

BAHNR 4: 82-4

**Open and Closed: Brethren and their Origins in the North East
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**in James Porter (ed.), *After Columba—After Calvin: Religious
Community in North-East Scotland***

Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 1999

pp.151-170 ISBN0906265274 £12.50

This concise and insightful overview of Brethren life in the north east of Scotland highlights issues that are relevant to the study of the Brethren movement both on a local/ regional basis and in general. The study benefits in particular from a breadth of view which encompasses all streams of Brethren represented in the north east (Open, Exclusive and Churches of God), while recognising the Open and London Exclusive groups as being of primary significance. It seeks also to set the Brethren of north-east Scotland firmly in their social context.

Notwithstanding an embryonic appearance in the form of a short-lived group led by John Bowes in Aberdeen in the early 1840s, Brethren emergence in the region was largely the fruit of the 1859 Revival, a fact which caused Brethren in the north east to consciously distinguish themselves at times from others elsewhere in the movement who claimed continuity with its founders in the earlier nineteenth century. (Although, as others have noted, mid-Victorian revivalism was itself coloured by Brethren thinking particularly that of early Exclusive writers.) In north east Scotland growth sprouted firstly among those whose links were with J.N. Darby's Exclusive stream, a notable figure being the black preacher, C.J. Davis, who came to study medicine in Aberdeen in 1868. Davis joined the Exclusive assembly founded two years previously by the banker and ex-Baptist, David Souter, and thereby attracted public attention to the assembly, something which Brethren in this region seem to have achieved to a greater degree than elsewhere, culminating in the press coverage of James Taylor Jnr's activities in Aberdeen in 1970. Donald Ross, Superintendent of the interdenominational North East Coast Mission was the principal individual in the origin of Open

Brethren in the north east. Ross and other evangelists linked with him were behind the founding of no less than twenty-seven assemblies between 1871 and 1873. Subsequent localised revivals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries benefited all streams of Brethren, although the Exclusives became marked by creeping insularity, a trend which was given a sharp twist in the mid-twentieth century.

A declared aim of the article is to examine the relationship of Brethren with the local identity of the area. While acknowledging the obstacles which confront those attempting to quantify Brethren strength, the author addresses what he describes as 'one of the myths of the region' (p.160), i.e. exaggerated perceptions of their numerical presence. That Brethren should have been perceived as having a significant profile, especially in the fishing villages of the Moray Firth, owes much to local factors. An egalitarian ecclesiology appealed to fisherfolk as a community of small entrepreneurs, and the close ties of kinship and business were conducive to the spread of Brethren values, with the result that those known by this name came to be regarded as setting a standard of uprightness and respectability in the fishing community. A fuller treatment of the subject would be enhanced by some assessment of Brethren strength in the north east both as a proportion of the population compared to other areas of Britain, and by comparison with other denominations.

Brethrenism in north east Scotland has often been seen as 'the archetypal fishermen's religion' (p.160). This paper is not only illuminating in the way it explores the reasons why this is the case, but contributes also to an evolving benchmark for studies of the movement, particularly those undertaken with a local or regional focus.

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