

Diaries – do they exist anymore?

The historical adage that claims the interpretation of history begins with the eye-witness who writes an account of an event, is well worth pondering. But how many people keep a diary these days? And if so, what kind? Just a few appointments to remember, or birthdays? How will we discover the heart of Baptist Christian perception if diaries are no longer attempted? How will future generations know about the 'nitty-gritty' of congregational life? Even church magazines, once a good source, are a rarity these days – most of what used to be in them now appearing weekly on a give away page with the hymn book – or even more transitory, put up on the overhead never to be seen again. If there is a monthly magazine, who will keep a file of them, and where?

I have before me at the moment two diaries which make fascinating reading. One is *The Secret Diary of Sarah Thomas: 1860-65* [Windrush Press, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos] 1994. Local historian June Lewis of Fairford has edited it. Sarah's diaries were not meant for anyone else's eyes, and cover a crucial part of her life as she decides which of her suitors to wed. 'The themes of conflict in love and the demands of her strict religious upbringing, and the frailties of human emotions make the diaries as rich to read as any novel.' Sarah was a daughter of the Baptist manse, her father being minister at Fairford and one of her ancestors being the Dr John Thomas who accompanied Carey to Bengal when the BMS began in the 1790s, 70 years earlier.

Sarah Thomas's diaries are now published. Also before me at the moment is a transcription of the diary of Dr Joseph Mason, a member of Broadmead Baptist Church,

Bristol, and close friend of Hugh and Caleb Evans, the father and son Ministers of the Broadmead Church and Presidents of the Baptist College. The transcript came to me via a medical contact, Dr H Temple Phillips who had written about the history of the Old Private Lunatic Asylum in Bristol [1740-1859] and in the process discovered Dr Mason's diary for the year 1763. His interest was almost entirely medical and it tells an important story about the care of the insane in the west of England. Imagine my delight when I found accounts of several meetings between Mason and Caleb and Hugh, Mason's encouragement of the College students sent to lead worship in the asylum on Saturdays or Sundays, and the realisation that Baptists from across the country sent Mason patients for treatment. The transcript is 150 pages of single space A4. Dr Phillips, in following the story of the institution, which passed down through the female family line, came across the Bompas family, a well-known Baptist ministerial family, some of whom had migrated to South Africa, and in whose possession the diary was. The original is now in the Medical Department Library of Bristol University. It is also emerged that the London Stennett family was connected, one of the Stennett daughters marrying Mason, as his second wife, and she brought with her the Stennett 'seventh day' convictions which were apparently met by the weekly Saturday service for the Asylum's patients.

Are there any other diaries the Society should be aware of, whether now printed or still in their original state? And are there 'secret dairies' now being written which should be assigned by deed of will to the national Baptist resource centre at Regent's Park College, Oxford? Comments, and information would be welcome.

ROGER HAYDEN 2005

Resources for History

As always, we are grateful to Frank for sharing resources with us. This time, he has a question as well. Can anybody help?

Berkshire Record Office holds in its Archdeaconry of Berkshire records a letter concerning a dispute over the right to preach in Hagbourne church - ref.

D/A2/c 164/f114 - date: 1660 [from Scope and Content] Richard Bristow, the incumbent, complained that his chosen deputy was prevented from preaching by Henry Armstrong and Robert Hide, "anabaptist Churchwardens", who "would have one Drye to have preached there who formerly spoke against ye King, being a Souldier in ye Parliament Army, & a Shopkeeper formerly in London. Does any reader know more of these good folk, witnessing within a few stones' throw of Baptist House in Didcot?

Frank Law fmlaw@onetel.com

Members may like to know of a website, <http://www.theobamber.co.uk/index.html>, which covers Rev Theo Bamber's Collection of Books and Addresses given in Rye Lane Chapel, Peckham 1926-1961. It has an outline of his life [1891-1970] by a daughter, includes an appreciation of him by the Church Secretary given on the occasion of his 35th Anniversary [in 1961] at Rye Lane Chapel, Peckham, and has a history of that Chapel covering 1818-1927

A brief chapel history of Naunton, Glos., Baptists can be found at http://www.ngbc.org.uk/Pages/Naunton_Chapel.html