

SOME VERY EARLY PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

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The successful writing of history has always required co-operation between the diggers or researchers and those who incorporate the diggers' findings into a wider synthesis. Local and family studies repeatedly bring to light specific details, which require the wider brush-strokes of historical generalization to be modified. A particularly valuable source of such detail has been the increasingly widespread study of genealogy—a hobby, in Britain, whose popularity is now said to be only second to angling! Readers of *BHR* will find an example of the valuable sort of information such genealogical digging can provide in a fascinating web-site devised by Gordon and Barbara Faulkner entitled <http://www.faulkner-history.fsnet.co.uk>. A part of the Faulkners' genealogy is concerned with the Devonian Passmore family and of particular interest will be the career of Christopher Passmore (1784-1833). Hard copies of the Faulkners' work, on which the following summary is based, may be consulted in the West Country Studies Library in Exeter and in the Society of Genealogists in London.

Christopher Passmore was born in Exeter, went to sea, and later lived in a variety of places in Cornwall, Devon and Kent as a 'home Missionary' for the Baptist Union. In Kent he married Ann Butler who had been brought up among Dissenters confusingly known (in view of the Passmores' later associations) as the 'United Brethren', a body formed out of a Union of Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. Passmore in his ministry appears to have been something of a rolling stone and served in Raglan, Monmouthshire (1817-18); Tenbury, Worcestershire (1818-19); Herefordshire (1820); and Dudley, (1821), Tipton (1824) and Lichfield in Staffordshire. In 1828 he arrived in Bideford in Devon to minister to twenty-seven members

of a Baptist congregation, meeting 'in a coal-cellar' in Honeston Lane.

At this point Passmore's career becomes directly related to the interests of this journal. After serving in Bideford for about eighteen months he was approached by the evangelist Pugsley of Barnstaple on behalf of Harriet Baynes of Sidmouth in south Devon, with a proposal for him to work as a 'Home Missionary' in Colaton Raleigh outside Sidmouth. Passmore left Bideford in May 1830. Thomas Pugsley played an important part in the development of the early ministry of his cousin's husband, Robert Chapman, while Harriet Baynes, the daughter of Major-General Edward Baynes (?1765-1829) was later to be the second wife and biographer of Anthony Norris Groves. Groves had visited Harriet's home in 1829 prior to leaving for Baghdad, about a year before the invitation was made to Passmore.

The Faulkners' main source for these developments is the recollections of Passmore's daughter Harriet Rowe whose account of her father's ministry outside Sidmouth is instructive:

We removed to a village, about 4 miles from Sidmouth, among a very uncultivated people, and under the influence of a Church minister and his son (who associated with the lower class). There was great persecution. There was no other Dissenting minister or place of worship, and quite an objection to let ground for building. Miss Baynes procured a tent and fixed in our garden for the purpose. Even the farmer, who let the cottage and garden to us, was threatened to be turned out of his estate...[but] in the course of time the many opposers were converted, a church formed, ground purchased, house and chapel built and to this present day [1874] continues.

Passmore extended his preaching to Kingston and other places in Devon like Newton Poppleford, Budleigh Salterton and Otterton. However, his health was poor and after a move to Teignmouth he came in 1833 to Plympton outside Plymouth where he kept a school but later in the year he died and was buried at Ottery St Mary, also in Devon.

One of the preachers who had sometimes helped Passmore at Colaton Raleigh had been George Wigram and in ?1832 he invited Passmore's daughter Harriet to live in his household to help his wife whose health was poor. In May 1833 Wigram, his wife and Harriet Passmore went to his mother's home at Walthamstowe, Essex, and Harriet was still there in September when she learnt of her father's death.

At this point she returned to Plymouth, to live with her widowed mother and was probably a member of the assembly at Plymouth. In 1841 when she married John Rowe of Helston, Cornwall, it was apparently with the approval of the Brethren at Plymouth as B.W. Newton was one of the witnesses at the ceremony, which took place in the Registry Office at Plymouth.

It may be argued by some that such fragments of information do not tell us a great deal, but cumulatively they help us to obtain a fuller picture. In any case several of the Faulkner's details are significant.

1). That Thomas Pugsley was the instrument of Harriet Baynes's invitation to Passmore before May 1830 confirms the (previously speculative) link provided by Robert Gribble between the Exeter circle of Groves and Hake and the North Devon work of Pugsley at Tawstock outside Barnstaple.

2). That Harriet Baynes was actively encouraging a Baptist evangelist in 1830, suggests a less exclusively Anglican allegiance in her family at that date than we might have expected.

3). The details relating to the Wigram household appear to confirm that after 1832 Wigram's residence in Plymouth was far from permanent. We know that he visited Bath in April 1833, sharing with Charles Brenton 'all the Plymouth news' [Lambeth Palace Archives, Golightly Papers MS 1804 f. 80, L.C.L. Brenton to C.P. Golightly, 7 Aug 1833]. His father Sir Robert Wigram had died in November 1830, so the Bath visit may have been made en route for a more permanent residence in the London vicinity if Harriet Passmore was still with Lady Eleanor Wigram at the family home in Walthamstowe four months later in September 1833. The widowhood of his mother and the poor health of his first wife (whom he married in March 1830

and who died in March 1834) may have caused Wigram to move back to the London area rather earlier than has been assumed hitherto.

4). Harriet Rowe's marriage in the Plymouth Registry Office indicates that as late as 1841 the Plymouth Assembly was not authorised or chose not to solemnize marriages.

Details of this sort are certainly not earth shattering in their significance, but cumulatively they make possible an ongoing fine-tuning of the story.