

## Introduction

It was good to be in Great Britain. Certainly, that was the overriding sentiment of faculty members of the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University who traveled to England, Wales, and Scotland in June 2006. The story behind this trip extends back over twenty years. Beginning in 1985, the department decided to commence a series of Church history study tours. The emphasis was on acquiring essential information and vital insights about our historical past and on gaining a “feeling for place,” both of which would ideally translate into our becoming more effective teachers. Tour participants were required to prepare papers that dealt with historical topics relevant to the particular region, which papers would later be published in a *Regional Studies* volume. The first such study tour was to New England in 1985. In 1987, the department opted to go to Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> It was an auspicious and exciting time—the sesquicentennial of Latter-day Saint beginnings in Great Britain. And such beginnings! Regarding that first 1837 missionary venture to England, the Prophet Joseph declared that it “must be done for the salvation of His [the Lord’s] Church.”<sup>2</sup>

Our 1987 study group arrived in Scotland on a Sunday and held sacrament meeting that evening in our hotel at Bridge of Allan, just outside Stirling. The following day we drove to Edinburgh, where we climbed Arthur’s Seat. In the ensuing days, we traveled southward, visiting both national shrines and Latter-day Saint historical sites. For most of us, it was our first exposure to the town square in Preston (where the first Latter-day Saint preaching commenced in 1837), to the River Ribble (where the first baptisms occurred), and to Benbow’s Pond (where a commemorative plaque had recently been placed and where Brigham Young University president Jeffrey R. Holland, in stirring fashion, compared this most ordinary dribble of water to the Waters of Mormon). We concluded our tour the following Sunday in London on a high spiritual clime by worshiping with British Saints at an area conference presided over by President

Ezra Taft Benson and by attending an evening fireside where President Holland addressed the congregation.

A goodly number of participants on the 1987 study tour have retired. Expectedly, in that near twenty-year span, many new teachers have joined our faculty. Understandably, much has occurred in the past two decades and much has been learned about our sojourn in this blessed land. Why not return, we thought, to this region where Apostles strode and testified? Why not go to this land that was so formative in our history—where large numbers of native Britons embraced Mormonism and preached the Restoration faith with verve and spirit?

And so in 2006 we happily returned. On this trip, the organizing committee chose to reverse the order of the 1987 trip.<sup>3</sup> We therefore began in London and concluded in Scotland. In London we saw both national historical sites as well as significant Church history landmarks. Among other historic places, we toured the London England Temple grounds. On this brisk morning, it was easy to envision a tearful President David O. McKay, a half-century ago, expressing gratitude that he had lived long enough to see a temple constructed in England. After a rewarding experience in London, our Welsh bus driver, Eddie, picked us up at our hotel and bused us to his home country—a land many Saints associate with legendary missionary Dan Jones. Most of our time in Wales was spent at Merthyr Tydfil, where many early converts to the Church worked in local coal mines. From Wales we drove through the rolling green hills of the West Midlands, where Wilford Woodruff baptized hundreds and where several Church history landmarks are found. We enjoyed the windy climb up Herefordshire Beacon, where the Apostles often went in 1840–41 to ponder, reflect, and receive heavenly guidance.

On Sunday we made our way to Liverpool and the Albert Docks, the point of departure for thousands of nineteenth-century British Saints gathering to Zion. That evening we held a sacrament meeting and a fireside. It was a fine opportunity for all of us to hear some of our seasoned Church history scholars speak;<sup>4</sup> it was an equally fine opportunity for our traveling group to mix with the local Saints and glean stories from them.

Liverpool is one of the fundamental locations in our early history. Another location of equal distinction is Preston, a city we toured on Monday. Preston (and its nearby environs) is the cradle of the Church in England and the location of a modern temple. We also took in nearby Downham, where Heber C. Kimball converted many and where, in pied-piper fashion, he gained the undying love and respect of villagers. On Tuesday, we continued northward, driving through John Taylor country at Milnthorpe. Nearing the England-Scotland border, we took a quick detour to Hadrian's Wall, an unexpected treat for the scholars of ancient history. After seeing the wall, Andrew Skinner declared to everyone that he could now die a happy man. We arrived in Edinburgh that evening. The next morning we climbed Arthur's Seat, referred to as Pratt's Hill by some local Latter-day Saints. Here Matthew Richardson briefly reported on the apostolic dedications that occurred on this rock mount and a skilled bagpiper in a kilt provided ample ambience by playing both Scottish and Latter-day Saint numbers.<sup>5</sup> Also here we began to part company.

An added feature of our study tour, a truly helpful feature in our minds, was having local Church Educational System tour guides along the way. Who better to talk of not only British culture and history but also Latter-day Saint culture, emphasizing current successes and challenges? The local guides were terrific and added a significant dimension to our journey.<sup>6</sup>

Our traveling faculty also came prepared and made significant contributions along the way. By giving reports on the bus (about the English Bible, for example) or at sites like Tabernacle Square in London, all faculty made helpful contributions. And, of course, consistent with our past policy, tour participants prepared scholarly papers having to do with the Latter-day Saint experience in Great Britain. Twelve of these papers, the majority dealing with twentieth-century themes or events, have been selected for inclusion in this volume. I will briefly summarize the thesis or basic conclusion of the articles in roughly chronological fashion.

Scott C. Esplin writes on the enigmatic Isaac Russell, one of seven missionaries who served on that historic first mission to England in 1837. Elder Russell, unquestionably a successful missionary,

later fell into disrepute during those tumultuous times in Missouri in the late 1830s. Was his reputation deserving of the tarnish and taint put upon it by various members, both then and now? Esplin encourages students of Church history to suspend judgment and be wary of throwing out labels of apostate.

Arnold K. Garr assesses the contributions of Elder George A. Smith, the youngest member of the apostolic delegation in 1840–41, who achieved striking success as a missionary in the Staffordshire Potteries area. Elder Smith was a force for good, baptizing a large number of converts and creating several new branches. While this friendly, outgoing Apostle endured more than his share of ill health, he derived much satisfaction from his missionary labors.

Carol Wilkinson discusses the restoration of the first Latter-day Saint chapel at Gadfield Elm in Worcestershire. Donated to the Church by the United Brethren, most of whom embraced Mormonism, this was the place where Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and Willard Richards preached; this was the place where John and Jane Benbow, Thomas and Hannah Kington, and hundreds of other early converts worshiped. The acquisition of this dilapidated chapel in 1994 is a fascinating story of resolute local Saints engaging in a grass-roots effort to raise sufficient funds to purchase a site that reverberates with the echoes of our early beginnings.

Picturing the sites of British Church history is a valuable part of the travel experience, and Craig James Ostler has photographed many sites of significance to Latter-day Saints. The featured sites include the Albert Docks at Liverpool, where “the pick and flower of England” set sail to America, and the River Ribble, where the first baptisms were held.

A major accomplishment of the apostolic quorum mission in the 1840s was the printing and distribution of the Book of Mormon. Clyde J. Williams details the impact of this volume of scripture in Britain from 1837 to 1852. Despite its early limited accessibility—it was not available until February of 1841—for some converts (but not all), the Book of Mormon was an instrumental conversion tool. For many missionaries, Williams postulates, the Book of Mormon was a major manifestation of Joseph Smith’s revelatory powers

and therefore buttressed their beliefs that Mormonism was both founded upon and regularly nourished by continuing revelation.

Richard E. Bennett and BYU student researcher Jeffrey L. Jensen take us into the twentieth-century in their study of Church reaction to the *Titanic* disaster of 1912. The authors give special attention to the response of Church leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. It was in April of that year, we are told, when the lone Church member on the sailing register, Irene Colvin Corbett, along with hundreds of other travelers, walked up the gangplank at Portsmouth. After six months of midwife training in England, Corbett was ready to rejoin her family in Provo, Utah. She was one of nearly 1,600 people who did not survive. The authors introduce us to a defender of religious freedom, noted English journalist and newspaper editor, William Thomas Stead, who also drowned that fateful night. During those tough, gritty years around 1912 and 1913, when Latter-day Saints were extensively hounded and persecuted in England, Stead regularly and courageously exposed the shallowness and falsity of the slander and accusations with which the Saints were bombarded.

Over twenty years after his missionary stint in Scotland and sixteen years after being called to the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder David O. McKay returned to Britain, this time to head up the European Mission. Mary Jane Woodger, author of a biography of President McKay, focuses her energy on this mission experience. Woodger claims his experience in 1922–23 was a kind of training ground, a formative period for his tenure as President of the Church. During this period, for example, President McKay coined the phrase that became familiar to all during his presidential era, “Every member a missionary.”

Many members know that harassment and persecution were commonplace in the nineteenth-century Church. But few realize that in the first few decades of the twentieth century, persecution was common in Europe as well. Jerome M. Perkins spent hours reading from the testimonies of British Saints from 1900 to 1950 as recorded in oral histories conducted in 1987, the year of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Church in Britain. Perkins describes the twin challenges British Saints faced of dealing with the disruption of life due to the constant flux of emigrating fellow Saints and

the almost constant harassment of fellow countrymen who resented their religion. Often ostracized by both families and friends, it was not always easy to be a Latter-day Saint in Great Britain in the early twentieth century, but many members exhibited tenacious faith.

Aware that a negative media image was furnishing grist for critics and oppressors, Church leaders sent exceptional men to supervise the European Mission in an effort to overturn or transform the image of the Church. Two of the men, observes Alan K. Parrish, were James E. Talmage and John A. Widtsoe. Parrish notes that Elder Talmage, mission president from 1924 to 1927, used his reputation as a respected scientist to gain access to influential newspaper editors and to encourage them to at least attempt to report the Latter-day Saint point of view. In effect, Elder Widtsoe walked through the doors Elder Talmage opened. After six years of diligent public relations work, Elder Widtsoe returned home in 1933, satisfied that the tide had turned but aware that more work needed to be done.

David F. Boone writes of yet another challenge to the British Saints—overcoming the obstacles generated by World War II. Missionaries were evacuated, mission president Hugh B. Brown left, and many members had to assume missionary responsibilities. They were dutiful beyond measure, but given the instability of the era, it was understandable that conversions would decrease and that some members would fall into inactivity. Boone intersperses his account with heroic acts of British members or missionaries to Britain, one of whom included the son of President Brown, who returned to England as a fighter pilot to share the burden of fighting for freedom with “his people.” Elder Brown was killed while on a flying mission.

Less than a decade after the end of World War II, two temples were constructed in western Europe, the first in Switzerland and the second just outside London. Few Saints in 1945 Europe envisioned such a possibility. These two temples, Richard O. Cowan writes, were the result of a historic decision made by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in April 1952 to build temples in Europe. Cowan then shifts his attention to the construction of the London and Preston temples, and in so doing, bridges the forty-year span between the administrations of President McKay

and President Hinckley. The building of these two temples, asserts Dr. Cowan, not only became a source of inspiration and strength to British Saints but also signaled to a larger audience that the Church was fully mature, strong and vibrant, no longer a springboard for emigration to North America but a sure and sturdy beacon of truth for all European Saints.

In our concluding article, Alexander L. Baugh pens a brief overview of the Church in twentieth-century Great Britain. Baugh chronicles events and happenings during that particularly challenging era from 1900 to the 1920s. He gives special attention to the post-1960 Church in Great Britain, a period he calls “an era of unprecedented growth.” Demographic studies indicate that Latter-day Saint populations are larger in the northern regions of the country and that the Church is now regarded by most in England as a viable Christian denomination. Baugh asserts that the Church projects an image of strength, vitality, and optimism—an assessment, I might add, that resonates well with our BYU study group.

Paul H. Peterson

*Professor emeritus of Church history and doctrine*

## Notes

1. The organizing committee of the 1987 study group included department chair Keith W. Perkins and faculty members Larry C. Porter, Donald Q. Cannon, and James R. Moss. Dr. Moss, a long time CES director in England and one of the early pioneers in locating and learning about historical sites in the country, expertly assumed bus captain duties.

2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 2:489.

3. The 2006 Great Britain study tour was skillfully orchestrated by Dennis A. Wright, now associate dean. Committee members assisting Dennis included Cynthia Doxey, Robert C. Freeman, and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel. Cynthia drove our van, assisted by Carol Wilkinson. Robert was placed in charge of compiling the papers for the upcoming *Regional Studies* volume. Richard, who has traveled extensively in Great Britain, ably served as our bus manager. On a daily basis, he managed to keep us both smiling and moving—not an easy feat. Also traveling with the group were Dean Terry B. Ball, Neal A. Maxwell Institute director

Andrew C. Skinner, and chair of Church History and Doctrine Arnold K. Garr. As in former years, two colleagues from the Church Educational System were invited to participate. We enjoyed getting to know Thomas R. Valletta and Kelly Shepherd.

4. Speakers included Susan Easton Black, Randall L. Bott, Matthew O. Richardson, and Carol Wilkinson.

5. This moving special effect was arranged by Cynthia Doxey.

6. Local institute teacher Warrick Kear shared his expertise with us in London. We picked up local Birmingham director David Cook in Cardiff, Wales, and David accompanied and instructed us the next few days. Former bishop and longtime member John Mahoney inspired us at Merthyr Tydfil. At Preston we were directed and tutored by licensed guide Peter Fagg, who both walked our socks off and remarkably summarized a week's worth of information into a single day. During our brief sojourn in Edinburgh, CES director Robert Richardson competently assisted us. And one of our own, fellow BYU professor and an adjunct teacher to Religious Education, Dr. Carol Wilkinson, a native of Yorkshire and a former Herefordshire missionary, provided special touches in a myriad of ways.