



1-1-1994

Men with a Mission, 1837-1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles by James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker

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Recommended Citation

Watt, Ronald G. (1994) "*Men with a Mission, 1837-1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* by James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 34 : Iss. 1 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol34/iss1/17>

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JAMES B. ALLEN, RONALD K. ESPLIN, and DAVID J. WHITTAKER. *Men with a Mission, 1837-1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992. xix; 460 pp. 84 illustrations, 7 maps, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$24.00.

Reviewed by Ronald G. Watt, an archivist working in Salt Lake City.

My first reaction to this book was to wonder whether I could learn anything new about the mission of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to the British Isles. However, I found myself captivated by the work of James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker. The authors' careful interpretation of the men and the mission is interesting and enlightening. The book provides, as promised in the preface, "a depth and richness never before available" (xvi), enlarging our understanding of more Church history than the book's four-year focus would suggest.

Each of the three authors of this volume brings his own expertise to the book. James Allen has written a monumental work on the early English convert William Clayton. David Whittaker has centered much of his work on the history of early Mormon publications and has read widely in British history sources. Ronald Esplin wrote an excellent dissertation on Brigham Young and has also published material concerning the women who were left at home.

The authors have several purposes to promote. According to the dedication page, they want to impart their own "commitment to the missionary spirit." They write for both scholars and "the general readership of the Church," employing scholarly tools and expertise to mine "the rich treasure trove of journals, letters, and other documents," which tell a "momentous story in the history of Mormon missionary work" (xv-xvi).

The central purpose of *Men with a Mission*, though, is to show how the mission brought a spirit of unity to the nine members of the Twelve who served in the British Isles. (There were only eleven members of the quorum during this period and two, pleading poverty, did not serve missions abroad.) The four-year experience transformed the group of nine dedicated missionaries into a quorum which could function effectively as a body and assume its important role in the organization and history of the Church.

The book provides a detailed chronological account of the work of the Apostle-missionaries in Great Britain. The first of thirteen chapters introduces the men and the land in which they served. Subsequent chapters deal with Heber C. Kimball's and Orson Hyde's first mission to England during 1837-38; happenings in Missouri, Illinois, and England before the nine Apostles traveled various pathways to Liverpool during 1839-40; missionary work in the British Isles from January 1840 to March 1841; and the return to America in 1841. Most of these chapters treat short periods of time—in two instances the period is just four months—enabling the authors to unfold the fascinating story of the work, often day by day. Personal glimpses of those whose lives were touched by the missionaries further enrich the narrative. We learn, for example, that a little over a week after Kimball and Hyde arrived in England in 1837 they baptized their first converts. One of the first nine converts was Elizabeth Ann Walmsley, “a frail consumptive not expected to live, who was carried to the water by her husband. Elder Kimball had promised her that if she would repent and be baptized, she would be healed” (35-36). She lived and emigrated to Utah, where she died years later at the age of eighty-two (36).

Three topical chapters discuss missionary life, the publication program of the Apostles in the British Isles, and the experiences of the Apostles' wives who remained in Nauvoo—adding significant detail and analysis to the chronological narrative. The chapter entitled “What It Meant to Be Missionaries” explains that in the 1830s and 1840s the elders went without purse or scrip. Generally, they made contacts by preaching in the streets or speaking in rented halls. At times they spoke in temperance meetings. The missionaries held both preaching and prayer meetings, yet the congregation did not partake of the sacrament at every meeting or even every week.

Because the authors use some sources which refer to the drinking of alcoholic beverages by the Apostles, they make sure the reader knows that the Word of Wisdom in that day was not understood to require total abstinence. Other topics are also discussed honestly and with sensitivity. Gifts of the Spirit, the authors explain, “abounded both with the apostles and among the Saints generally” (93). Healings, speaking in tongues, visions, dreams, and prophecies—carefully recorded in diaries and

letters—“were viewed as sacred and deeply personal, not to be touted as part of the missionary message or used as evidence for unbelievers” (92).

The authors give good explanations of the political happenings and social conditions in nineteenth-century Britain. Some of this background is provided to offer context for the responses of the missionaries to the country and its culture. For example, the missionaries could recognize the poverty and riches, but most could never comprehend the social class system because nothing like it existed in frontier America.

The chapter, intriguingly titled “To ‘Hurl Truth through the Land’: Publications of the Twelve,” concerns the Apostles’ ambitious program for publishing abroad the word of God, including the Book of Mormon, the *Millennial Star*, and a host of other materials. Abundant and detailed footnotes enlarge an informative discussion of the work of the “Apostle-writers.” In fact, sometimes the footnotes are more interesting to read than the text.

The heart of the book describes the nine Apostles’ work in the British Isles during 1840 and 1841 in terms of where each went, what each experienced, and what contributions each made. I had heard many times about the work of Wilford Woodruff in Herefordshire, and that is detailed here, but I learned about others whose experiences were less familiar to me. George A. Smith labored in Staffordshire in the Potteries, where he “experienced a rude awakening to the difficulties of working men and women” (161). Orson Pratt “organized the first Scottish branch of the church at Paisley” (163) and then moved on to Edinburgh, whose intellectual climate perfectly suited the Apostle, who would later become a mathematician and philosopher. The authors observe that “the ideas he came across there [in Edinburgh] had important influence on his later publications” (165).

Orson’s enthusiastic and skillful brother Parley P. Pratt “was the natural choice for editor” of the Apostles’ monthly periodical, the *Millennial Star*, which Parley announced “would be ‘devoted entirely to the great work of the spread of truth’ and would stand aloof from the common political and commercial news of the day” (252). Willard Richards labored in Preston and Manchester, balancing the pressing demands of missionary and emigration work with his obligations to Jennetta, the wife he had courted and married in England in 1838. In Liverpool, Ireland, and the Isle of

Man, John Taylor presented, to audiences ranging from six to fifteen hundred people, lectures which “generated both interest and opposition” (176). Elder Taylor “confronted every challenge head on” (179), responding in print to anti-Mormon newspaper articles and pamphlets and entering into a formal debate on the Isle of Man.

Building up the branches he had established during his 1837–38 mission, Heber C. Kimball encouraged and instructed new local Church leaders. With characteristic emphasis on the human element of their story, the authors explain that “depending upon the Saints for his livelihood . . . was emotionally draining” for Heber, who “cried inwardly at the poverty he saw among his friends. His heart melted when those who treated him so well on his first mission felt hurt because now they could not even feed him” (140–41). Orson Hyde, devitalized by both illness and disaffection following his first mission to England, rejoined his brethren there as they were preparing to return to America, receiving their collective blessing in April 1841 preparatory to his missionary work in Palestine.

Overseeing the men and the mission was Brigham Young, senior Apostle and President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He was responsible for administering not only missionary labors, but also the emigration of British Saints to America and a publishing program which produced the Book of Mormon complete with index, a new hymnal, and the *Millennial Star*. His decisive strength is evident in this narrative, as is his humor and humanity: “Be careful not to lay [my] letter with the new testament wrightings,” he wrote to Willard Richards, for “if you doe som body will take it for a text after the Malineum a[nd] contend about it” (158).

After the Twelve had obeyed the word of their Prophet and had built up the Church in Britain, Joseph Smith was ready to teach and prepare them for the mission of running the Church. While he would be teaching them up until the time of his death, their responsibilities and authority expanded significantly within weeks of their return from the British Isles. Wrote Willard Richards in his diary on August 16, 1841: “Conference: business of the Church given to the Twelve” (316).

The authors did not leave out the Apostles’ wives. A chapter entitled “Meanwhile, in Nauvoo” takes us back to America to see

what their wives were doing. After reading it, I wished there had been more on the wives and their problems and sacrifices. My wish was fulfilled, in part, in appendix B, which includes twenty-five important documents selected by the authors. Not often is the reader able to study the sources and make his or her own interpretation. One of the most poignant documents is a letter from Vilate Kimball to her husband, Heber C. Kimball, on September 21, 1839. She writes: "To day I have not ben able to do any thing. I was taken early this morning with a shake, and shook about an hour and a half as hard as I ever saw any body in my life, and then weltered under a fever and extream pain until almost night" (356).

The authors first conceived this book as being a book of documents. They made an excellent decision to write a narrative and include some of the best examples of the sources in an appendix. The source documents in appendix B give the reader just enough first-person perspective.

Appendix A is an excellent article by Malcolm R. Thorp about the social and religious backgrounds of the people who were converted to Mormonism, but it is out of place. This fine work should be in a journal, where it could be appreciated for its own sake.

The book is well footnoted. However, the location of the cited documents is mentioned not in the footnotes, but in the bibliography. The index is generally well done, providing listings under names, places, titles, and topics, but it occasionally misses a page. For example, Theodore Turley is listed as being on page 181 but not on page 182, though he appears on both pages. The maps and illustrations are also excellent.

This is a fine work of history, and the authors and publisher are to be commended. They have made an important, first-rate contribution in educating readers about the Church in the 1840s.