

Baptist Historical Society: Local Church History Review

Larry J. Kreitzer, *'Seditious Sectaryes': the Baptist Conventiclers of Oxford 1641-1691* (2 vols), Paternoster 2006, ISBN 978-1-84227-516-0 and 978-1-84227-517-7. £59-99

These two volumes are dedicated to the members of New Road Baptist church, Oxford and rarely can a local church have had such a colourful kaleidoscope of its origins.

Making extensive use of local records, Dr Kreitzer has provided a picture packed full of detail. In the absence of church books from the period, people shape the heart of the story. More familiar names, such as Richard Tidmarsh and Lawrence King, share the stage with, among others, Roger Hatchman the soldier, Thomas Williams the milliner, Richard Quelch the watchmaker and Ralph Austen the gardener. The beginnings are set in a time when Oxford was the headquarters of Charles I and end when toleration permitted freedom of worship. The interim is marked by Commonwealth promise and the shadowy illegality in Restoration England. Here is a lively picture of the individuals with Baptist convictions in Oxford.

Appendices in the first volume set out family pedigrees for the key members of the congregation (a very important contribution given the family links in dissenting communities), and also several extracts from key documents of the period to give context, including the 1688 Charter of Oxford in Latin and English.

The second volume consists of extensive transcripts of records that illustrate the lives of several of the Oxford Baptists. Personal letters sit cheek by jowl with property leases, excommunication lists, Baptist church records, official documents of Oxford Council and various parochial details and much more. Dr Kreitzer has painstakingly constructed with generous attention to detail. Local archives have been thoroughly and patiently examined. It is an object lesson for any researcher of Baptist history or biography in the desirability to consult Anglican, parish and civil sources. He marshals his facts to provide an impressive montage of cameos.

One feature that emerges is the number of connections and networks both personal and epistolary that existed. These include a series of letters from Austen to the polymath Samuel Hartlib. The Toms family made a link to the Abingdon congregation, significant when Daniel Turner, the minister at Abingdon, helps to re-establish the Oxford church in 1780. The Quelch family would soon be linked to the Stennetts of Wallingford by marriage. John Pendarves of Abingdon introduced the Fifth Monarchist dimension. Here is another illustration of the closeness of the dissenting world.

The members of New Road should be grateful to Dr Kreitzer for his detective work and meticulous research. He has produced a history that is likely to be the definitive telling of the story.

Reviewer: Stephen Copson, Secretary, Baptist Historical Society