

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Thomas Lawson, North Country Botanist, Quaker and Schoolmaster. By E. Jean Whittaker. W. Sessions, York, 1986. pp.xiv + 258. £9.00.

This is a very well-researched book. Dr Whittaker's main interest is the development of the study of native British plants during the seventeenth century, a process in which Thomas Lawson played a part, but she has also searched extensively for information about other aspects of his life both in public Record Offices and also at Friends House, adding references to a wide range of published works. Lawson's botanical activity is thus placed in the context of his life as a Quaker in the troubled period of the Commonwealth and Restoration.

In July 1652 he was 21 years of age, recently returned from an uncompleted period of study at Cambridge and "priest" in charge of the chapel at Rampside in Cumbria when George Fox reached his neighbourhood (Fox was then 28). Lawson asked his congregation to hear what Fox had to say and as a result was himself convinced and became associated with the organization centred on Swarthmoor, preaching the Quaker message first in the North and later in Sussex (1654-55), suffering fines and imprisonment like other Friends. He was associated with others in the production of pamphlets against the established church and also against other dissenters (*An untaught teacher witnessed against*, refuting the Baptist Matthew Caffyn). It is not clear how he passed the next few years.

In May 1659 Lawson married Frances Wilkinson of Great Strickland and went to live with her family, occupying himself as a small farmer and also opening a school, but from time to time action was taken against him as a non-churchgoing schoolmaster; finally in 1673 he was fined and possibly imprisoned and was obliged to cease teaching for a time. He had contact with George Fox who was at Swarthmoor from 1675 to 1677, and apparently Fox influenced him in planning a tour to the south of England and back, visiting Friends, which he undertook in 1677. He had recently developed an interest in native British plants and had available books about them, so before starting his travel he opened a botanical notebook (now in the archives of the Linnean Society) in which he noted the plants he might expect to see. During the tour he marked plants seen; he also widened his acquaintance among botanists by calling at the Oxford Botanic Garden (where he met Jacob Bobart and Professor Robert Morison) and at other gardens near London. Jean Whittaker records in detail the plants which he found during this travel and later, with comments on their significance. At that time the British flora was incompletely known, and the Linnean system of binomial nomenclature had not been invented so that Lawson listed his finds under short Latin phrase-names which have to be interpreted.

Lawson also used London contacts to help him develop ideas for books which would present Quaker principles; a book on baptism had already been completed and was submitted to the Second Day Morning Meeting which passed it for publication. After returning to Great Strickland he completed three more books which were published in 1679-80 after the lapse in 1679 of the censorship law. These books contained criticism of the current university teaching, based still on classical works in Latin and Greek, and include some forward-looking ideas on teaching to prepare children for living in the current world. The four books were reprinted by Friends after his death but have not proved of lasting value.

Next comes a chapter about family troubles at this time. His son died in 1684 and

in 1687 his daughter Ruth married a curate who had been a pupil; Lawson incurred criticism through not disowning his daughter.

In the years after 1677 Lawson devoted much time to a field study of plants in Cumbria, and in the early 1680s he sent plant specimens and information about them to John Ray, then the foremost British naturalist; a major list sent in 1688 included information new to Ray which he recorded in his next book. In the late 1680s Lawson made contact with Archdeacon William Nicolson of Carlisle who was becoming interested in local plants, and they botanised together after the Revolution of 1688. Nicolson completed a considerable work on the plants of Cumbria, with acknowledgement to Lawson (who died in 1691); this was edited for a new publication by Dr Whittaker in 1981. The book concludes with an index of plants recorded as having been collected by Lawson, alphabetically under modern binomials with citation of his Latin phrase-names, also English names, with references to the pages in the book where they are mentioned.

R. ERIC HOLTUM

Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England. By Christopher Stell. pp. xviii + 276 + 527 figs (approx.) + col. frontispiece + col. illustrated wrapper, London, H.M.S.O. 1986. £45.00.

This is a book which has been long awaited and one which should be the first instalment of a country-wide study of a subject thoroughly and most unjustly neglected. The title page, by some unexplained choice of editorial policy, omits the author's name, which only appears at the end of the preface. Such anonymity does not appear to be a consistent policy of the Stationery Office as is evident by other studies of individual building types, nor is it maintained in their current advertising of the book. It needs, perhaps, therefore to be emphasised that in its own field this study is as authoritative as H.M.S.O. studies of English Vernacular Houses or the Welsh House by named authors. The author is well known as the authority on his subject.

This volume is an "Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting houses in Central England" and covers the Midland counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

As to range it covers all Protestant nonconformist groups, excluding therefore the buildings of the Church of England, Roman Catholics and Jews. All examples prior to 1800 are treated with the Royal Commission's customary detail, the usual terminal date of 1850 is extended as far as 1914 selectively, and the volume also describes the more important examples which have been demolished since about 1940. This last inclusion begins to show one great value of the work: as a record. From a recent report drafted in Staffordshire County Planning Office it appears that in Stoke-on-Trent the various Methodist sects alone had 100 chapels at the beginning of this century. By 1959 these were down to 76 and today less than 60 survive, many of those precariously. The problems caused by decline in membership, movement of population and redevelopment of towns are common to the established church and to nonconformists alike. For Friends these began early; it has been said that our eighteenth-century history echoed with the closing of meeting houses. Distinctively also in our history has been the rise of new meetings in towns where ancient premises were sold, sometimes only a generation ago, which with more faith (and a willingness to pay for the upkeep!) could well have served the renewed life.

Of the 60 buildings selected by the Commission for recommendation as "most worthy of preservation", Friends have 15, including such well known delights as Amersham, Jordans and Ettington. The several branches of Methodism achieve only six. The Unitarians, as heirs of many early and fine Presbyterian buildings, make the most outstanding group.

The whole volume shows the immense range and richness of Nonconformist building and architecture. Here are village chapels as simple as any Quaker meeting house. Here also is a reminder that the term 'Meeting house' is not our own exclusive possession. Other bodies share George Fox's certainty that "the church is the people and not an old house made up of lime, stones and wood". Here also are the large town chapels, seating 1,000 and more on ground floor and galleries and never filled in these days. Their counterparts in Quaker meeting houses have been sold or subdivided. Here also are the grand, the fantastic and even the eccentric – Nottingham's High Pavement Unitarian Chapel or the Baptist "Church of the Redeemer" in Birmingham which would each pass for an Anglican parish church and Leicester's "Pork Pie Chapel" (so called from its shape). Lewin's Mead Unitarian Meeting house in Bristol has for years been a problem case – one of the finest buildings of its class and without a congregation. The Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in Worcester, which provides a coloured illustration on the jacket, shows the building as it once was. Since then it has been through the cycle of redundancy, decay, precarious survival and, shortly, ultimate rescue for a different purpose. The stately pulpit and pair of eagle lecterns will adorn a most unusual concert hall.

There is a case for extending the provisions of the Redundant Churches Fund to cover Nonconformist buildings. The "Friends of Friendless Churches", not being a statutory body, are moving in that direction.

Quakers could perhaps be persuaded, on architectural grounds, to look at traditions outside their own. There are more compelling reasons for an ecumenical attitude but this is not to be despised. Our Society's buildings are not the only ones to express and embody attitudes and principles, faith and practice.

The preface promises in future volumes a considered account of the architectural quality and planning of chapels, of the differences between their fittings and plans appropriate to the various denominations and a discussion of the growth of and the differences between the denominations. This promise must be kept. This volume is a fine first instalment of an essential study of a part of our national heritage which is altogether undervalued.

H. GODWIN ARNOLD

The Dragon's Backbone: Portraits of Chengdu People in the 1920s. By William G. Sewell; Drawings by Yu Zidan. W. Sessions, York, 1985. £7.50.

This is a fascinating book to dip into, and much more, it will be an abiding joy. Those who know William Sewell's writings will find here the expected succinct paragraphs bringing to life the 90 drawings of people, work and play in that area of China (Chengdu) which he knew so well. The brief paragraphs of text help an active imaginative participation in the pictures, and to inform that art of History which is the sharing of experiences. The drawings by a Chinese teacher, encompassing both the work and the leisure activities of one part of China at the beginning of this century, offer one a base line of social structure from which the very different society in China today has developed. If one seeks to know and

understand the inherent character of a nation which is due to be a dominating influence in the world, much of the material needed is here.

Of course the China which is displayed here is peculiar to one part of the country and that at a specific period in history. This is what helps the thoughtful reader to appreciate the basic material which is fundamentally characteristic of a nation that has achieved so much change in so little time.

I would also recommend this collection of drawings, with their accompanying text, to a more casual reader who simply wants a book for the passing pleasure of looking at delightful pictures in a typical Chinese style.

R. STANLEY H.G. THOMPSON

Deliver us from evil: The radical underground in Britain, 1660–1663. By Richard L. Greaves. New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

This is a study of radical opposition movements against the restored monarchy in the period before the first Conventicle Act, 1664, with ample and detailed references to state papers, newsbooks and contemporary pamphlets.

The basic point about religious persecution at the time is well appreciated: “the persecution of Nonconformists was undertaken primarily for reasons of state, not theology” (p.106).

Further research is needed to amplify the part played by some Friends in political activity at this period, and how far it spilled over into subversion. The author concludes that “the evidence for the 1660s indicates that some Quakers did not follow their leaders in adopting pacifism” (p.99). He notes Quaker interest in the 1663 plot, supporting Captain Robert Atkinson at Kirkby Stephen (pp.177, 190), and gives the names of Faucett of Orton, Thomas Randall, Thomas Wharton (Orton) and Thomas Wright (Castlethwaite). Quakers are stated to have been in contact with Sydrach Lester the illicit arms trader, master of the *Magdalen* based in Poole; and “Joseph Helling (or Hiller), a Quaker known... for his ‘ill designs’” is reported in collusion with Dr Edward Richardson (minister at Ripon during the interregnum, practising medicine at Harrogate Spa at this time, and later minister to a congregation in the Netherlands; died at Amsterdam) (pp.182, 201).

All this contrasts sharply with the great difference which is to be seen 20 years later, when Friends in London and in the country districts affected made strenuous (and largely successful) efforts to distance themselves from any complicity in the events surrounding the Monmouth rebellion in the west. By 1685 Quaker organisation had grown up.

At some points in the book sources are quoted without a note that some stark impressions given need qualification after reference to the actual source. For instance, one may well question whether in *January* 1661, “Throughout the West Riding Quakers went naked through the principal towns crying ‘woe to Yorkshire’ ” (p.55).

RUSSELL S. MORTIMER