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The Patterns of Missionary Work and Emigration in Early Victorian Buckinghamshire, England, 1849–1878

Ronald E. Bartholomew

Latter-day Saint missionaries from America began proselyting in Buckinghamshire, England, in the 1840s and established the first branches of the Church there in 1849, but they did not experience the same dramatic successes their colleagues encountered in other regions of the British Isles. Indeed, most of the baptisms in this more rural county came as a result of missionary work by local converts. Several factors help explain the Buckinghamshire experience, and in many ways missionary work in this region may actually be more representative of Church growth in other parts of the world than the phenomenal conversion rates experienced in certain more industrial areas of England in the middle to latter years of the nineteenth century.

As is true of most historiography on the Church, historical analyses of Mormonism in the British Isles tend to focus on prominent individuals or principal institutions. J. F. C. Harrison observed that historians have typically emphasized the decisions and accomplishments of those in positions of authority or prominence. He suggests this might occur because of the difficulties associated with gathering pertinent information about “common people.” Despite this difficulty, Harrison says, documents relative to the “common people” are the historian’s witnesses, and “our task is to force them to speak, even against their will,” because “the real, central theme of History is not what happened, but what people felt about it when it was happening.”

Regarding the tendency of historians to focus on larger or more prominent institutions, Andrew Phillips has noted that a closer analysis of LDS congregations from a regional perspective would bring a richness and color that might otherwise be missed. He asserted, “The diversity of local
I did my doctoral studies at the University of Buckingham in England. While studying there, I developed a close association with Professor John Clarke. One day he discovered that I was using almost all of my free time visiting various parish churches in Buckinghamshire in an attempt to learn more about my maternal ancestors, who almost exclusively originated from that county. Due to his interest in Victorian history, he challenged me to provide for him and a group of interested scholars an explanation for “the mass emigration of citizens from that county during the nineteenth century incident to the preaching of Mormon missionaries.” His main interest was Charles Dickens’s account in The Uncommercial Traveller of eight hundred Mormon emigrants who left London in 1863 aboard the ship Amazon. Dickens recorded that some of them were “platting straw,” a major cottage industry at that time in Buckinghamshire and adjoining counties. Professor Clarke was particularly intrigued by Dickens’s comment that, unlike others emigrating at the time, the Mormons were orderly, well kept, and appeared to be “the pick and flower of England.” This raised several questions: What social class was predominantly represented by LDS emigrants from Buckinghamshire? Were any of the emigrants aboard the Amazon from Buckinghamshire? What were the missionaries like, and what was their message and method of presenting it that could have persuaded “the pick and flower of England” to leave the motherland because of their newfound religious beliefs?

LDS historical literature contains many studies regarding missionary work, emigration, and the growth of the Church in various locales in England. Upon close examination, however, it became apparent that no study of this sort had been conducted in respect to the specific time period and location in question. It also became apparent that in order to proceed, I would need funding. I applied for and received a research grant through the BYU Religious Studies
Center. What began as an attempt to provide an answer for these inquiring scholars has evolved into an impassioned pursuit of any information I could gather regarding the genesis of the Church in Buckinghamshire. And the rest is, well, history!

I discovered that the Buckinghamshire Saints were indeed represented on the *Amazon*. And some of the missionaries on that vessel had served there as well. Three of the most interesting finds of this research were:

- The high level of involvement of the members in the missionary effort.
- The location of two existing buildings where LDS church services were held in the nineteenth century. In the process, I met and interviewed a centenarian who remembered witnessing baptisms by the Mormons in the pond adjacent to one of the buildings and had recorded it in her personal writings.
- The contrast between the methods used by missionaries in this rural setting as opposed to those employed by missionaries in the more densely populated, industrialized areas of the same time period, which has become my current research focus.

I am indebted to BYU’s Religious Studies Center, which funded this project. I am especially thankful for the expertise of my faithful research assistant, Careen Valentine. Professors John Clarke and Martin Ricketts of the University of Buckingham graciously provided me with office space at the University of Buckingham during my research trips during the summers of 2006, 2007, and 2008. Professor Clarke also helped me place my findings in the proper Victorian context for Buckinghamshire. I stayed at the home of Harry and Jesse Withington of Aylesbury (the county seat and location of the archives) for these past three summers and have grown to love and appreciate them. Harry and Jesse are both advanced in years but still serve faithfully in the Church. They are representative of the Saints from this rural English county that I have grown to love and admire. Truly, Buckinghamshire has become my home away from home.
circumstances makes it possible to distinguish trends and conditions that do not necessarily correspond to national patterns.\(^4\)

This analysis will address both of these concerns, utilizing the stories of heretofore unheralded missionaries and members who lived and worked in this diverse region. After considering Buckinghamshire in its Victorian context, this paper will examine the genesis of the Church in this area, exploring patterns of missionary work and emigration in this region and how they correspond to or diverge from national trends.

**Early Victorian Buckinghamshire**

Buckinghamshire is one of the English “home counties,” located immediately northwest of and adjacent to London (fig. 1). Despite its proximity to London and Bedfordshire, Mormon missionary work, subsequent conversions, and emigration patterns in Buckinghamshire are unique in many respects. For example, an exhaustive examination of extant historical data pertaining to those who labored as missionaries in this county during this time period shows no evidence that any Apostle, General Authority, or other prominent Church leader worked in, visited, or even walked through its confines. Likewise, there is no evidence that any convert from this county ever rose to the level of known prominence in the hierarchy of Church leadership.\(^5\)

The socioeconomic makeup of this county was also unlike other regions that have been the predominant focus of studies of the Church in early Victorian England. Scholars have asserted that the vast majority of Mormon converts came from the working class living in industrialized urban centers.\(^6\) In contrast, Buckinghamshire experienced few of the direct effects of the Industrial Revolution that transformed many other parts of Britain in the nineteenth century.\(^7\) Consequently, it had no major industrial center to attract large numbers of people from elsewhere—a pattern typical of areas where missionary work, convert baptisms, and emigration have been more closely examined. Moreover, Professor John Clarke argues that it would be incorrect to describe rural Buckinghamshire farm laborers of this time period as working class. “Class is about more than income,” he notes. “It also involves values and perceptions, and . . . farm workers and factory workers had a rather different take on most things.” It would be more correct to describe the residents of Buckinghamshire during this period as “landless laborers” or “the rural poor” rather than “working class.”\(^8\)

In addition, the success of Mormonism in England during this time period (1849–1878) was subject to certain geocultural limitations.
Fig. 1. English counties. Buckinghamshire is one of the “home counties,” being adjacent to London. Shown are the locations of six known nineteenth-century LDS branches in Buckinghamshire, 1841–1852, along with Sherington, birthplace of the first Buckinghamshire natives to convert to the Church.
For example, while missionaries laboring in the West Midlands and North West reported success, those working in the vicinity of London described a vastly different experience. These early missionaries referred to that locale as the “seat of Satan,” “the great babylon,” and “the hardest place I ever visited for establishing the gospel.”

Empirical studies approaching this phenomenon from different disciplines have proffered diverse but complementary explanations for why this may have been so. In terms of the actual geography, John Gay suggested there was a line of demarcation that divided the country into north-northwest and south-southeast regions. He claims the line represented “a clear divide” in terms of the success or failure of post-Reformation Catholicism, the front-runner of nonconformity. Figure 2 shows the line of demarcation: the counties that were immediately north of this “line” were Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Lincolnshire. The counties that were immediately south of it were Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire, and Norfolk.

Interestingly, Stephen Fleming suggests a similar, although not identical, demarcation (fig. 3):

The line from the Wash to Bristol (called the Wash-Severn line) that divides Great Britain between its Northwest and Southeast was the dividing line between the Mormons’ most and least receptive proselytizing areas in the Anglo world. The apostles added six thousand converts during their year in Britain, and at their departure 98 percent of British Mormons were in the Northwest. In 1844, 93 percent of British Mormons resided in the North and West. . . . By 1851 the numbers were less stark, down to 77 percent; however, over seven thousand British Mormons had left for America by 1850, and the numbers suggest that these individuals
Fig. 3. Location and size of LDS conferences, as reported in the *Millennial Star*, April 1844. Membership numbers do not reflect converts who had already emigrated. The gray line is based on Cedric Cowing, *The Saving Remnant: Religion and the Settling of New England*, 13. The line designates the cultural division between the religiously liberal northwest and the conservative southeast. Thanks to Stephen J. Fleming for leading me to this information.
were overwhelmingly Northwesterners. Thus the percentage of total Northwestern British Mormons in 1851, the year Mormonism reached its peak in Britain, was likely higher than the percentage still remaining in Britain. While the Wash-Severn line presents no absolute dividing line between areas of Mormon success and subregional variance certainly occurred, the line does indicate a larger trend in early Mormon British conversions.12

Regardless of where the division may have occurred, these studies provide empirical explanations for the contrasting success and failure Mormonism experienced in these two different geographical regions during the early Victorian period.13 Either dividing line placed Buckinghamshire in the southeastern region.

Whether due to the lack of prominent missionaries and members who served or lived in Buckinghamshire, the county’s nonindustrial and rural nature, or its geographic location, the study of Mormon missionary work and conversions in and emigration from Buckinghamshire during this time period proffers a unique perspective to early Victorian LDS Church history. With this context, this paper will address the following relevant topics:

1. Extant records of branches in Buckinghamshire and evidence that other branches may have existed.
2. Buckinghamshire natives who joined the Church, how they came in contact with the Church, and what role they played in Church growth in Buckinghamshire.
3. The religious climate in Buckinghamshire and how it affected missionary work and convert baptisms.
4. A comparison of conversion rates in this county and other regions.
5. A comparison of emigration rates in this county and other regions and factors that may have affected these rates.

The Genesis of the Church in Buckinghamshire: Nineteenth-Century Branches of Record

At the general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held on April 6, 1844, it was reported that a branch of eight members was located at Wolverton, Buckinghamshire (see fig. 3).14 The first three known families with ties to Buckinghamshire who joined the Church were originally from Sherington, which is only six miles from Wolverton.15 The membership of the branch at Wolverton could not have been composed of the Sherington group, however, because those early converts either
emigrated before or joined the Church after 1844. Apart from this reference to Wolverton in general conference of April 1844, no other evidence of the existence of this branch has yet come to light. Consequently, we do not know who any of the members of this branch might have been. What we do know is that rapid social and economic change caused a good deal of internal migration in Britain. In 1833, Parliament approved plans to build a railway line from London to Birmingham. Wolverton was the midpoint on this line, so a station was built to facilitate changing engines. By 1845, the railway had built some two hundred houses for its workers, along with schools, a church, and a market. In 1846, Wolverton became the site of the locomotive works of the London & Northwestern Railway. The works grew rapidly and eventually employed over two thousand men. A thorough investigation of the activities of LDS missionaries reveals no evidence that any missionaries labored in the area around Wolverton and Sher-ington at this time. Of course, much missionary work was taking place in London and the northwestern “home counties.” A possible—though still speculative—explanation of the Wolverton Branch is that it consisted of a single family who joined the Church earlier, perhaps in London or Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, and then relocated to Wolverton. They could have come from even further afield, since some of the more highly skilled workers at Wolverton came from the north of England.

Five years later, on April 1, 1849, the first branch of the Church in Buckinghamshire for which there are extant branch records was established in Edlesborough. Missionaries had been laboring in the neighboring county of Bedfordshire since 1837, and Edlesborough lies very close to the Buckinghamshire/Bedfordshire border. One unanswered question—which will require further exploration—is why it took twelve years for Mormonism to take root in Buckinghamshire when it grew so rapidly in the neighboring county of Bedfordshire. This question becomes particularly intriguing in light of the fact that a robust branch of the Church existed in Luton, Bedfordshire, only seven miles from Edlesborough. Luton was the chief center of commerce for straw-plaiting, the major cottage industry in both eastern Buckinghamshire and western Bedfordshire, so there would have been regular interaction between some residents on both sides of the county border.

The Edlesborough Branch was actually the reorganization of a branch at Whipsnade, Bedfordshire, which was established on February 27, 1848. It became the Edlesborough Branch on April 1, 1849, after its relocation.

On April 4, 1846, Elder Elisha Hildebrand Davis, an American missionary and the president of the London Conference, baptized Benjamin Johnson, a native of Northall, Buckinghamshire, in the small community
of Whipsnade, Bedfordshire. Whipsnade was less than eight miles north of Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, where Davis had worked during the previous six months. Benjamin’s wife, Charlotte, also a Buckinghamshire native, was baptized three weeks later, on April 27, 1846, by Elder Thomas Squires, a local convert. Squires had been serving in the Hemel Hempstead Branch presidency.

The Johnsons were somewhat atypical converts because of their unusually high social status. Both were more educated and culturally refined than the typical rural or working-class converts who joined the Church in nineteenth-century England. Benjamin purportedly graduated from Oxford, and Charlotte from a girls’ finishing school. Benjamin loved music and often earned money playing the bass violin. He also played other stringed instruments, as well as the flute and the clarinet. Charlotte was known for her passion for reading the classics and memorizing and reciting poetry. Benjamin and Charlotte became the founding members of the Eaton Bray (Bedfordshire) Branch, and, with the exception of the traveling Elders, they remained the only members of the Church in the area for over five months. On December 1, 1846, Elder Squires ordained Benjamin an elder; Benjamin later served as the president of the Eaton Bray Branch. As the Church grew in this area, the branch was divided and the Johnsons became the founding members of the Whipsnade Branch, where Benjamin again served as president. It is interesting to note that the subsequent change in the name of the Whipsnade Branch and its relocation to Edlesborough occurred at about the same time the Johnsons moved back to Northall, Buckinghamshire, a hamlet of Edlesborough.

Unlike other areas in Buckinghamshire, the Church grew quickly in Edlesborough. Under the leadership of Benjamin Johnson, the Edlesborough Branch became the largest branch in nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire, with over 160 members at its peak. It was also the only LDS congregation in Buckinghamshire listed in the 1851 Census of Religious Worship. The census record states: “170. Edlesborough. Latter Day Saints Meeting Place. Erected before 1800. . . . On the 30th March Afternoon General Congregation 90; Evening General Congregation 100. Dated 31st March. Signed Benjamin Johnson, Presiding Elder, Northall Bucks." According to local histories and historians, the building mentioned in the census record was actually a public house referred to as The Good Intent (fig. 4). An adjacent pond was used for baptisms. The building is still standing and has since been converted into two private houses. An identifying placard still stands by the building.

Historical records indicate that the real key to the growth of the Church in Edlesborough was not so much the impact of the American elders,
but rather the enthusiastic work of the locals who had themselves only recently joined the Church. In less than seven years (from April 4, 1846, to March 27, 1853), for instance, Benjamin Johnson helped bring more people into the Church than anyone else in nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire. Johnson was the only person the American missionary Elisha Hildebrand Davis actually baptized and confirmed in any of the three branches the Johnsons belonged to. In other words, the Edlesborough Branch continued to grow and prosper because of the efforts of recently baptized members who began serving as missionaries, some immediately following their baptism. Johnson, however, was only one of several local convert missionaries, all of whom enjoyed almost as much success. In the Edlesborough Branch alone, Benjamin Johnson baptized thirty people; Robert Hodgert, twenty-three people; George Smith, fifteen; Berrill Covington, twelve; John Mead, a priest, nineteen; and Samuel Impey, also a priest, twenty-six. These missionaries did not confine their efforts to the Edlesborough Branch; Benjamin baptized nearly twenty people into the Eaton Bray and Studham (Bedfordshire) branches, and each of the other local missionaries baptized members in nearby branches. In essence, the heavy involvement of newly baptized converts was crucial to the growth of the Church throughout Buckinghamshire.

The Edlesborough Branch grew to be nearly four times larger than any other nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire branch for which records can be located. Elder Robert Hodgert, a local convert who became a missionary, noted the success of the Church in this area: “The work continued, steadily increasing; truth was triumphant; the word was confirmed with

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Fig. 4. The Good Intent, a public house believed to be the meeting place of the Edlesborough Branch. The building has been converted into two private houses. The gravel area (bottom photo) is reported to be the site of a former baptismal pond. All photographs courtesy Ronald E. Bartholomew unless otherwise noted.
signs following, much to the astonishment of the people. The truth had now taken deep root. . . . Nothing else was talked about except this new doctrine and these men who are turning the world upside down.”42 By 1850, the growth of the Church in this area was formally recognized by Church leaders in London, and on January 5 of that year, Elder John Banks, then president of the London Conference, transferred the Luton, Edlesborough, Flamstead, Hemel Hempstead, and Studham branches from the London Conference to the Bedfordshire Conference.43 Interestingly, this formal action, recorded in the Latter-day Saints’ *Millennial Star*, is the last mention of the Edlesborough Branch in any known official or Church document.44 This could well be the result of the large number of Edlesborough Saints who emigrated from 1851 through 1872. Of the 163 names found on this branch record, 77 (47 percent of the branch’s total membership) can be identified as emigrants. The majority of these families emigrated through the Church’s official emigration offices in Liverpool.45 One noteworthy exception, the George Cheshire family, emigrated through London on the famed *Amazon*;46 an account of their emigration was included in Charles Dickens’s *The Uncommercial Traveller*.47

The next Buckinghamshire branch was presumably the one created at Simpson (fig. 5), not far from Wolverton. The first members of this branch were baptized by William Reed, of North Crawley, who had been baptized in 1845.48 North Crawley was a small Buckinghamshire village six miles northeast of Simpson. Reed baptized William Luck; his mother, Rosannah

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**Fig. 5.** A picturesque home in Simpson, Buckinghamshire.
Button Luck; and Ellen Briant. David Cowley and William Luck’s father, John Luck, along with three other members, were baptized the next month, and Cowley was called as the first branch president.

This branch was unlike the one based at Edlesborough in two significant ways. Although Simpson was less than three miles from the Buckinghamshire/Bedfordshire border, the Simpson Branch’s origins were not linked to the activities of American missionaries working in neighboring counties, but rather to the work of a recent convert. Furthermore, the Church in the Simpson area was severely hampered by intense opposition from local landowners; these antagonists frustrated missionary activities by attempting to prevent the holding of public meetings and the establishment of a meeting place. This contrasted starkly with Edlesborough, where success may have been a consequence of the Johnson family’s high status.

Elder Job Smith, who served for a time as president of the Bedfordshire Conference, wrote of the difficulty encountered by Church members: “Proceeded next day to Simpson. Here is a small branch of the church under the presidency of David Cowley. I staid at the house of William Luck. The landlords of all the saints houses here positively forbid any meetings being held therein, consequently I had to get the saints together in a covert manner and teach them.” Although Elder Smith and other missionaries sought to minister to the Saints in this branch, the opposition continued. On December 5, 1852, Elder Smith wrote, “Called at Simpson and comforted the few saints there.” On May 30, 1853, he penned, “I . . . privately visited the Saints at Simpson.”

Despite intense opposition from local landlords, the Simpson Branch grew from the original three members to thirty, although most of that growth occurred between 1849 and 1850. As with the Edlesborough Branch, newly baptized convert missionaries made a significant contribution. One notable example was William Luck, a young convert whose efforts brought thirteen people into the Simpson Branch. Although the records of the Simpson Branch span only the years 1849 through 1853, additional records kept by members in this area have been located. A surprising twenty-nine of the eventual thirty-eight people recorded as members of this branch emigrated—an astoundingly high 76 percent, compared to the emigration rates of other Buckinghamshire branches, which ranged from 37 to 47 percent.

The third nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire branch for which records exist was established at Wooburn Green. Although this branch was not officially organized until August 22, 1850, it had its beginnings in 1849, just like the Edlesborough and Simpson branches. Unlike those branches, however, it was located on the southwestern side of Buckinghamshire, and
its ultimate origins lay in Berkshire. The first converts to move to the Wooburn Green area were Thomas Tanner and his family, who had joined the Church in 1843 in their hometown of Newbury, Berkshire. Shortly after the Tanner family arrived in Wooburn Green in 1849, Thomas followed the pattern established by many other Mormon converts; he began to share the message of the restored gospel with anyone who would listen. His efforts eventually led to the first conversions of Wooburn Green natives, William and Susan Beesley and their son Ebenezer, who were all baptized by Tanner in September of 1849. Initially, the Wooburn Green Mormons were attached to the Newbury Branch, but substantial distance led to the establishment of a separate branch. By 1850, membership of the Church in Wooburn Green had risen to thirty. Many joined the Church through the efforts of American missionaries, but Tanner was responsible for ten conversions—thus following the model already identified at Edlesborough and Simpson. Although Tanner had more experience in the gospel, William Beesley was appointed as the first president of the Wooburn Branch. This further illustrates that the involvement of recent converts was essential to the growth of the Church in Buckinghamshire.

Members in Wooburn Green, similar to the Saints in Simpson, experienced serious opposition, but the Wooburn Branch was able to meet in public. Although a meetinghouse was not reported in the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, a local trade directory of 1853 indicated that among the other churches in Wooburn Green, the Mormons also had a place of worship. It was identified as a “Mormon Chapel.” Historical evidence, however, indicates there was no dedicated church building in Wooburn Green, and the trade directories do not include a location for the building. The name of Henry Hancock, the second president of the Wooburn Branch, appears in the Wooburn Green census records for the years 1851 and 1861. By carefully calculating the route followed by the census taker and using known landmarks that existed then and still exist today (for example, The Red Lion Inn pictured in fig. 6), it was possible to identify the residence occupied by Henry Hancock and his family during that time period. The 1861 census records that a “ Minister of the Latter-day Saints” named George Alfred Wiscombe was also residing with the Hancock family. It is possible that the home was used for church meetings, and this
may have even been the “Mormon Chapel” reported in the local trade directories of 1853. This conclusion is supported by an entry in the life history of Henry Hancock’s eldest daughter, Sarah, which states, “Church leaders in Wooburn held meetings in the Hancock home.” Fortunately, this home is still standing today (fig. 7) and is included in the local historical site index as “No. 36” on “The Green” in Wooburn. The index verifies that the home did in fact exist at the time a “Mormon Chapel” was listed in Musson and Craven’s Commercial Directory noted above.

Life for Church members in Wooburn Green was not easy. For a while, at least, they had to contend with aggressive anti-Mormon campaigns spearheaded by the reverend of the parish church, F. B. Ashley. Reverend Ashley’s anti-Mormon lectures were published, and multiple editions circulated. His arguments corresponded closely with other contemporary anti-Mormon tracts published throughout England but appear to be the only anti-Mormon clerical publications that actually originated in Buckinghamshire during the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, anti-Mormon sentiments were expressed in the Bucks Free Press, the local newspaper. These reports ranged from accounts of the Mormons in Utah purportedly rising up in treason against the United States government and publicly encouraging immorality to commentary on the pitiable condition of “innocent and deceived” emigrants who were leaving England for Utah.

Despite the opposition, Church members in Wooburn Green appeared to be content with their newfound religion and lifestyle. In contrast to the somewhat disheartened journal entries of Elder Job Smith in the Simpson area, a letter written by Elder Samuel Stephen Jones in 1872 reported, “We have very fair, lively branches at Woburn Green in Bucks, Burbage in Witts, and at Portsmouth. The Saints are rather more numerous at these last mentioned places, and evince a good lively spirit.” Another missionary, Elder James Payne, wrote that in 1876 he was “laboring with great joy and satisfaction in the London Conference. . . . On this tour I first visited Woburn Green, held meeting, and re-baptized four persons.” These letters are surprisingly positive, especially since elsewhere in England the fortunes of the Church appear to have been in decline by the 1870s.
due to the effects of religious persecution associated with antipolygamy campaigns, alleged problems in Utah, and, perhaps most of all, to general apathy and lack of religious fervor in England.79

It is possible that relatively favorable conditions at Wooburn Green may have reduced incentives to emigrate, although other factors, which will be discussed later, were also at work. Of the thirty original members, only thirteen (43 percent) can be identified as having emigrated.80 Included among those who did not emigrate were William Beesley, the first president of the Wooburn Branch, and his wife Susannah.81 However, the second branch president, Henry Hancock, and his wife, Esther, did emigrate.82 Interestingly, Ebenezer Beesley, son of the first branch president, married Sarah Hancock, daughter of the second branch president. The young couple emigrated in 1859 and settled in Salt Lake City.83 Ebenezer had shown great promise as a musician from his early years, and after emigrating he continued his musical training. He eventually became a director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.84 In fact, the current edition of the LDS hymnbook attributes the tunes of thirteen hymns to Ebenezer Beesley, including “God of Our Fathers, We Come unto Thee,” which is sung to a tune Beesley named “Wooburn Green.”85

The final nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire branch for which records are extant was organized at Aylesbury on March 7, 1852.86 Like other Buckinghamshire branches, this congregation was located near the boundary of another county; Aylesbury is close to the “tongue” of Hertfordshire, which comes within a few miles of the town. Like Simpson, membership of the Aylesbury Branch did not result from a migration of recently baptized members, but rather from the efforts of missionaries sent to the area. Elder Job Smith, then president of the Bedfordshire Conference, wrote of the significant challenges they faced. His entry of March 5, 1852, reads:

Went to Buckingham to visit Elder E. W. Tullidge, one of the travelling elders sent from our conference at Bedford to raise up a branch of the church. Found him at the house of a deist. I soon learned that he had forsaken his mission and mormonism; and that he was now a disbeliever in all revealed religion. I reasoned with him but soon found that it was altogether in vain, expressed his disbelief in the Prophet Joseph, in the present authorities and the whole system and in respect to God, he did not know any thing of him, but “if God should curse or otherwise punish him for disbelieving Mormonism, yea if he were consumed in hell by him he would then rise up and damn him.” At Br Underwood’s the same evening I excommunicated him from the church. And this at his own request.

Two days later, Elder Smith continued:

Next day proceeded to Aylesbury where Elder [William] T. Cope was laboring. He had labored here eight months and baptized 5 persons.
A very dull prospect presented itself, but as a family that were scattered at another place were about to move thither it was concluded to organise it to be a branch which was done on the 7th [of] March. I endeavoured to get a congregation to preach to, by sending the bellman round the town &c but could not get any body to come.87

Two months later, Elder Smith recorded:

May 11, 1852. Tuesday visited Br Cope and in consequence of his ill health released him from his labours in the ministry. . . . May 24, 1852. Next day proceeded to Buckingham found Br Underwood discouraged, counselled him to move to a branch of the church, he said he would. Next day went to Aylesbury. Found Brother Cope trying to heal up difficulties in that young branch which he had raised. Here we had a meeting and cut off two members at their own request; tried to do the best I could to set matters straight with them but I found that the elements were not there for a good branch of the church.88

The Aylesbury Branch record only lists the names of three of the first five members baptized by Elder Cope, corroborating Job Smith’s story of excommunication.89 Providentially, the “family that were scattered at another place” and was “about to move thither” was the George Smith family.90 George had joined the Church a decade earlier in Hemel Hempstead and served as the president of that branch. His family had already lived in the Aylesbury area from 1838 to 1841, and when he returned there sometime after the organization of the Aylesbury Branch, he brought not only his large family of twelve but also his missionary zeal and considerable Church leadership experience.91 He had already brought nine people into the Hemel Hempstead and Studham branches,92 and upon arriving in Aylesbury, he brought an additional sixteen people into the Church, including some of his own family. His efforts helped the branch grow from five members to thirty in two years.93 As in the three branches examined above, most of the missionary work and convert baptisms in the Aylesbury Branch resulted from the efforts of the native English member-missionaries.

George Smith’s missionary efforts apparently had a positive effect on the general morale of the members and missionaries and made an impression on the local community as a whole. On Sunday, December 12, 1852, only seven months after the Smith family relocated to Great Missenden, Elder Job Smith wrote, “Visited Br George Smith of Great Missenden (near Aylesbury) held a meeting and had a good congregation to hear me. Next day visited the Saints in Aylesbury.”94 On January 17, 1853, Elder Smith noted he had “received letters of success of Elder [Richard] Aldridge in Aylesbury”95 who had baptized seven more people, and on May 29, 1853, he wrote, “Preached at Aylesbury. Br Aldridge is laboring here and at Buckingham. Next day proceeded
to Buckingham. Found E. W. Tullidge rebaptised, married and house keeping, and opening his house for meeting. I was much pleased with this, for although he broke loose before he is a young man of singular and peculiarly adapted talents.”

In 1854, George Smith’s family of twelve—who represented 40 percent of the membership of the Aylesbury Branch—emigrated at the request of Church leaders in Utah and were the only members listed in the Aylesbury Branch record to do so. George and Caroline eventually settled in what they called Pleasant Valley, Nevada (fig. 8). A biographical sketch of George reads: “Mr. Smith was one of the first, if not the first white man to settle along the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains; and by indomitable will and great energy, has accomplished what very few men could have done. The danger surrounding such an early settlement among the Indians cannot be fully portrayed.”

Although the Smith family were the only members listed on the official branch record who emigrated, other sources suggest at least five other people joined this small branch and emigrated after 1854. The Millennial Star paid tribute to a sister named Amelia Mary Andrews Champneys, born in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. She died in Ogden, Utah, in 1893 at the age of 36, and was reported to have been “a faithful Latter-day Saint.” She had emigrated with her husband, Thomas, who was also a member. In addition, Robert Price and his older siblings Samuel and Matilda emigrated in 1855, one year after the Smiths. Robert was baptized at Great Missenden in 1853 and, after emigrating, returned to England to serve as a missionary. Upon his return to America, he was called as bishop in Paris, Idaho.

Ancillary Branches

Cynthia Doxey notes the difficulty of ascertaining the whereabouts or existence of LDS branches in England during the mid-nineteenth century: “As can be inferred from the difference in the number of existing branch membership records and the number of branches reported in the Millennial Star, many English and Welsh branches of the Church from the 1851
time period are not currently documented. With only these two sources of information about the Church in Britain, we have no way of knowing more about other possible branches.”

A close examination of extant historical documents, however, uncovered evidence of two branches of the Church in Buckinghamshire during this time period, in addition to the four examined herein. One was the previously mentioned Wolverton Branch. The other is the North Crawley Branch, mentioned in the missionary journal of Elder Job Smith, who served as the president of the Bedfordshire Conference. On April 1, 1851, Job Smith recorded, “Walked 18 miles to North Crawley, where there is a small branch of the church, Wm Reed president.” The whereabouts of these branch records, if they exist, is unknown at present.

**Impact of Local Converts**

As indicated in figure 9, missionary work and convert baptisms in the four nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire branches of record followed a relatively consistent pattern. Each branch began when missionaries from America converted a small group of key individuals, who then, almost immediately following their baptisms, began proselytizing their friends and neighbors. The initial efforts of the American missionaries brought a small group into the Church and a branch was formed; this was followed by a larger group of converts resulting from the efforts of the newly baptized member-missionaries.

One reason for this pattern may have been the size of the London and Bedfordshire conferences, to which Buckinghamshire belonged. Elder H. B. Clemons reported that on his “stroll through the Bedfordshire Conference” he traveled mostly on foot to over twenty-five locations in four different counties. As late as 1874, Elder Robert W. Heyborne recorded, “During my stay in the Bedfordshire Conference I have walked,
while visiting the Saints from village to village, 1,207 miles.” Missionaries assigned to labor in Buckinghamshire were required to walk several miles between branches and members’ homes, inasmuch as “the Saints are scattered—one here and one there.” This required them to be absent from most of the branches most of the time, which in turn necessitated that newly baptized members of the Church assume leadership and missionary roles.

**Church Membership Per Capita**

Attempting to ascertain Church membership per capita in the county of Buckinghamshire during this time period can be approached in one of two ways. John Gay utilized the 1851 religious census, even though it included only one (Edlesborough) of the four branches for which records are available, and found that Church members constituted between 0.1 and 0.2 percent of the population. Use of the composite 1851 census data is another way to arrive at an estimation of members per capita. Providentially, all four known branches existed in 1851, and only 14 of the 266 members had emigrated before the 1851 census. Therefore, approximately 242 members of Buckinghamshire branches would have been citizens of this county on March 30, 1851, the day the census was taken. The population of Buckinghamshire on that same date was 167,095; therefore, Church membership per capita was less than 0.2 percent, by this measure.

Figure 10 shows how Buckinghamshire compares with other counties in terms of LDS membership per capita, according to the 1851 religious census. It is important to note that this data is not representative of the actual numbers of converts.
from these counties. For example, Buckinghamshire and Lancashire had the same membership per capita in 1851. However, more than 6,700 Latter-day Saints had already emigrated by the end of 1850, many of them from Lancashire. 115

**Emigration**

As is shown in figure 11, of the 266 members on record, documentation could be found for the emigration of only 136, or 51 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch Name</th>
<th>Total Membership</th>
<th>Dates of Emigration</th>
<th>(#) and % Emigrated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edlesborough</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>1851–1872</td>
<td>(77) 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpson</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1851–1878</td>
<td>(29) 76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooburn</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1851–1859</td>
<td>(13) 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylesbury</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>(17) 49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>266</strong></td>
<td><strong>1851–1878</strong></td>
<td><strong>(136) 51%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 11.** Percentage of members who emigrated from nineteenth-century branches.

One explanation for this relatively low number was the poor economic condition of Church members in Buckinghamshire. The Church established the Perpetual Emigrating Fund to aid such members. P. A. M. Taylor notes that from 1849 to 1852, approximately four thousand emigrants were aided by this fund. This suggests there were only two years when this fund could have benefited those emigrating from Buckinghamshire. Furthermore, for the years 1853 through 1856, members could benefit from this program only if they were able to provide between £10 and £13 of their own support, which, as will be shown below, was extremely difficult. After 1856, the fund never assisted more than one hundred persons per year, and they were almost entirely returning missionaries. 116 Considering the years Buckinghamshire branch members emigrated (see figure 11), many members had to rely on their own resources.

Missionary correspondence highlights the indigent circumstances of the members of these branches and the effect that had on emigration rates. On February 4, 1863, Elder Joseph Bull wrote:

> In this Conference, as well as in many others, the Saints are poor as it regards the goods of this life. . . . Though surrounded by poverty and hard task-masters, with their attendant train of trying circumstances. . . . many are looking forward with eager anxiety for the emigration season to open, that they may gather to the bosom of the Church. That they may do so, nothing is being left untried on their part which will help them
to accomplish this so-much-desired object. Several, who have struggled with poverty for years, will have the privilege of emigrating themselves with their own means, having a rigid economy saved out of their weekly pittances, through years of struggling, sufficient to accomplish the much-desired object.\textsuperscript{117}

This highlights several important points: (a) the impoverished condition of many of the Saints, (b) their near-universal desire to emigrate to Utah, and (c) the necessity for Saints to save for their own travel instead of relying on Church assistance.

Elder R. F. Neslen explained the difficulty facing the Saints who were seeking to acquire the resources needed for emigration:

Saturday, March 24, [1871,] found me visiting around among the Saints in Stony Stratford [Buckinghamshire] and Deanshanger [Northamptonshire]. In these places I found the Saints still rejoicing in the work, and hoping fervently that their way of deliverance might be shortly opened. They seemingly have not got discouraged concerning gathering yet, although, so far as their own means is concerned, their prospects are not much brighter than they were when I became acquainted with them in 1855.\textsuperscript{118}

Later that same year, however, Elder George W. Wilkin, also writing from Stony Stratford, noted, “The Saints, as a general thing, are poor in this world’s goods, but the greater portion of them are rich in faith. Quite a number have emigrated since my arrival, and many more are expecting to go this season.”\textsuperscript{119} Despite their poverty, some gradually acquired sufficient money. More than two years later, on October 29, 1873, Elder Robert W. Heyborne reported the following, also from Stony Stratford: “We have been able to emigrate forty persons from this Conference for Utah. Considering the small number in the Conference, and the impoverished condition of most of the Saints, I feel highly satisfied.”\textsuperscript{120} He wrote again on April 23, 1874, “Considering the impoverished condition of many of the Saints through their limited wages, they are doing well in saving means for emigration, which will enable them, at no very distant day, to effect their deliverance.”\textsuperscript{121}

Stories of financial challenge, difficulty, and even tragedy abound in the personal journals and diaries of Saints waiting to emigrate. For example, Charlotte Johnson

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{Charlotte_Budd_Johnson.jpg}
\caption{Charlotte Budd Johnson. Photo obtained from Wayne Rollins Hansen, \textit{William, Benjamin and Joseph Thomas Johnson}, 364.}
\end{figure}
widow of Benjamin Johnson, was left with the responsibility of raising nine children between ages two and sixteen. Before he died, Benjamin gathered his family around him and said to Charlotte, “Mother, when you sell what little property we possess and pay off our debts you will have enough money to take you and the children to Utah. So after I die you take our family and go to Utah where you can live with the Saints and enjoy the blessings there.” Following her husband’s wishes, Charlotte sold their property and sent the necessary money to the mission office, entrusting it to a missionary going to Liverpool and then to America. He agreed to open an account in her name with the Emigrating Fund. When he arrived in Liverpool, however, he decided to keep the money and emigrate to California instead. After waiting eleven years for the Church to somehow help her recoup the money, Charlotte gave up hope of ever being able to emigrate. To her delight, Elder Franklin D. Richards, president of the British Mission, became aware of her situation and made arrangements for the entire Charlotte Johnson family to emigrate, which they did in 1868.

Trying as their own personal circumstances were, some members of the Church were moved to compassion towards their fellow Saints. When Sister Emma Austin of the Edlesborough Branch read in the *Millennial Star* that part of the ship *Minnesota* had been chartered by Mormon emigrants, she felt impressed this was the vessel that would take her family to America. Unfortunately, the Austins did not have sufficient means. But two weeks before the *Minnesota* was due to depart, Bartel Turner (fig. 13), a member of their branch, offered to lend them the money for their emigration. At first John Austin “hesitated to accept this generous offer, fearing that he might never be able to repay the loan,” but he finally became convinced that his family’s prayers were being answered in a miraculous way. As a result of Brother Turner’s generosity, John and Emma Austin and their ten children sailed from Liverpool on June 22, 1868. Bartel Turner and his family also sailed on the same voyage of the *Minnesota*.

Recent converts were not alone in their struggle to raise sufficient funds to emigrate. Expected to proselyte following the New Testament model, without “purse or scrip,” full-time...
missionaries were almost completely reliant on charitable offerings for their daily sustenance, as well as for sufficient funds to emigrate. One historian noted a “systematic fund-raising was undertaken in behalf of elders returning to Zion . . . Local converts who spent their full time in the ministry were not always so fortunate . . . , but they were usually able at least to borrow the means to emigrate.” This appears to be the case with the missionaries who served in Buckinghamshire. Elder Job Smith wrote about his fund-raising efforts for returning American missionary John Spiers while he preached in Eaton Bray, Studham, and Hamstead: “In all of these places I asked the Saints to raise funds to assist Elder Spiers to emigrate, as he was liberated to return to the valley. . . . I therefore labored faithfully to render him assistance. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday visited the branches of Luton, Hensworth, and Eaton Bray, holding meetings and raising funds for Br. Spiers.” The collection began on October 24, 1851, and by January 10, 1852, Elder Spiers had emigrated. However, when Elder Thomas Squires, a local convert who had served as a full-time missionary for “many years” expressed a desire to emigrate, he apparently experienced a longer wait, although means for his emigration were eventually provided. His life sketch records, “Finally the authorities of the Church . . . gave him the privilege of emigrating to Zion. The conference over which he presided furnished the means to defray the expenses of that journey.”

Comparing emigration rates from Buckinghamshire and other counties is difficult because, as P. A. M. Taylor notes, “The passenger lists do not include information about emigrants’ places of origin.” In fact, he contends that “figures for individual . . . counties are often too small to be relied on: a ‘trend’ might be set by the decision of two or three families.” In addition, “in no clear-cut fashion do figures for the rural element in Mormon emigration differ from those of the urban.” But some general comparisons can be made. According to historical data, 52,182 persons were baptized in England between the years 1851 and 1870; 23,066, or 44 percent, emigrated. During that same time period, 132, or nearly 50 percent, of the 266 baptized members of the four Buckinghamshire branches emigrated. Thus, the percentage of members who emigrated from Buckinghamshire during this time period was actually higher than the national average.

**Reappraisal of Buckinghamshire Branches**

There were at least six branches of the Church in Buckinghamshire between the years of 1849 and 1878. Records for four of these branches are
extant although incomplete. Historical data indicate there were at least two other branches, although records for these branches are unavailable.

The first Buckinghamshire natives to join the Church did so outside the confines of the county as early as 1841. However, it was not until 1849 that the Church was formally established within the boundaries of Buckinghamshire. Unlike other areas, there is no historical evidence of any apostolic ministrations, nor were other persons of known Church prominence responsible for the establishment of Mormonism in this county. Rather, the first branch prospered under the direction of its founding member, Benjamin Johnson, and the majority of converts joined the Church through his efforts and those of other early convert missionaries. In fact, this phenomenon occurred in each of the four branches: the initial efforts of one of the traveling American missionaries brought a small group into the Church and a branch was formed. This was followed by a larger group of converts resulting from the efforts of the newly baptized member-missionaries.

The local religious climate appears to have been different for each of the four branches. The Edlesborough Branch fared well. It grew to include a membership of over 160 people. They were able to meet without any apparent opposition in a public house that had been converted into a church building. On the other hand, Simpson Branch members struggled against the intense opposition of local landowners. Consequently, branch membership remained relatively small, and they were able to meet only covertly. The members of the Wooburn Green Branch also experienced intense opposition. This came from the local clergy, however, instead of landowners. Perhaps this explains why they were able to hold public meetings in a Church member’s home and were portrayed by traveling elders as having a “good, lively spirit.” Finally, the Aylesbury Branch was extremely difficult to establish, and the missionaries assigned to this area felt “the elements were not there for a good branch of the Church.” This led to discouragement and even apostasy among these missionaries. However, when George Smith, a recent convert, relocated his family to this region, his enthusiasm had a profound influence on the missionaries who had forsaken their ministry as well as the citizens of the area, and the branch was finally able to take root.

The American missionaries who proselytized in Buckinghamshire did not experience the phenomenal success their counterparts enjoyed in other regions of England. This paper has provided several empirical explanations for this. First, Taylor and others have concluded that “Mormonism appealed mainly to an urban population, and the great majority of Mormon emigrants were urban.” Mormonism was also more successful
among the working class living and working in the industrialized centers. Buckinghamshire was rural during this time period and did not have an industrialized center, and its citizenry were not classified as working class. Gay and Fleming have also shown the propensity for nonconformist movements to be less successful in the southeastern portion of England.

Despite the small number of converts who joined Mormonism in Buckinghamshire during this time period, both numerically and per capita, a larger portion of them emigrated than their counterparts in other regions—usually against the challenges of abject poverty. Upon arriving in Utah, none of them attained prominence in the Church hierarchy. In many respects, their story is the story of the rank-and-file convert from England during this time period. Most of them were not brought into the Church by Apostles, other prominent leaders, or even missionaries from America, but rather through the untiring efforts of local convert-missionaries. And most of these converts were unable to emigrate or did not ascend the hierarchy of Church leadership and prominence themselves after their emigration.

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1. Through a careful analysis of existing historical data, Susan Easton Black showed that the most “typical” member of the Church in England during its first decade (1837–48) was an unskilled and therefore impoverished, unmarried woman, age thirty, whose church activity was minimal. She did not hold leadership positions, nor did she emigrate, and there is no evidence that her posterity continued in the Church. Although she was the first to accept the gospel, she “has been the last to be remembered.” Black pointed out even when early British converts are mentioned, this usually occurs in the context of their relationship with more prominent members, often American missionaries such as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, or Wilford Woodruff. She notes that “such writing portrays ‘American gospel heroes’ in Britain, but fails to communicate the magnitude of the contribution made by the individual English convert.” Susan Easton Black, “A Profile of a British Saint 1837–1848,” in Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint History: British Isles, ed. Donald Q. Cannon (Provo, Utah: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1990), 103–4, 111–12. In addition to these early converts being overshadowed or even eclipsed by American members of prominence, Malcolm Thorp has also observed that “too often in Mormon history it is the institutions that really count,” while “little attention is paid to the


5. Every effort was made to search well-known publications such as Frank Esshom’s *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Utah Pioneers Book Publishing, 1913) and Andrew Jenson’s *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36). In addition, an exhaustive search was made of available publications and archival materials. The one convert from this county who rose to relative prominence, although not in the hierarchy of Church leadership, was Ebenezer Beesley, who became a conductor of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and composed thirteen tunes that have appeared in LDS hymnals (see note 116 below).

6. James B. Allen and Malcolm R. Thorp reported that most Mormon converts came from the “working classes of the urban communities.” James B. Allen and Malcolm R. Thorp, “The Mission of the Twelve to England, 1840–41: Mormon Apostles and the Working Classes,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 4 (1975): 512. P. A. M. Taylor noted that the vast majority of converts emigrating from 1850 to 1862 were from urban centers. He also reported that the country was approximately half urban during this time period, yet 90 percent of Mormon emigrants originated in urban areas. “Moreover, more than two-fifths of that emigration came from towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants.” P. A. M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 145–49. Tim B. Heaton, Stan L. Albrecht, and J. Randall Johnson asserted that the major source of new converts was the population most affected by the “Industrial Revolution and associated rapid population growth, urbanization, and political reform.” They indicated that “proselytizing efforts were more successful in certain industrialized sections,” and that “urban centers of the industrial heartland provided the type of people that were most inclined to join the Church.” Tim B. Heaton, Stan L. Albrecht, and J. Randall Johnson, “The Making of British Saints in Historical Perspective,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 2 (1987): 120–21.


10. Gay examined the expansion of Roman Catholicism and Mormonism as nonconformist movements in England from a geographer’s perspective. He found that Roman Catholicism was a predominantly north-northwestern phenomenon during the post-Reformation period. He attributes this to the fact that the landed gentry had the resources to establish their own churches, and they were farther from London, which made it easier to evade the legal penalties associated with nonconformity during that time. Similarly, he found that by 1851, the peak year for Mormon conversions in England, Mormonism was also more successful in the northern and western portions of England than in the southern and eastern areas. He attributed this to the fact that Mormons were intent on emigration and so tended to gravitate towards seaport cities of Bristol, Southampton, and Liverpool. See John Gay, “Some Aspects of the Social Geography of Religion in England: The Roman Catholics and the Mormons,” in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, ed. David Martin (London: SCM Press, 1968): 47–76. In his examination of the spiritual roots of Mormonism in England, Stephen Fleming found that a significant number of Mormon converts were former nonconformists, and that many of the nonconformist movements were rooted primarily in the northern and western portions of England. He carefully demonstrated how the belief systems of the most prolific nonconformist movements were tied to or grew out of the spiritualistic aspects of post-Reformation Catholicism, thus providing a link to John Gay’s analysis and an alternative explanation for the success of nonconformist religious movements, including Mormonism, in the northern and western regions. See Stephen J. Fleming, “The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism,” *Church History* 77 (March 2008): 73–104.

11. By 1728, England was less than 5 percent Roman Catholic. However, on average the Roman Catholic land values were 5 percent of the total land tax assessments for this time period. All of the counties with percentages above the national average of 5 percent lay north of the line of demarcation as displayed in the map in figure 2. The average figure for all the counties south of the line was 2.7 percent, while to the north it was 11 percent. See Gay, “Some Aspects of the Social Geography,” 48–49.


13. Gay noted that in 1851 the Mormon movement was still in its infancy in England, and the 1851 census “must be used with considerable caution when attempting to assess the geographical distribution of Mormons.” However, he did indicate that 75 percent of the members of the Church lived in the northern and western regions, excepting London, a figure comparable to the one given by Fleming for the same year (77 percent). He indicated that although the largest percentage of Mormon converts was from Lancashire, it was not the county with the largest number of converts per capita. The counties with the highest
incidence of Mormon converts per capita were Hampshire, Gloucestershire, and Nottinghamshire. He also gave a list of the “home counties” that were amenable to the Mormon movement, but he excluded Buckinghamshire from that list, based on the raw number of converts and the number of converts per capita. See Gay, “Some Aspects of the Social Geography,” 59–61.


15. The first Buckinghamshire native to join the Church, based on extant baptismal and membership records, was, interestingly enough, a man named Samuel Smith. Samuel grew up in Sherington, Buckinghamshire. He was baptized by Elder Lorenzo Snow, who was then a proselytizing missionary, on December 26, 1841. Samuel’s parents, Daniel William Smith and Sarah Wooding Smith, were baptized shortly thereafter, along with Samuel’s wife. Subsequently, Samuel and his wife and children moved to Liverpool with Samuel’s parents, and “in 1843 they left England to join the Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois.” Interestingly, Samuel’s brother, George Smith, was baptized shortly after Samuel, on January 30, 1842, at Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, by Elder John W. Lewis. There is no evidence that Samuel or his parents were influential in George’s conversion. “The next Buckinghamshire native to join the Church was George Coleman, . . . who was also from Sherington. . . . George joined the Church in 1845 and was . . . baptised by Berrill Covington. His wife was baptised later by George Smith in 1849.” Ronald E. Bartholomew, “Babylon and Zion: Buckinghamshire and the Mormons in the Nineteenth Century,” Records of Buckinghamshire 48 (May 2008): 234–35.

16. Mormon Immigration Index CD, comp. and ed. Fred E. Woods (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000). See also George Smith and Caroline Harrison Family Group Record, Ancestral File numbers 1FRB-1T and 1TRV-PB, available online at http://www.familysearch.org, and Hemel Hempstead Branch Record, film no. 86979, Family History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. It is important to note that family records accessed from familysearch.org are often inconsistent, informal family history records submitted by interested individuals. They are useful, however, if used with caution. Every attempt has been made herein to crosscheck information obtained from these records with as many other sources as possible to verify their accuracy.

17. Reed, History of Buckinghamshire, 111.

18. See Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record, film no. 86996, item 12.


20. See Luton Branch Record, film no. 86979, Family History Library.


22. British Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Whipsnade Branch, London Conference, film no. LR 1140/2, reel 6, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

23. Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record. Edlesborough lies on the boundary between Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire and is less than three miles from Whipsnade. Eaton Bray is adjacent to Edlesborough but on the Bedfordshire side of the boundary. Maps of the period suggest Eaton
Bray and Edlesborough formed one community. See Ordinance Survey plan, 6-inch scale, Buckinghamshire sheet XXV.SW [25 SW], 2d ed., Archives, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, Buckingham, England. It seems that, whatever the case elsewhere, the county boundary here bore little significance. In many missionary and member journals, the entire area is referred to as “Eaton Bray,” even though a portion of it is technically Edlesborough. This can make it difficult for researchers to be sure of exactly which village and county are being referred to, although most official church and government publications do make the distinction. For example, see Robert Hodgert, “Journal of Robert Hodgert,” January 8, 1850, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Elder Hodgert records that a decision was made at the January 5, 1850, special general conference in Liverpool to move the “Eaton Bray” Branch to the Bedfordshire Conference. However, official notes from that conference in “Special General Conference,” *Millennial Star* 12 (January 15, 1850): 26, refer to the same branch as the “Eddlesbro” branch. This article will make these distinctions for the purpose of confining its scope to Buckinghamshire.

24. Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record.

25. Hemel Hempstead Branch Record.


30. See Eaton Bray Branch Record. Note: Eaton Bray is less than one mile from their first residence in Northall, only one mile from their second residence in Totternhoe, and just over three miles from their residence in Whipsnade. Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record.


32. British Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Whipsnade Branch, London Conference.


34. Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record.


37. See Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record. See also Hansen, *William, Benjamin and Joseph Thomas Johnson*, 363–65, for a
list of persons baptized, confirmed, and ordained to priesthood offices by Benjamin Johnson.

38. See Eaton Bray Branch Record.

39. For example, while the elders were confirming Thomas Squires, they ordained him an elder “before taking off their hands.” In John Paternoster Squires, “Sketch of the Life of Thomas Squires as Recorded by His Brother John P. Squires in June 1891—Book F, p. 334,” in Notes of Interest to the Descendants of Thomas Squires (Salt Lake City: Eva Beatrice Squires Poleman, 1970), 139.

40. Whipsnade Branch Record, altered to Edlesborough Branch Record.

41. See Eaton Bray Branch Record. See also Studham Branch Record, film no. 87035, items 10–11, and film no. 86979, Family History Library. It is important to note that some of these individuals’ Church membership records were later transferred to the Edlesborough Branch; Benjamin Johnson baptized a total of thirty-six. See Hansen, William, Benjamin and Joseph Thomas Johnson, 30; and Eaton Bray Branch Record. See also Kensworth Branch Record, film no. 86979, Family History Library.


44. See British Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Edlesborough Branch, London and Bedfordshire Conference, film no. LR 1140/2, reel 2, Church History Library. There is no mention of this branch after 1850 in the Millennial Star or any other public or private document cited in this work.

45. Mormon Immigration Index CD. See also Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868 Database; available online at http://www.lds.org/churchhistory/library/pioneercompanysearch/1,15773,3966-1,00.html.

46. “George and Elizabeth Cheshire,” Mormon Immigration Index, CD.


48. Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” April 1, 1851, 120; Simpson Branch Record.

49. Simpson Branch Record, film no. 86979, Family History Library.

50. Simpson Branch Record; Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” April 23, 1851, 123.

51. Although it can be inferred from existing data that the North Crawley Branch was organized earlier than the Simpson Branch, in the absence of any formal records for the North Crawley Branch, it is impossible to ascertain its origins or membership. William Smith Reed’s records were later transferred from the North Crawley Branch to the Simpson Branch along with three other members who appear to be his sister, brother-in-law, and father: William Cox, Eliza Reed Cox, and John Reed. See Simpson Branch Record.

52. Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” April 1, 1851, 123.


55. Simpson Branch Record.
56. Simpson Branch Record.

57. For example, the Thomas and Mary Labrum family, consisting of five members—Thomas George, Mary Elizabeth, Jane Elizabeth, John George, and Joseph Hyrum—were undoubtedly members of this branch. Not only is their emigration recorded and noted in the Mormon Immigration Index along with important information regarding their birth years, family relationships, and shipping records, their written histories validate the Immigration Index, their birthplaces and residence, and the details surrounding their joining the Church. See, for example, “John George Labrum” and “Mary Elizabeth Labrum,” in Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Index, 2:470; Biographical Record of Salt Lake City and Vicinity Containing Biographies of Well Known Citizens of the Past and Present (Chicago: National Historical Record Company, 1902), 318; and Noble Warrum, Utah Since Statehood: Historical and Biographical (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing, 1919) 2:998 (photo), 3:998. In addition, it is likely that the Alexander George Sutherland family from Stony Stratford were also members of this branch. See Bartholomew, “Babylon and Zion,” note 99.

58. Mormon Immigration Index CD. I acknowledge that this index must be used with caution. Every effort has been made to establish family and community relationships, and only those individuals who could be positively identified as members of this branch were included.

59. British Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Wooburn Green Branch, London and Reading Conference, film no. LR 1140/2, reel 6, Church History Library.

60. Newbury Branch Record, film no. 87020, items 17–20, Family History Library.

61. Wooburn Branch Record, film no. 87039, item 10, Family History Library.

62. The Wooburn Branch Record indicates that those members living in Wooburn, Wooburn Green, and Egams Green were transferred from the Newbury Branch to the Wooburn Branch on August 21, 1850. The branch name was changed from the Wooburn Branch to the Wooburn Green Branch the next day, August 22, 1850. See British Mission Historical Reports, Wooburn Green Branch.

63. British Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Wooburn Green Branch.

64. See Newbury Branch Record and Wooburn Branch Record.

65. British Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Wooburn Green.

66. See Legg, Buckinghamshire Returns of the Census, 1851.

67. Musson and Craven’s Commercial Directory of the County of Buckingham and the Town of Windsor (Nottingham, Eng.: Stevenson and Company, 1853). 90. Information obtained from Mr. Lawrence Linehan of Wooburn Green.


70. The building that was crucial to establishing the site of Calico Square and the building the census taker went into after leaving Calico Square was the “Anchor” public house rather than the Red Lion. The Anchor is now a private
dwelling called the Anchor House. The Red Lion was also useful in establishing
the position of the Anchor public house because it is still externally labeled such.
I am indebted to Mr. Lawrence Linehan for making the painstaking efforts to cal-
culate this using the 1861 census returns and period maps of Wooburn Green.

71. Carol Cornwall Madsen, Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail
(Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 696.

72. The home is referred to as Clematis Cottage, reference number SU 98
NW, 6/180 in the historical site index. The “Department of the Environment
List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, Borough of High
Wycombe, Bucks” was published by the Department of the Environment under
the terms of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1984 in London. A version
of the list, updated in February 1989, is in High Wycombe Reference Library,
which I visited on August 4, 2007. The list shows that the building at 36 on The
Green is not a later replacement—it can only be the building where the Reverend
Wiscombe was a guest of the Hancocks in 1861. Information obtained from Mr.
Lawrence Linehan.

73. Reverend F. B. Ashley, Vicar of Wooburn, wrote the following regard-
ing his interactions with the Mormon missionaries: “The Mormonites were very
active long before I came, in the neighbourhood and in the parish, and at that time
a priest used to preach on Sundays for three-quarters of an hour at the sign-post
between the Vicarage and the church. I cautioned all I could not to stop or take
any notice, but it was a real nuisance when the Holy Communion was adminis-
tered, for his voice was strong, and he supposed all had left church. . . . I heard one
day that the Independent minister . . . went up to him; the result was a challenge
to a public discussion on Wooburn Green the following Thursday. I was sorry, and
called a meeting of teachers and communicants for that evening and put a sketch
of the subject before them. Platforms were erected on the Green, four Mormon
preachers were brought from London, and my fears were realised. The well-
meaning challenger was a novice in the matter; the Mormons had a happy hit in
reply to anything he said; he appeared to be beaten, and two houses for Mormon
preaching were opened on the Green for week-days as well as Sundays.

“My policy had been not to notice the subject, it was so unworthy, but the
new revelation took readily; numbers joined, and the crowds that came could not
be seated. As general attention had everywhere been drawn to the movement, it
would not do to appear blind. The next Sunday morning . . . I went to Church
not having made my mind what to do, but after the service I gave notice that I
would give a lecture on Mormonism in the school-room the following Thursday.
It caused great excitement. . . . I sallied out on Thursday evening, and found the
road and the room blocked with people. A mill-owner who was amongst them
came to me and offered his Sol-room, which was perfectly empty, and would
hold a great number standing. . . . By the time I reached the Sol-room it was . . .
crammed to the door. With difficulty a small table and a cask to put on it were
got inside. I then mounted, and kept them listening for two hours. The quiet was
intense, and I could hear nothing but now and then a gasp of sensation and the
scratching of the Mormon reporters’ pens.” Cited in Francis Busteed Ashley, Pen
and Pencil Sketches—a Retrospect of Nearly Eighty Years, Including about Twelve
in the Artillery and Fifty in the Ministry of the Church of England by Nemo [i.e.
Francis Busteed Ashley] (London: Nisbet, 1889), 158–59. This information was also obtained from Mr. Lawrence Linehan.

74. F. B. Ashley, *Mormonism: An Exposure of the Impositions Adopted by the Sect Called “The Latter-day Saints”* (London: Hatchard, 1851). This pamphlet sought to clarify and expose his views on the prophet-leader Joseph Smith, the “Golden Plates” from which the “Book of Mormon” was purportedly translated, and other “Mormon Doctrines” and “Mormon Attractions.” Ashley, *Mormonism*, 2. His arguments corresponded closely with other contemporary anti-Mormon tracts published throughout England but appear to be the only anti-Mormon clerical publications that actually originated in Buckinghamshire during the second half of the nineteenth century. See Ashley, *Pen and Pencil Sketches*, 160.

75. Ashley said Joseph Smith was a false prophet who “lived a vagrant life with no honest employment,” spent his days looking for buried treasure through supernatural means, and was adept at deceiving others into believing his pretended revelations. Ashley, *Mormonism*, 4. He recounted accounts of the purported altercations the Mormons had with government officials and citizens in the states of Missouri and Illinois, accusing Joseph Smith and his followers of treason, the attempted murder of the ex-governor of Missouri, and other atrocities. He discredited the Book of Mormon as a piracy of Solomon Spaulding’s work *Manuscript Found* and the existence of the plates from whence it purportedly originated. He also criticized the Mormon belief that God is an anthropomorphic being, because this doctrine contradicts the belief in the Holy Trinity. Ashley, *Mormonism*. For a list of anti-Mormon literature published between 1837 and 1860, see Craig L. Foster, *Penny Tracts and Polemics: A Critical Analysis of Anti-Mormon Pamphleteering in Great Britain, 1837–1860* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 221–34. I checked each reference on the list provided by Foster against *Crockford’s Clerical Directory*, vols. 5–6, reel 3, World Microfilms Publications Ltd.

76. See, for example, “Mormonism” and “The Crisis of Mormonism,” *Bucks Free Press*, June 5, 1857, and “More News about the Mormons,” *Bucks Free Press*, May 21, 1858. These newspaper articles were also provided by Mr. Lawrence Linehan.

77. “Correspondence,” *Millennial Star* 34 (September 17, 1872): 603.

78. “Home Correspondence,” *Millennial Star* 38 (February 21, 1876): 124. It is important to note that although extant records for this branch terminate in 1850, it is obvious from this letter and the one preceding it that there was still a branch and that converts were joining it as late as 1876.


81. William Sheppard Beesley and Susannah Edwards Beesley Family Group Record, Ancestral File numbers 1H79-D3 and 1H79-F8, available online at http://www.familysearch.org. Not only do their names not appear on the Mormon Immigration Index or the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database, their family group record indicates they both died in England.

83. “Ebenezer and Sarah Hancock Beesley,” Mormon Immigration Index CD.


85. Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), 387, 404.

86. Job Smith indicated in his missionary journal that he organized this branch himself, on this date. See Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” March 7, 1852, 148–49. This is in discrepancy with Doxey, who indicated the Aylesbury Branch Record spanned the years 1851–53. See Cynthia Doxey, “The Church in Britain and the 1851 Religious Census,” Mormon Historical Studies 4, no. 1 (2003): 116.

87. Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” March 5 and 7, 1852, 147–49. “Aylesbury” was mistranscribed as “Hylesburg” in the typescript.


89. Aylesbury Branch Record, film no. 86976, items 15–16, Family History Library.

90. See Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” March 7 and May 24, 1852, 158.

91. “George Smith and Caroline Harrison Family Group Record.”

92. See Hemel Hempstead Branch Record; Studham Branch Record.

93. Aylesbury Branch Record.


96. Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” May 29, 1853, 185–86. Elder Job Smith’s assessment of Elder Tullidge proved to be accurate though perhaps only to a certain degree. E. W. Tullidge eventually emigrated to America and, after arriving in Utah, pursued an ambitious career in publishing, both in Utah and on the East Coast. His career had many ups and downs, and, sadly, toward the end of his life he became destitute. While still a member of the Church, he continued to publish articles and books hostile toward the Church and its leaders. He was finally excommunicated a second time, again at his own request. Tullidge vacillated between anti-Mormon movements, once more repeating the instability he had shown at Buckingham. Yet Elder Smith was right to say that Tullidge possessed “peculiarly adapted talents,” which would be demonstrated by his biographies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, and perhaps most of all in his History of Salt Lake City. See Ronald W. Walker, “Edward Tullidge: Historian of the Mormon Commonwealth,” Journal of Mormon History 3 (1976): 55–72.

97. Mormon Immigration Index CD.


102. This search included all issues of the Millennial Star, known journals of missionaries who served in the Bedfordshire or London conferences,
branch records, and all archival materials of relevance from this time period. See note 14.


104. Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” April 1, 1851, 120; Simpson Branch Record.


106. For example, the missionary journals of both Robert Hodgert and Job Smith, who worked in Buckinghamshire during the relatively short time period covered by the four extant branch records (1847–53), indicate they were rarely in the same location. Job Smith changed location an average of twelve times per month while in this conference. See Smith, “Diary and Autobiography,” 90–197.


110. Gay believed that “absolute numbers tell us very little; they need to be related to the total population base,” which is why “the large numbers of Mormons . . . did not have much effect on the general total for Lancashire.” Gay, “Some Aspects of the Social Geography,” 59–60. The Edlesborough Branch constituted the majority of Buckinghamshire membership, being over four times larger than any other branch.

111. This statement is problematic, but can be adequately resolved: as already mentioned, missionary journals and official Church records do not agree on the year the Aylesbury Branch was established. See note 86. In addition, Doxey also reported that the Edlesborough Branch Record spanned the years 1847–49, but, as already mentioned, it was actually a reorganization of the Whipsnade Branch. The Edlesborough Branch was, in all actuality, organized on April 1, 1849. See British Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Whipsnade Branch. Similarly, Doxey indicates that the Wooburn Branch spans the years 1843–50, based on the dates of its baptized members. However, as explained above, while originally consisting of members who lived in Berkshire, the branch was relocated to Buckinghamshire when those original members moved there. The statistical report of the London Conference for the half year ending June 1, 1851, “showed that the Wooburn Green Branch was organized on Aug 22, 1850.” See British Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Wooburn Green Branch, London Conference, film no. LR 1140/2, reel 6, Church History Library.

112. Four members of the Edlesborough Branch emigrated on the *Ellen* and departed from Liverpool on January 8, 1851. Ten more members of various branches emigrated on the *Olympus*, which left from Liverpool on March 4, 1851. The remaining 122 documented emigrants from the four Buckinghamshire branches did not emigrate until after 1851 (1852–1878). Information taken from *Mormon Immigration Index* CD. See also Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868 database.

113. 1851 British census returns for each town in Buckinghamshire acquired online, http://www.familyhistoryonline.net/database/BucksFHS1851.shtml. This does not account for the North Crawley Branch, for which records are missing. One could also argue that some members of the Edlesborough Branch lived
outside of Buckinghamshire, but the existence of the Eaton Bray, Kensworth, and Studham branches, all within four miles of Buckinghamshire and Edlesborough, would seem to indicate that those living in Bedfordshire attended one of these three Bedfordshire branches.


120. “Correspondence,” Millennial Star 35 (November 4, 1873): 699.

121. “Correspondence,” Millennial Star 36 (May 5, 1874): 283.

122. Photo of Charlotte Budd Johnson obtained from Hansen, William, Benjamin and Joseph Thomas Johnson, 364.


130. Squires, “Sketch of the Life of Thomas Squires, 139.


132. Taylor, Expectations Westward, 156.

133. Statistical data obtained from the British Mormon Historical Society. This data is available online at http://www.mormonhistory.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=49&Itemid=97. See also Taylor, Expectations Westward, 248–49.

134. See figure 2. Of the 136 members who migrated from these four branches, 132 (97 percent) emigrated during the years 1851–70. Only four members emigrated after 1870: one on the Nevada in 1871, two on the Minnesota in 1872, and the last one on the Montana in 1878.

135. These figures must be considered cautiously for the reasons given by Taylor (see note 132) and also because every possible method was employed to establish which Buckinghamshire members had emigrated, including ship records, branch records, family history records, and U.S. census records.
136. For example, the London and Reading Conference minutes indicate that on the day the Wooburn Green Branch was established, August 22, 1850, there were thirty members, but the extant branch records included the names of only seventeen individuals, even though the date on the record is August 21, 1850, just one day prior. It is difficult to ascertain who the other thirteen members were, although I have been able to piece together many of those names using mission journals and other records. The same phenomenon applies to each of the other four branch records.