he came into contact with one of the formerly prominent United Brethren preachers, John Cheese, who had been baptised and then ordained by Wilford Woodruff. Williams slunk to the back of the meeting, despite being asked to preach, which he refused to do. In spite of his reservations, Williams was impressed by the way that Cheese spoke, using a 'plain, simple style concerning the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ called Latter-day Saints'. He spoke of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, of 'the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands', with 'no thunderings of hell

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<sup>40</sup> Gadfield Elm Chapel collection: United Brethren Preachers' Plan of the Frooms Hill Circuit, 1840, April - June.

<sup>41</sup> Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from my Journal*, (Salt Lake City, Juvenile Instructor Office: 1882) Amazon Kindle ebook, (2009) (chapter XXIV, para. 3, location 1844).

<sup>42</sup> Williams, p.3.

<sup>43</sup> Williams, p.3.

and damnation to scare us' and proving each part of the doctrine 'from our own Bible'.<sup>44</sup> Williams admitted to feeling 'abashed ... confused and distressed' by the authority with which Cheese had preached. After being unable to preach because the power of Cheese's teaching resonated in his mind, Williams had decided to give up preaching himself. Going back to his place of work and explaining his 'defeat', Williams was blamed and pitied by the other workers and told that, next time he saw this preacher with his new message, he should bring him back so that their employer could deal with him.<sup>45</sup> This Williams did, with the result that he and all who had taunted him were baptised by John Cheese, with Williams himself soon being ordained as a teacher and later as a priest of the Latter-day Saints. Nearly all the United Brethren preachers were then baptised, as well as other Baptists and Methodists.<sup>46</sup> This episode shows the understandable initial resistance to a new, strange religion and the eventual winning over of many local people from different denominations who heard the preachers.

#### *Studies of the religious background of the Mormon converts*

Malcolm Thorp examined 298 case studies of people in Britain who joined the Mormon Church and explains that, although not a representative sample, his work gives a general indication of their religious backgrounds.<sup>47</sup> He argues that the converts were previously members of nonconformist congregations, rather than being from the non-attenders identified in the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship*.<sup>48</sup> Thorp's analysis covers the time-period from 1837 to 1852, much longer than the

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<sup>44</sup> Williams, p.4.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, p.4.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, pp.4-5.

<sup>47</sup> Malcolm R. Thorp, 'The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts in Britain, 1837-52' *Journal of Mormon History*, 4 (1977), p.52.

<sup>48</sup> Mann, pp.86-88.

Herefordshire mission, but of 280 prior religious affiliations of British Mormon

converts, only four described themselves as 'not religiously inclined', although 41 (15%) were 'religiously inclined but not specifically affiliated'.<sup>49</sup> Thorp writes that the Mormon mission came at a time of transformation of traditional religious loyalties, when people commonly changed from one sect to another or espoused unconventional creeds, or perhaps secular beliefs. Confirming other studies, he suggests that in Britain there were many competing sects at this time and movement between them was not unusual.<sup>50</sup> Thorp finds that Mormon converts tended not to be from those who were apathetic towards organised religion but rather Christian fundamentalists who already shared some beliefs with them. The United Brethren can be identified as fulfilling these conditions. Stephen Fleming endorses the view that the converts were mainly chapel- or church-goers before coming into contact with the Mormons and maintains that the United Brethren easily converted to Mormonism because they shared an expectation of a divine presence in day-to-day life that was not available in orthodox Protestantism.<sup>51</sup> Also in agreement with this, James Allen, writing with Thorp, suggests that it was the familiar teachings, rather than the unique Mormon doctrine, that accounted for this very successful mission.<sup>52</sup>

### *Summary*

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<sup>49</sup> Thorp, p.60. As Thorp states, the figures are indicative rather than being a representative sample: United Brethren are listed as providing only 14 (5%) of the converts, while in the Herefordshire area there is evidence that they accounted for a substantial proportion. See Job Smith, p.2. and Woodruff, ed. Scott G. Kenny, p.41.

<sup>50</sup> Thorp, p.52.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen J. Fleming, *The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism*, in *Church History* 77:1 (2008) p.75.

<sup>52</sup> James B. Allen and Malcolm R. Thorp, 'The Mission of the Twelve to England 1840-41: Mormon Apostles and the Working Classes' in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 15:4 (1975) p.526.

The United Brethren were a close-knit fellowship of mainly working-class people, scattered across a rural area and clustered around an inspirational leader, Thomas Kington, who had led them in a split from the Primitive Methodists. The United Brethren followed the Methodist approach of an orderly preaching plan, supported by a committed group of speakers. Having dissented from the Primitives, who were unpopular in some parts of Herefordshire, they were no strangers to those opposing nonconformity and, as contemporary diaries record, were ready to stand up for their beliefs. Comments made about the Anglican Church in this area suggest that ministers were felt to be out-of-touch with their parishioners. The United Brethren welcomed a direct explanation of biblical truth, delivered in a straightforward manner by their teachers, and appeared to be seeking a new authority, which came to them in the shape of the Mormon Apostle, Wilford Woodruff.

## CHAPTER 4: THE MORMON MISSIONARIES, THE CONVERTS AND THEIR DETRACTORS

This chapter will describe the mission and show how it was perceived from various viewpoints: the journal of Wilford Woodruff will be used to outline the main events, beginning with his arrival in England and the decision to take his ministry to Herefordshire. Accounts written by converts will illustrate the intense effect he had upon many individuals, to provide an understanding of who joined the Mormons and why they felt an affinity with this new religion that came from America. Comments in the local press and tracts written by local clerics will give their censorious views of the events. These differing perceptions of the mission demonstrate the strong feelings that it evoked.

### *Why was Herefordshire chosen for the mission?*

Wilford Woodruff arrived in England on 11 January, 1840, docking in Liverpool after a twenty-three day voyage across the Atlantic on the packet ship *Oxford*, accompanied by Elders John Taylor and Theodore Turley.<sup>1</sup> After spending a few days with the missionaries already working in Preston, it was decided after consultation with them that the Elders would split up, with Woodruff directed towards the Staffordshire Potteries.<sup>2</sup> Woodruff was in that area until 2 March, preaching in the villages daily during the week and two or three times on a Sunday, baptising, confirming and blessing many people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from My Journal*, (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882) Amazon Kindle ebook (2009) (Chapter XXII, location 1730).

<sup>2</sup> Woodruff, location 1758.

<sup>3</sup> Woodruff, location 1794.



His journal records that on 1 March, which was his thirty-third birthday, Woodruff felt very strongly that he was being called by God to leave Staffordshire and travel further south where 'many souls were waiting for the word of the Lord': he describes being 'astonished' by this call, as he still had many local appointments to preach.<sup>4</sup> While in the Potteries, Woodruff had often stayed at the home of William Benbow, a member of the Mormon Church in Hanley and, hearing that Woodruff was to go south, William accompanied him to the Herefordshire village of Castle Frome, to stay with his brother who was a farmer.<sup>5</sup> The use of family connections was not without precedent. Because the Mormon missionaries were following the Biblical injunction to the Apostles to travel 'without purse or scrip' but to rely upon God to provide food and lodgings, it was important that they had access to accommodation, especially if they were beginning to preach in a new area. Their previous mission started in Lancashire because early Mormon converts in North America were Britons, who wanted to share their faith with family members back home, and the first group of missionaries to England began their work among the congregation of a brother of one of them who lived in Preston and who could provide them with accommodation.<sup>6</sup> There were therefore both religious and practical reasons why Woodruff's mission took place in Herefordshire.

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<sup>4</sup> Woodruff, location 1803-14.

<sup>5</sup> James B. Allen and Malcolm R. Thorp, 'The Mission of the Twelve to England 1840-41: Mormon Apostles and the Working Classes' in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 15:4 (1975), 449-526 (p.504). The authors state that Mormon writers traditionally fail to mention this connection, although Allen and Thorp consider it not to be contrary to any concept of revelation.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen J. Fleming, *The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism*, in *Church History*, 77:1 (2008), 73-104 (p.86).

Woodruff's journal records that John Benbow was a wealthy farmer, having three hundred acres of land with good accommodation, where he lived with his wife - they had no children.<sup>7</sup> The Benbows were tenant farmers with a lifelong lease, rather than actually owning the land.<sup>8</sup> Woodruff introduced himself to them as an American missionary, an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sent by God as a 'messenger of salvation' to bring the 'gospel of life' revealed through his prophet, Joseph Smith, to the household and to the nation.<sup>9</sup> John Benbow and his wife greatly welcomed this news and told Woodruff about the United Brethren, of which they were among six hundred members; there were forty-five preachers and many licenced preaching places associated with this group.<sup>10</sup> The Benbows also mentioned that the United Brethren 'were searching for light and truth, but had gone as far as they could, and were continually calling upon the Lord to open the way before them ... that they might know the true way to be saved'.<sup>11</sup> Woodruff then saw why he had been sent to Herefordshire, as there was evidently a great searching for enlightenment there.

Word was spread throughout the neighbourhood and the next day Woodruff preached his first gospel sermon in a large hall at the Benbows' house. After preaching again on the following day, 6 March 1840, Woodruff baptised six people, including John and Jane Benbow and four United Brethren preachers.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the Mormon belief in the importance of baptism by total immersion, the

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<sup>7</sup> Woodruff, chapter XXIV, location 1826.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Wilkinson and Cynthia Doxey Green, *The Field is White* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2017), p.111.

<sup>9</sup> Woodruff, location 1826.

<sup>10</sup> Woodruff, locations 1834-41.

<sup>11</sup> Woodruff, location 1841. This coincides with Job Smith's description of the United Brethren's preachers' sense of having preached all they knew (see previous chapter).

<sup>12</sup> Woodruff, location 1851. The individuals are also named in his Baptismal Record, 1840 (HARC BA/2, p.2.).

next day was spent in clearing out the pond at Hill Farm in preparation for carrying out baptisms there and Woodruff states that he 'afterwards baptised six hundred in that pool of water'.<sup>13</sup> Although this phrase appears in a number of transcripts of Woodruff's journal, Wilkinson and Doxey Green observe that some of the figures he quotes appear to be contradictory, noting that according to his Baptismal Record, 1840, Woodruff had baptised just over three hundred people himself. However, after he had performed the initial baptisms, other American and British missionaries began preaching and baptising and it is not always clear what his figures are referring to.<sup>14</sup> Jay Greaves Burrup has also researched this mission, in which some of his family members were converted, using Woodruff's records as his main sources. Regarding the pond at Hill Farm, Burrup concludes that 'it is thought that about sixty-four of the hundreds of baptisms performed by Woodruff took place at this site'.<sup>15</sup>

For the next fortnight, Woodruff continued to preach and baptise people at various venues in the locality. News that there was an American preacher in the area spread quickly and on the Sunday evening, 15 March, Woodruff had a congregation of about eight hundred people at Frome's Hill, in stark contrast to the fifteen persons that he says attended the local Anglican Church that day.<sup>16</sup> However, his journal records that 'some of the baser sort made much Disturbance' in an attempt to disrupt the meeting and they made it impossible for him to baptise anyone.<sup>17</sup> A similar incident occurred at Bridge End a few days later when rotten

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<sup>13</sup> Woodruff, location 1851; also in the Cowley transcription, p.117.

<sup>14</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, pp.93-94.

<sup>15</sup> HARC NEWS/H/35: Jay Greaves Burrup, '150 Years Ago: A Look Back at Wilford Woodruff and the West Midland Mormons of 1840' in *Journal of Herefordshire Family History Society*, IV:6 (1990) 210-221, (p.217).

<sup>16</sup> Woodruff, location 1860.

<sup>17</sup> Burrup, p.219.

eggs were thrown.<sup>18</sup> Other missionary and convert journals mention disturbances that interrupted meetings and an unpleasant incident in Dymock was reported in the *Hereford Times*. Local people had been ‘shooting, hanging, and burning effigies, which they dressed to represent some of the leaders of the ‘latter day saints’.<sup>19</sup> During March, the rector of the parish had sent a constable to an evening meeting at the Benbows’ to arrest Woodruff for his preaching, although Woodruff was able to produce his licence to prove his authorisation to preach.<sup>20</sup> He records that the constable stayed to hear Woodruff speak and afterwards asked to be baptised, as did two Anglican clerks who were later sent by the rector to investigate this new teaching – the rector was much alarmed.<sup>21</sup> Woodruff does not give details of the content of his sermons but the size of his congregations and the numbers coming forward for baptism suggest that he was a most charismatic and powerful preacher.

On 17 March, Woodruff first met Thomas Kington, who was the leader of the United Brethren. Woodruff ‘lade the whole work of the fulness of the Gospel before him and he seemed to receive the testimony’: Kington and his wife were baptised four days later.<sup>22</sup> This was a pivotal moment for the Mormon mission because it gave Woodruff access not only to the preachers and congregations of the United Brethren but also to their meeting houses. Woodruff was soon rejoicing that during the first thirty days since his arrival in Herefordshire, he had baptised forty-five preachers and one hundred and sixty members of the United Brethren, who had ‘put into [his] hands’ one chapel and forty-five houses that were licensed

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<sup>18</sup> Burrup, p.219.

<sup>19</sup> *Hereford Times*, 14 November 1840.

<sup>20</sup> Woodruff, location 1860.

<sup>21</sup> Woodruff, locations 1860-80.

<sup>22</sup> Burrup, pp.219-20.

for preaching. The result was to bring over eighteen hundred souls to the Church in just eight months, including nearly all the United Brethren and preachers of various other denominations, from Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.<sup>23</sup> Ownership of the chapel at Gadfield Elm was transferred to the Mormons in 1840 and is the oldest Latter-day Saints' chapel in the world and the last surviving memorial to the United Brethren.<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green have researched extensively the records of Church membership in the Three Counties, comparing these with a variety of independent sources, and conclude that they can put no definitive figure to the number of converts during Woodruff's time there: they have found evidence that supports a total of between fifteen hundred and two thousand converts and reckon that Woodruff's recollection of about eighteen hundred souls is likely to be close to the correct number.<sup>25</sup>

The success of this mission had not gone unnoticed by the local clergy. Woodruff recorded that on Sunday 29 March he was informed that the Anglican ministers were holding meetings to petition Parliament to stop him from preaching and to ban his religion.<sup>26</sup> Baptism into this new faith was also causing John Benbow trouble with his landlady, Ann Freeman. She owned the advowson of the local parish and was evidently approached by the local minister to take action regarding the activities at the farm. Within a fortnight, Benbow had sold his tenure and farming equipment and had left the farm, emigrating with his family and other converts six months later.<sup>27</sup> The proceeds of this sale were used to make a

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<sup>23</sup> Woodruff, locations 1899-1902.

<sup>24</sup> Gadfield Elm website: [www.gadfieldelm.org](http://www.gadfieldelm.org).

<sup>25</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, pp.96-97.

<sup>26</sup> HARC NEWS/H/45: Burrup, '150 Years Ago: A Look Back at Wilford Woodruff and the West Midland Mormons of 1840' in *JHFHS*, IV:11 (1991) 406-18, (p.408). No reference to this has been found in parish records or elsewhere.

<sup>27</sup> V. Ben Bloxham, *The Apostolic Foundations, 1840-41*, in *Truth Will Prevail* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) p.140.

substantial contribution towards the printing of three thousand copies each of the Book of Mormon and the hymn book, the first of these to be published in England, and also to assist the passage to America of forty converts.<sup>28</sup>

Although there was opposition from the Anglican clergy, Woodruff records that on 30 March the Baptist minister in Ledbury invited him to preach in his chapel, even opening the meeting with a prayer and a reading from Isaiah.<sup>29</sup> Woodruff was told that this was the largest congregation that had ever met in this chapel.<sup>30</sup> The Baptists may have been more amenable to the missionary than other nonconformist groups because of the importance the Mormons placed upon baptism, although there must have been a fear of losing members of the host congregation.

### *The converts*

In early April 1840, Woodruff baptised Mary Ann Weston.<sup>31</sup> She had first met him when he called at the house where she was staying when there was no-one else at home. Mary Ann recalled how he sat by the fire and soon started singing 'Shall I for fear of feeble man the Spirit's course in me restrain' and, as he sang, he 'looked so peaceful and happy [she] thought he must be a Good man and the Gospell he Preached must be true'.<sup>32</sup> Mary Ann was won over by Woodruff's powerful personality before she had even heard him preach.

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<sup>28</sup> Woodruff, location 1909.

<sup>29</sup> Burrup, p.408.

<sup>30</sup> Burrup, p.409. Confirmation from independent sources has not been found.

<sup>31</sup> HARC BA33/2: Wilford Woodruff's Baptismal Record, 1840, p.8.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Ann Weston Maughan, Journal, p.11. The hymn was translated from the original German by John Wesley and appears in many hymnbooks, including that of the Latter-day Saints (Hymnary.org).

Mary Ann was from a well-to-do family and she characterised her mother's background as being from 'very Respectable genteel people' who 'Married well'.<sup>33</sup> Her father was the proprietor of a large poultry merchants shop in Cheltenham who also owned farmland including beautiful orchards, where Mary Ann says that he had a new house built for the family as well as building other properties in neighbouring villages.<sup>34</sup> Regarding their religious affiliation, she describes her father as a 'leading member of the Wesleyan Methodists at Corse Lawn' and tells of her own attendance at the chapel Sunday school until the age of sixteen, when she had become a teacher there.<sup>35</sup> There is no mention in Mary Ann's journal of the United Brethren and she certainly seems to have come from a prosperous family, rather than from the unskilled labouring stock described by Job Smith as comprising the Brethren's membership. The Wesleyans tended to attract people, like Mary Ann's family, from a higher social class than did the Primitive Methodists, the great majority of whom belonged to the working class.<sup>36</sup>

Mary Ann married another Mormon convert, John Davis, a cooper and carpenter of Tirley, Gloucestershire, who was baptised on 18 May 1840.<sup>37</sup> She went to live at Tirley with him but she felt isolated because there were no other Mormons in or around that village.<sup>38</sup> Although her family did not share her religious beliefs, they did not oppose her membership.<sup>39</sup> Mary Ann's journal tells that as 'soon as the

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<sup>33</sup> Maughan, p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Maughan, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> Maughan, p.7.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989) p.30.

<sup>37</sup> HARC BA33/2: Wilford Woodruff's Baptismal Record 1840, p.16.

<sup>38</sup> Maughan, p.12.

<sup>39</sup> Maughan, p.12.

people were Baptised, per[se]cution comenced' and she relates an ugly incident, also mentioned in Woodruff's journal, when a dog was thrown into the pool where baptisms were taking place.<sup>40</sup> The Davis house was used as a venue for preaching and Mary Ann tells that the meetings were often disturbed and the preacher was threatened with violence. On one occasion, the mob attacked her husband, knocking him down and kicking him, causing internal bruising from which he never fully recovered. He died on 6 April 1841.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that she says he was buried in 'a nice quiet corner' of Tirley Churchyard and this is confirmed by the parish records, so he must originally have been a baptised Anglican.<sup>42</sup> Mary Ann was still being persecuted by her neighbours and moved after the funeral to stay away from the area with Mormon friends who were preparing to emigrate to America and Mary Ann decided to go with them.<sup>43</sup> Funds were available for her passage from money owed to her husband that she was able to collect, and also from the proceeds of selling his tools and furniture at auction.<sup>44</sup> The early emigrants were those, like Mary Ann, who were self-financing, while others depended upon the philanthropy of other converts and later schemes that provided financial assistance. Woodruff's journal stated that on 11 August 1840, forty of the eighty people who were preparing to emigrate to America had their passage paid by John Benbow, by then an Elder of the Church.<sup>45</sup>

Mary Ann writes very movingly of saying goodbye to her family, knowing that they would never meet again.<sup>46</sup> However, it transpired that her father was planning to

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<sup>40</sup> Maughan, p.12.

<sup>41</sup> Maughan, p.13.

<sup>42</sup> Gloucestershire Archives, GDR/V1/397.

<sup>43</sup> Maughan, p.13.

<sup>44</sup> Maughan, pp.13-14.

<sup>45</sup> Burrup, in *Journal of HFHS*, V:7, 1993, p.247.

<sup>46</sup> Maughan, p.14.



send lawyers to abduct Mary Ann as she boarded the ship, the *Harmony*, in

Bristol, among a group of Mormons. Being warned of this, she 'lay aside [her] black' and dressed as a 'gay young girl and mingled with the girls' and was able to evade them, although they searched the ship for several days before it sailed for Newfoundland.<sup>47</sup>

She wrote: 'I thought of the girl I was not six months ago. now I had left all and was traveling alone to a land unknown to me, but I had cast my lot with the people of God and in him I put my trust'.<sup>48</sup> Mary Ann had put her faith in God and in the Mormon religion before her natural inclination to be with her family in her home surroundings, and that appears to be the main motivation for her departure, together with a desire to be in a community of people of similar beliefs and escape persecution.

In a brief account of his life, written for his children and grandchildren, William Wood wrote that he had been a regular attender at meetings of the United Brethren before his conversion.<sup>49</sup> When first invited to hear an American missionary speak, Wood assumed that this would also be a preacher from the Brethren and attended out of curiosity but he then found that 'for the first time in my life I heard the Gospel taught as it was anciently taught by Jesus Christ and His Apostles'.<sup>50</sup> The Mormon Elder who preached on that occasion was Brigham Young and Wood 'knew that it was the truth', however he also knew that baptism would mean loss of work, which he could ill-afford, so he 'put off going into the

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<sup>47</sup> Maughan, p.15.

<sup>48</sup> Maughan, p.14.

<sup>49</sup> William Wood, History of the Life of William Wood, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Wood, p.1.

water'.<sup>51</sup> Wood described having plenty of gardening and maintenance work but his circumstances were such that 'if you did not work you did not eat' and, although he felt compelled to attend meetings of the Mormons, he was not baptised until 23 September 1840. Almost immediately, Wood was dismissed from his work in a quarry, although his employer briefly reinstated him in the hope of persuading him to abandon his new-found faith, but Wood stood firm in his conviction that Joseph Smith was a true prophet.<sup>52</sup>

There followed some very difficult months in which Wood lacked food and shelter but eventually he did find work and was able to support himself again. Like Mary Ann Weston, Wood met a family, the Greens, who were preparing to emigrate and were able to loan him money for his passage so that he could join them.<sup>53</sup> Exactly two years after his conversion, William Wood sailed from Liverpool to New Orleans aboard the *Medford*, on which Wood says that Elder Orson Hyde led a company of over two hundred souls.<sup>54</sup> Wood's account demonstrates the depth of his faith and the degree to which he experienced discrimination because of it. His lack of financial security meant that he had nothing to lose by emigrating and, like Mary Ann, the comfort of joining a community of like-minded people must also have motivated him to leave the country. Both religious and practical factors played a part in his decision. These first-hand accounts show the vulnerability of rural people, whose isolation left them exposed to persecution and open to abuse.

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<sup>51</sup> Wood, p.1.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, p.2.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, p.3.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, p.3. Confirmed by Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas, 1830-1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983) p.148.

While Wood did not mention the attitudes of his family to his conversion, another convert, James Palmer, described a supportive family, who were 'exceedingly devoted to the Christian religion', being members of the United Brethren under the leadership of Thomas Kington. Although his parents were poor, Palmer had attended school for four years and served a four-year apprenticeship as a stonemason and bricklayer.<sup>55</sup> Despite being only twenty years old, Palmer was appointed by Kington as a preacher to 'preach the Gospel and proclaim remission of sins to all mankind', which he fulfilled to the best of his ability. He wrote of knowing that a church must have apostles and prophets but that these were lacking in the current organisation and, like another young preacher, Job Smith, said the Brethren 'were daily petitioning our Father to send us this light'.<sup>56</sup> In April 1840 it was announced that a man of God had come from America and would be preaching in Ledbury, a meeting to which all were invited. There are few examples of the content of the teaching in the diaries of the converts but Palmer did comment on this: he wrote of Woodruff's preaching from the first principles of the Gospel on 'God's divine law, unadulterated, giving chapter and verse from the Bible ... until we were all satisfied that we had heard the truth which we had been seeking'.<sup>57</sup> Palmer, his father and his brother were then baptised with ten other Brethren, with his mother following a few days later.<sup>58</sup> Within weeks, Palmer had been ordained as a priest at Gadfield Elm and given responsibility to preside over a branch of the Church at Kilcot, Gloucestershire, which involved preaching engagements at Dymock, Ledbury and Greenway.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> James Palmer, *James Palmer's Travels and Ministry in the Gospel, 1820-1905*, p.2.

<sup>56</sup> Palmer, p.3.

<sup>57</sup> Palmer, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Palmer, p.3. This is confirmed by Woodruff's *Baptismal Diary*, although the dates differ by a few days.

<sup>59</sup> Palmer, p.3.

Palmer became a full-time preacher and was soon appointed as an Elder of the Church.<sup>60</sup> His journal recorded work in Cheltenham, Gloucester and Upton-upon-Severn, where he had varying degrees of success in spreading the Gospel. Palmer was opposed and verbally abused by preachers of other denominations and, in particular, by a Roman Catholic priest who disrupted a meeting by reading out 'newspaper falsehoods' against the Mormons.<sup>61</sup> He had first preached in Garway, in the Herefordshire Marches, in June and in September 1840 he was directed to work in the Garway area, using that Branch as his base.<sup>62</sup> By that time nearly all the United Brethren had joined the Mormon Church and Palmer continued to work diligently, often walking long distances, to preach and to perform baptisms. Garway became an important centre for the Mormon movement and the Garway Conference, where area meetings were held, was formally established in April 1841.<sup>63</sup> Palmer was not deterred by local churchmen in this area on the Welsh borders of Herefordshire warning against the Mormon doctrines and preachers. His journal recorded a sermon and a speech made by the Rev. Charles Probert on 'The Mormon Delusion' in which the missionaries were characterised as 'money diggers, trick players, fortune tellers, and jugglers' but Palmer still found that the people were flocking to his own meetings.<sup>64</sup> He continued his ministry, walking long distances between his many preaching engagements, until 7 March 1842, when he set off to join the Saints in America, sailing from Liverpool aboard the *Hanover* on 15 March. He was among 268 passengers but Palmer does not say how many of these were Mormons.<sup>65</sup> His

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<sup>60</sup> Palmer, p.5.

<sup>61</sup> Palmer, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Palmer, p.5.

<sup>63</sup> Sue Rice, 'The Methodists and the Mormons', in *Garway Hill Through the Ages*, ed. Joan and Brian Thomas (Herefordshire: Logaston, 2007) pp.117-34.

<sup>64</sup> Palmer, p.15.

<sup>65</sup> Palmer, p.32. Sonne, p.148, estimates 200 Mormon passengers.

parents had already emigrated and he was happy to be reunited with them after a long and arduous journey.<sup>66</sup>

These are but a very small sample of the many journals written by people who joined the Mormon Church as a result of this mission. However, they demonstrate the reasons that influenced their conversion, which were both spiritual and practical, and the hardships that they faced within their community and sometimes within their own families. The writings of James Palmer also show how baptism was often quickly followed by appointment to the role of Elder, who was then sent to expand the area of operation of the mission.

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<sup>66</sup> Palmer, p.35.

Comments about the Mormon mission appeared in the editorials and correspondence columns of local newspapers from September 1840, following the publication of tracts written by two 'talented clergymen ... exposing the delusion and absurdity of Mormonism'. These tracts were two '*Warnings from a Minister to his Flock*' by the Rev. W. J. Morrish of Ledbury and '*A Few More Facts Relating to the Latter-day Saints*' by the Rev. J. Symons of Dymock.<sup>67</sup>

In his second tract, Morrish was far from complimentary about his parishioners, describing them as 'simple-minded Christians' who were 'not sufficiently grounded in the faith' but were 'unstable and wavering' and being taken in by the Mormon message.<sup>68</sup> This does not say much for Morrish's ministry! He stated that the missionaries were preaching about baptism, Christ's Second Coming and the 'New Jerusalem and America', asserting that his flock was convinced by them because much of the teaching was from the Bible, although 'they are too cunning to reveal the real doctrines'. Morrish maintained that the Book of Mormon was forged and went on to refute various passages, accusing the doctrines of 'disloyalty', 'inhumanity' and even 'treason', because the 'rule of kings' was disapproved.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Hereford Journal*, 30 September 1840, p.3.

<sup>68</sup> W. J. Morrish, *The Latter-day Saints and the Book of Mormon: a Second Warning from a Minister to his Flock*, (Ledbury: J. Gibbs, 1840) p.1. Morrish himself was an unusual character who, as Chaplain to the Workhouse, was rebuked by the Board in 1844 for practising Mesmerism upon the inmates! See John Powell, *Hard Times in Herefordshire*, (Herefordshire: Logaston, 2008) p.59.

<sup>69</sup> Morrish, p.3.

An editorial in the *Hereford Times* described these tracts as 'excellent' and expressed incredulity that people from this area should have joined 'this illiberal and infatuated sect' and were ready to 'leave their homes and embark for a foreign shore' to seek the 'New Jerusalem'.<sup>70</sup> This piece prompted a letter to the editor in defence of the Latter-day Saints, the writer believing that the derogatory remarks were unjust. The letter pointed out that all religious sects believe that the others are 'in error' and that the Mormons should not be criticised as 'illiberal for saying so'. Interestingly, the editor 'omitted a considerable portion of our correspondent's letter as its insertion would lead to religious controversy', showing the strength of feeling aroused by the mission.<sup>71</sup> This elicited a further letter, criticising the editor for publishing a defence of 'delusions of so gross nature'. This writer stated that since its rise in America, Mormonism has 'brought thousands of unfortunate families ... to beggary and ruin' and that local people had withdrawn their savings and placed money 'into the pockets of these deceivers' to fund their passages to the 'New Jerusalem in America'.<sup>72</sup> The Mormons were now being accused of defrauding the converts. Despite all the negative comments on the Mormons, they won respect for their endurance in the face of persecution.

### *Summary*

Scrutiny of these primary sources has shown how different aspects of the mission were seen by the missionary himself, by those who became converts to the Mormon faith and by the local clergy and press. Wilford Woodruff was delighted by the swift and fervent response to his teachings in this area, to which he had

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<sup>70</sup> *Hereford Times*, 24 October 1840, p.3.

<sup>71</sup> *Hereford Times*, 21 November 1840, p.4.

<sup>72</sup> *Hereford Journal*, 2 December 1840, p.2.

come mainly because of his faith that he was called by God to do so but also for the very practical reason of the offer of bed and board. His converts were already religious people and his message particularly appealed to members of the United Brethren, the baptism of their leader being a pivotal moment for success of the mission. They were persuaded not only by the strong personality of Woodruff and the straightforward delivery of the teaching by him and by others but also by the spirit of community among the new Mormon converts. Persecution by their neighbours and their disparagement in the press drew them closer together and this was a key factor in the converts' individual decisions to emigrate to America.

### *Postscript*

Wilford Woodruff was at times accompanied by other American missionaries during his stay in the Three Counties but he often travelled with local converts whom he had appointed as Teachers and they continued his work of spreading the gospel after he had left.<sup>73</sup> In August 1840 he went to London, where his preaching had little success and he found that 'the devil was manifest'.<sup>74</sup> Woodruff returned to Herefordshire several times before he left England entirely in April 1841. Convert diaries and anecdotal evidence from their descendants record many instances of emigration and the hardships endured during hazardous sea crossings and the subsequent trek across America, when the Mormons were forced out of Nauvoo in 1846, to what is now Salt Lake City, where some became agricultural pioneers. However, Wilkinson and Doxey Green do not supply an estimate of the total number of emigrants from the Three Counties: they found it difficult to positively identify all the converts, let alone link them to other church

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<sup>73</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, p.65.

<sup>74</sup> Woodruff, location 2202.



records and passenger lists.<sup>75</sup> While some of those who could afford to emigrated in 1840 and 1841, others waited many years because of poverty or family commitments. Other sources quote emigration figures but these tend to cover the sum total of British emigrants without identifying their home counties. It was estimated that about a quarter of the British members of the Mormon church emigrated in 1840 and the same proportion again in 1841, although British church membership was also growing at this time. The 1850s was the decade with the heaviest emigration from the British Isles, estimated at 16,342 persons.<sup>76</sup> Because emigration took place over several decades, there is no suggestion in local histories of a denuding of Herefordshire villages.

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<sup>75</sup> Wilkinson and Doxey Green, p.138.

<sup>76</sup> Bloxham et al, pp.197-98.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study of the Mormon mission set out to examine the background of the people who were converted, to understand why they were ready to be baptised into a new religion. The geographical area has been described, also the religious and social context of their conversion prior to the arrival of the missionary, Wilford Woodruff. His journal provided a view of the mission from his own perspective, while those of the converts gave their accounts of the events and indicated their previous religious affiliations and occupational status. Clergy tracts and items in the press provided an opposing standpoint.

The mission of 1840 was undertaken in a sparsely populated area of Herefordshire and the bordering counties of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Outside the market towns, the inhabitants experienced rural isolation and, despite producing a diversity of crops, they suffered from poor economic conditions when the harvest was insufficient. In other parts of England, riots took place and people used political action to protest against their harsh circumstances but in this area of few opportunities, religion was an outlet for dissent. Herefordshire was similar to other rural counties in this respect, although nonconformist street preachers were cut from the same cloth as the political activists of other areas.

In the mid-nineteenth century, church membership was becoming associated more with social class than in earlier years, when church communities included all levels of society, albeit in a strict hierarchy: Anglican ministers were powerful characters who were felt to be out-of-touch with working class congregants. Nonconformist denominations had proliferated locally and nationally between 1800 and 1840, with

agricultural labourers in particular being drawn to Primitive Methodism and related splinter groups. It was not uncommon to move between these groups. The United Brethren had split from the Primitive Methodists under a zealous leader and comprised largely working-class folk who formed a close-knit fellowship, although they were scattered across a rural area. Some forty preachers followed a Methodist-style plan of appointments to preach at the venues on their circuit but they appeared to be seeking a new direction when the Mormon missionaries arrived.

Coming to Herefordshire for both religious and practical reasons, Wilford Woodruff found immediate interest in the Mormon teachings and was baptising people within days of his arrival. A crucial element in the success of the mission was the baptism of Thomas Kington, the leader of the United Brethren. As a result, Woodruff was given access to the whole group and was invited to use their venues to spread his message. Among the many converts, almost all their preachers became Mormons. Most people who were baptised were already religiously inclined and mainly members of nonconformist congregations – notably the United Brethren - who were drawn to this new form of Christianity by shared beliefs delivered in a straightforward manner by a charismatic missionary.

While Woodruff relished the success his mission was having, the converts' diaries reveal the persecution suffered by some of them and this brought even closer together an already cohesive group based upon the United Brethren, and was an influential factor in their decisions to emigrate. Strong opposition was voiced in

tracts published by the clergy and by contributors to the local press but this did not stem the numbers coming forward for baptism.

In summary then, the converts were already religious people drawn mainly from the working classes. They were attracted to the Mormon message but the reasons for their conversion were also associated with the poor economic prospects experienced in this rural area.

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