

Chapter 10: Through Darkness to Light—Post-Restoration Sabbatarianism: Survival and Continuity¹

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The Seventh-day Sabbatarian movement during the post-Restoration years, like English Nonconformity in general, found itself on the defensive and running for cover. In February 1668, Edward Stennett, patriarch of the prominent Stennett family, wrote from Abingdon, then in Berkshire, to the fledgling Sabbatarian church in Newport, Rhode Island, of the difficulties Sabbatarians in England were experiencing. “We have passed through great opposition, for this truth’s sake”, he wrote, adding “Many once eminent churches have been shattered in pieces”.² A month later the church in Bell Lane, London, also wrote to Newport in similar vein. The letter told of their “troubles”, “fiery trials”, “great opposition”, specifying the “persecution of enemies” and the “frowns of friends”,³ the latter a reference to antagonism to the seventh day from believers of other persuasions. It was all indicative of the times. In April 1671 Stennett wrote again, from Wallingford where he was now elder of a Sabbatarian congregation which met in the ruins of Wallingford castle. The situation had worsened. “Thick clouds and darkness are upon us in many places”, he said, “we are in jeopardy every hour”.⁴

A few months later such fears turned to reality for many members of the Bell Lane congregation. On Saturday 24 June John Belcher, their elder, was reported to the authorities for preaching to an unlawful assembly and he and thirty-four others, “dangerous and seditious persons”, were taken into custody. Twenty-six were committed to Newgate, four to Bridewell

1 Previously unpublished paper presented at a conference on religious minorities and pluralism in the UK in 2004, subsequently published in Richard Bonney and D.J.B. Trim, eds., *The Development of Pluralism in Modern England and France* (Oxford, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 2007). The post-Restoration period commences with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660..

2 Edward Stennett to the church in Newport, Rhode Island [hereafter cited as Newport], 2 Feb. 1668, quoted in *The Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, 1:1 (Jan. 1852), 26.

3 Bell Lane to Newport, Mar. 1668, *ibid.*, 24-25.

4 Stennett to Newport, 9 April, 1671, in Samuel Hubbard’s Journal, Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society MS 194x.6, 67-68.

and Belcher himself, “a most notorious knave” and three others, including Arthur Squibb, formerly Member of Parliament for Middlesex in the Nominated Parliament, were sent to the Tower. Three weeks later thirty-one of them were sent to trial upon refusing the oath of allegiance. They were found guilty, their goods confiscated and they were imprisoned pending the King’s pleasure. As a final gesture, their meeting place was destroyed.⁵ Although Professor Capp is correct in observing that by the time this episode took place persecution in general was less severe than it had been,⁶ the effect on a single congregation and a small movement was nonetheless traumatic.

These are merely fleeting glimpses of the times. Similar instances could be recounted from many places in the realm where the penal legislation of the early 1660s was brought to bear upon individuals and congregations. And this is to say nothing of the hostile attitudes, for example, of Seth Ward, Bishop of Salisbury, or John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, in their severe opposition to Dissenters, including Sabbatarians. Nor does it take account of the merciless activities of the notorious Judge Jeffreys in the West of England following the suppression of Monmouth’s rebellion of 1685. While the specific effects of the so-called “bloody assizes” on Sabbatarians remain largely un-examined, the *Western Martyrology* of 1705 suggests that they would have fared no better than Baptists and Dissenters in general, for whom the decimation of whole families and entire congregations was not uncommon. Joseph Davis, whose own contribution to the Sabbatarian cause we shall note shortly, wrote in 1685, “The shadows of evening seem to be stretched [*sic*] out upon Great Britain”.⁷ G. R. Cragg comments, “This was the period of the great persecution . . . Never had their sufferings been so bitter or so prolonged”.⁸ We easily forget the harsh historical realities which form part of the background of many European minorities.

We speak also, however, of survival and continuity. Edward Stennett and the Bell Lane church are two cases in point. They were survivors. Repressive legislation and its zealous application by the Establishment did not inevitably lead to extinction. Stennett, who first appeared c.1655 in Berkshire and who published his first book advocating the seventh-day Sabbath in 1658,⁹ remained a leading figure in the movement until his death in 1705.

5 CSPD 1671, 356-57, 386; J. C. Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records*, 4(1892), 29-30.

6 B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 216.

7 Joseph Davis Snr. to Newport, in Samuel Hubbard’s Journal, SDBHS MS 194x.6, 140.

8 G. R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789* (London: Penguin, 1960), 57-58.

9 Edward Stennett, *The Royal Law Contended For; or, Some Brief Grounds serving to prove that the Ten Commandments are yet in full force*, . . . (London,

For fifty years, and through two high periods of persecution, Stennett was the guiding light of several Sabbatarian congregations in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and London. Although strangely omitted from the old *Dictionary of National Biography* he was in every sense the patriarch of the nascent Sabbatarian movement and lived to see it through its most difficult years.

Bell Lane typifies the survival of a congregation. Those who were arrested and imprisoned in 1671 comprised almost the entire male membership of the Bell Lane congregation. It has been suggested that Charles II may already have had in mind the Declaration of Indulgence which eventuated in 1672 and the prisoners were shortly released.¹⁰ Although their meeting house had been destroyed, the Bell Lane congregation regrouped and continued for another thirty years until in 1702 it amalgamated with the like-minded Particular Baptist Sabbatarian congregation at Pinners' Hall. In the meantime, Bell Lane had played a significant role in the establishment of the Sabbatarian cause in New England and hence, it may be argued, in the modern world.

Perhaps the most important single testimony to the survival of the seventeenth-century Sabbatarian movement is an account recorded in the Llanwenarth Baptist Church book, dated December 1690. Dr. E. A. Payne, the Baptist historian, first drew attention to this remarkable document in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1951.¹¹ It is the record of surviving Sabbatarian congregations in England shortly after the cessation of repressive measures against Dissenters which followed James II's second Declaration of Indulgence in 1688. Just why a Baptist congregation in Wales should be so interested in the English Sabbatarian movement is still an unresolved question, but the suggestion that it was itself a mixed-communion congregation and a connection with the Stennett family are two plausible reasons. In any event the account lists twenty-two Sabbatarian congregations in England, together with the names of their elders or ministers. It omits congregations at Brintree, Leominster and Hay-on-Wye, which from other sources are known to have existed at the time, and makes no reference to the strong Sabbatarian interest in the northern counties, or to several small groups which are also known to have existed in other parts of the country. It is, nonetheless, an important historical document in terms of Sabbatarian history and continuity.

We turn, then, to what is perhaps one of the most important questions to arise from the survival in England of the Saturday Sabbath well into the 1658).

10 Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 216.

11 E. A. Payne, 'More about the Sabbatarian Baptists', *The Baptist Quarterly*, 14(1951-52), 165. The document is reproduced in Ball, *The Seventh-day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 228-29.

eighteenth century. It is the matter of causation. What enabled a relatively small movement with an unpopular doctrine to survive such difficult times and the strong and sustained opposition of both friend and foe? The answers are no doubt many and complex and would apply variously to any given congregation, but we can detect four principal factors, each demonstrated in the life and work of a prominent Sabbatarian of the period. Each of these individuals suffered personally in the times of persecution: two of them survived and two of them did not.

Theophilus Brabourne, 1590-1662: Convincing Apologetic Literature

Theophilus Brabourne, a native of Norwich and an Anglican clergyman with Puritan inclinations, was the first English writer to publish an apology for the seventh-day Sabbath. His *Discourse upon the Sabbath Day* (1628) was the forerunner of more than seventy such works of varying size and quality which appeared over the next 120 years.¹² As the only known non-Baptist who published in favour of the Saturday Sabbath during the seventeenth century, Brabourne's influence on the development of the Sabbatarian movement as a whole was considerable. Cox is thoroughly justified in calling him an able writer, although in error in describing him as a Seventh Day Baptist.¹³

Born in 1590, the elder son of a Norwich hosier, Brabourne was one of the relatively few who received episcopal ordination without having first received a university education. According to Alexander Gordon, Brabourne was ordained in 1621 by Thomas Dove, Bishop of Peterborough, licensed for the diocese of Norwich in 1622 and appears a few years later as the curate of Catton in Norfolk.¹⁴ The *Discourse upon the Sabbath Day* came indisputably from an Anglican context. There is equally little doubt that Brabourne remained at heart a loyal Anglican for the rest of his life, although well-disposed to Nonconformists, particularly Baptists, many of whom in coming years gladly espoused the Sabbatarian doctrine he had earlier advocated.

Brabourne's journey to the Court of High Commission and to Newgate gaol began in 1632 with the publication of his second book, *A Defence of . . . the Sabbath Day*. This work was boldly dedicated to Charles I who referred it for a response to Francis White, Bishop of Ely. The dedication to Charles I was motivated by the hope that he would initiate a Sabbath reformation

12 A chronological bibliography of the English Sabbatarian literature from 1628 to 1750 is given in Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, Appendix IV, 342-50.

13 Robert Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1865), I, 157-58.

14 *Dictionary of National Biography*, II, 1047-49.

similar to that undertaken by Old Testament kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah. "The soundness and clearness of my cause giveth me good hope", Brabourne wrote and sent the *Defence* on its way, prepared to defend it as necessary, but aware of the possible consequences and quoting Esther, "and if I perish, I perish".¹⁵ Parker notes that Brabourne was not a schismatic¹⁶ and we may add, neither was he a fanatic as the earlier Sabbatarian John Traske had clearly been. Unfortunately, Brabourne was regarded by the authorities with Traske as one of a kind and they were apparently determined to treat him in a similar manner. White's reply to Brabourne, which Bishop Cox judged to be, after Peter Heylin's *History of the Sabbath*, "the most notable work" in the entire Sabbatarian controversy, appeared in 1635. But this was too late to deal as expeditiously as necessary with Brabourne's views, which White himself admitted already "might have poisoned and infected many people with this Sabbatarian error".¹⁷

So in April and in June 1634 Brabourne found himself before the Court of High Commission charged with holding and disseminating "erroneous, heretical, and judaical opinions".¹⁸ The trial took place on 16 June, before more than a hundred clergy and several hundred other onlookers. In answer to questioning Brabourne confessed himself a Sabbatarian, "as much bound to keep the Saturday Sabbath as the Jews were before the coming of Christ". It was an injudicious response, for Brabourne was neither a legalist nor a Judaizer, as his published arguments clearly demonstrate. The Court had heard all it needed, however, and Brabourne was pronounced a Jew, a heretic and a schismatic, "worthy to be severely punished".¹⁹ It was ordered that he be deprived of all ecclesiastical privileges, including his living, deposed from holy orders, excommunicated, fined one thousand pounds and required to make a public retraction of his errors at such time and place and in such words as the Court should approve. It was also ordered that he be remanded in custody pending further consideration of his case and the possibility of delivering him to the secular power.²⁰ The outlook was not bright.

The proceedings against him dragged on for another year, most of which

15 Theophilus Brabourne, *A Defence Of that most Ancient, and Sacred ordinance of GOD's the SABBATH DAY* ([Amsterdam], 1632), sig 3Cv.

16 K. L. Parker, *The English Sabbath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988), 199.

17 Francis White, *A Treatise of the Sabbath Day; containing a Defence of the Orthodoxal Doctrine of the Church of England against Sabbatarian Novelty* (London, 1635), Ep. Ded.

18 CSPD 1634-35, 126.

19 See Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, 65.

20 CSPD 1633-34, 108, 122, 126-27; W. H. Hart, *Index Expurgatorius Anglicanus* (London, 1872-78), III, 75.

time he spent in the Gatehouse and in Newgate, in conditions he later described as “loathsome” and in the company of “rogues, lousie felons and cheaters”. Although the fine of a thousand pounds was eventually remitted, the strong feelings against him should not be underestimated. One of his prosecutors, Sir Henry Marten, moved during the trial that the old anti-Lollard legislation *De haeretico comburendo* should be brought against him, and the message reached Brabourne’s wife that he was to be burnt. It is said that only the personal intervention of William Laud prevented it.²¹

Brabourne eventually returned to Norwich, but we hear little of him again until the Commonwealth era, by which time he was no longer an Anglican priest. Then, in 1653, after having kept an appropriately low profile for several years, he resumed publication with a further eight works in the space of nine years which wholly, or in part, advocated the Sabbatarian view. In fact, of the twenty books advocating the Seventh-day Sabbath which appeared in print by 1660 Brabourne was the author of ten.²² In his *Of the Sabbath Day* (1660), he maintained that the debate over the Sabbath was at that time “the Highest Controversie in the Church of England”.²³ Whether or not this claim was valid is difficult to determine, but already in 1635 Francis White, in attempting to defend the orthodox position of the Church of England against “Sabbatarian Novelty”, had conceded that Brabourne’s arguments were “commonly preached, printed, and believed, throughout the kingdom”.²⁴

Brabourne produced in total more than one thousand pages in support of the Saturday Sabbath. It was by any standard an impressive output, giving evidence throughout of a keen mind and a thorough grasp of the historical and biblical material involved. It included the forthright apologetic of his early writings and the later controversies involving opponents who had attacked him or the Sabbath doctrine, including Collings of Norwich, Cawdrey and Ives of London and Warren of Colchester. Later Sabbatarian apologists would return frequently to most of the arguments found in his writings, but it was indisputably Brabourne who laid the foundation for the revival of an ancient practice that was to last in the British Isles without break for at least four centuries. While Brabourne passed from the scene of action shortly after the Restoration, the lasting influence of his writings demands recognition of the major role he played in the development of English Sabbatarianism.

21 Theophilus Brabourne, *A Reply to the Indoctus Doctor Edoctus . . .* (London, 1654), 100-101; *CSPD 1635-36*, 495. The *Reply* was a response to John Collings of Norwich, who had attacked Brabourne on a number of issues, including the Sabbath.

22 See Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, 342-44.

23 Theophilus Brabourne, *Of the Sabbath Day* (London, 1660), title page.

24 White, *Treatise*, Ep. Ded.

John James, d. 1661: Unwavering Commitment

John James is one of the very few Sabbatarians who is mentioned by all the early Baptist historians, including Crosby, Ivimey and Taylor and by many who have added to Baptist and Nonconformist history more recently, notably W. T. Whitley, B. R. White and B. S. Capp. Within a month of his death in 1661 James had established a place of lasting significance in the ranks of seventeenth-century anti-paedobaptists and Sabbatarians. Had he lived a century earlier he might well have featured prominently in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, more commonly known as the *Book of Martyrs*.

Little is known of James's early life and he first appears in the late 1650s as the first identifiable pastor of the Mill Yard General Baptist Sabbatarian congregation meeting in Bullstake Alley, Whitechapel.²⁵ A ribbon weaver by trade and barely literate, he earned his place in the history of the period on account of his trial and execution in 1661, which have been variously described as "grossly unjust", a judicial murder" and "one of the many blots on the reign of Charles II".²⁶ In view of the facts, it might even be concluded that such judgements were lenient.

The series of events which led to his death can only be seen properly in the context of the Fifth Monarchy movement, which is today much better understood than it was in its own time. In January 1661, Thomas Venner, a Fifth Monarchist desperado, had led an abortive uprising against the government of Charles II, for which he had been tried and executed. The basis for Fifth Monarchist activism was an interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, which held that the final kingdom in the succession of earthly powers delineated therein, Christ's kingdom, was soon to be set up on earth and that Christ's true followers were to be instruments in its establishment, using force if necessary. Although many Fifth Monarchists were not as radical as Venner and his immediate band of followers, the government was understandably fearful of any Fifth Monarchist tendencies, particularly when Fifth Monarchy language was used indiscriminately by those who were themselves pacifist in their inclinations. The indications are that John James was in this category, particularly since he had publicly disavowed any connection with Venner or support for his activities.²⁷

On 19 October, while preaching at the regular hour of Sabbath worship at Bullstake Alley, officials interrupted the meeting and ordered James to

25 R. L. Greaves and R. Zaller, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (Brighton, MA: Harvester, 1982-84), II, 138; Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 253.

26 *A Narrative of the Apprehending, Commitment, Arraignment, Condemnation, and Execution of John James, who Suffered at Tyburn, Nov. 26, 1661* (1662).

27 Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, 83-84.

come down from the pulpit, accusing him of treason. When he twice ignored the order, he was dragged from the pulpit and taken to Newgate on the concocted charge of “preaching maliciously and traitorously against the life and safety of our Sovereign Lord the King”. He was accused of being a Fifth Monarchist and of having been connected with Venner’s uprising. Several members of his congregation who protested his innocence were also taken into custody, but were subsequently released without charge.²⁸ It was deemed advisable to deal with the matter as expeditiously as possible and accordingly James was brought to trial on 14 November before a jury and witnesses that, according to an informer, had been hand-picked in order to ensure a conviction. He was indicted, *inter alia*:

1. for compassing and imagining the death of the King;
2. for endeavouring to levy war against the King; and
3. for endeavouring a change of the government.²⁹

The charges were manifestly untrue, if not absurd, but under such circumstances a conviction was inevitable. Despite a personal plea to Charles II by James’s wife he was convicted and sentenced to death.

The view that this was “a judicial murder” and one of the most barbaric acts of the Restoration government seems fully justified by the wording of the sentence. The nature of the event and its intended message for those judged to be radical and dangerous, can only be fully grasped by hearing the sentence as John James himself heard it from the dock:

Thou art to be carried from hence to prison, and from thence to the place of execution, and there to be hanged by the neck, and being yet alive, to be cut down and thy bowels taken out and to be burnt before thy face, and thy head to be severed from thy body, and thy body to be quartered, and thy head and body to be disposed according to the King’s pleasure.³⁰

And that is precisely what happened. It was a severe blow to the Mill Yard Church and to Sabbatarianism *per se*.

The days of James’s imprisonment prior to execution were mercifully short. The warders were reported to be grasping and heartless. They stole his clothes and pressed him continually for money which he did not have and could not obtain. On the day before his execution, the hangman arrived and demanded twenty pounds “that he might be favourable to him at his death”.³¹ It was an impossible request and they settled for five pounds, the

28 Detailed accounts of James’s trial and execution can be found in the anonymous *A Narrative* (1662) and in T. B. Howell (ed.), *Cobbett’s Complete Collection of State Trials*, VI (1810), 72ff.

29 *A Narrative*, 12.

30 *Ibid.*, 24.

31 *Ibid.*, 198.

hangman threatening “to torture him exceedingly” if the five pounds was not forthcoming. The next day he was dragged on a hurdle to Tyburn and executed according to the sentence. His speech at the gallows was in reality a confession of faith which confirmed a non-militant eschatological hope, said nothing of Fifth Monarchism, and owned “the Lord’s holy Sabbath, the seventh day of the week”.³²

How do we evaluate John James’s contribution to the Sabbatarian cause? What does it represent in Sabbatarianism that ensured its survival through intense opposition and when the prospects were so bleak? The word we use today, commitment, sounds trite against the reality of what took place. Yet it would be difficult to find a better example then or now of what we understand by the word. Certainly he typified commitment to the cause, to the Sabbath, which he saw as an institution of divine origin, enshrined in the fourth commandment which required Christian obedience, and to Sabbatarianism as a vehicle for communicating and perpetuating those convictions. It was what Edward Stennett had in mind when later he said that he and his congregation were suffering for “this truth”. James also demonstrated pastoral commitment to his congregation at a time when it might have been better for him to have disappeared until safer days returned. It is easy with hindsight to make such suggestions, yet what Dr. B. R. White calls the “paranoia in government circles”³³ which prevailed at the time indicates that it might have been a more prudent option. This is to say nothing of commitment to his own conscience, a characteristic of Nonconformity in general throughout the seventeenth century and critical to its existence and identity. It may reasonably be concluded that all this was very much germane to the survival of English Sabbatarianism.

Joseph Davis Snr, 1627-1707: Considered Beneficence

Joseph Davis Snr. is a classic illustration of the fact that the well-being of a congregation depends on the commitment of its members as well as its minister. Born in 1627 at Chipping Norton, his first religious affiliation was with a Baptist church in Coventry where his father was a burgess and chief magistrate. Between 1660 and 1662 Davis found himself in prison briefly on several occasions on charges relating to alleged breaches of the post-Restoration legislation against Dissenters. Then in the spring of 1662 he was again arrested and committed to Oxford Castle where he spent the next ten years. Following the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 he was released, together with four hundred and eighty-nine others, including John

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

³³ B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 100.

Bunyan. These years of imprisonment, which he later described as being spent mostly “in a cold, high tower”, were notable on two counts. In 1665 he was released temporarily to attend his dying wife and arrange for the care of their children and in 1668 he became convinced of the seventh-day Sabbath and forthwith commenced its observance.³⁴

An enlightening letter from Davis to the Seventh Day Baptist Church in Newport, Rhode Island, written in 1670, is preserved in Samuel Hubbard’s Journal. It tells of his trials and reveals a temperament that no amount of tribulation would easily crush:

Satan in the present day hath appeared, and operates in the spirits of men, who rage with violence and open force, casting forth waters like a flood, thinking to destroy and swallow us in the sea of their confusion [. . .] for which I have suffered the loss of wife and enjoyment of children, trade and public ordinances, in the hope of being of that happy number who shall stand on Mount Zion [. . .]³⁵

Regarding his “afflictions” as “the appointments of our dear Father” and rejoicing that “the snares which were laid to take away my life” had not prevailed, he continued, “It is my lot to sit here alone in the observation of God’s holy Sabbath, yet not without some precious tokens of his presence, which makes a wilderness like an Eden, and a desert like a garden of the Lord”.³⁶

Soon after his release from Oxford gaol Davis moved to London and there established a drapery business which, together with other ventures, was to reward him and the Sabbatarian cause beyond expectation in the years to come. The first evidence of his generosity came in 1691 when he purchased a property for the Mill Yard church, consisting of a meeting place, almshouses and a burial ground, which in 1700 was conveyed to nine trustees appointed by the congregation.³⁷ This became the home of the Mill Yard Sabbatarians for a hundred years. In 1705 he purchased another property, the Manor at Little Maplestead in Essex and in 1706 he established a charitable trust, under the terms of which an annuity was to be paid in perpetuity to the ministers of nine specified Particular or General Baptist Sabbatarian congregations.³⁸ We shall return to these congregations shortly.

34 (Joseph Davis), *The Last Legacy of Mr. Joseph Davis, Snr.* (London, 1720), 5-16, 26-29.

35 Joseph Davis to Newport in *The Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, 1:2 (April 1852), 74.

36 *Ibid.*, 75

37 W. H. Black (ed.), *The Last Legacy of Joseph Davis, Snr.* (London, 1869), xii; William Wallen, *The History and Antiquities of the Round Church at Little Maplestead, Essex* (London, 1836), 137-38.

38 *The Case Submitted to the General Body of Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations* (1901), 9. A copy of this rare document is included with the

When Joseph Davis died in 1707, all his assets were inherited by his son, Joseph Jnr., who himself died without heir in 1731, at which time the entire Davis estate, with the exception of certain specific bequests to be noted below, passed to the Mill Yard Church. The pecuniary benefits flowing to Mill Yard from these dispositions, and the annual disbursements, though modest, from the charitable trust to qualifying Sabbatarian ministers over many decades were together a source of considerable strength to the Sabbatarian cause. It has been claimed that by 1900 one hundred and seventy years after Mill Yard first benefited from the Joseph Davis legacy, the income it generated was more than seven hundred pounds per annum.³⁹

The nine endowed Sabbatarian pastorates, which did not include Mill Yard itself, provide further evidence of the continuing effect of Joseph Davis's charitable concerns. Of these nine congregations, six survived for at least fifty years and three for more than one hundred years. Records for these three are scanty, but all continued well into the eighteenth century. The congregation that had coalesced in the Berkshire-Oxfordshire area finally expired in 1806. The last Sabbatarian at Salisbury died in 1844 and at Natton in 1910. Joseph Davis would surely have been gratified to know that his generosity had such far-reaching effects. The benevolence of Joseph Davis Jnr. consolidated the impact of his father's provisions. Six beneficiaries of Joseph Jnr's will were known Sabbatarians, five of them members of the congregations specified in his father's will and four of them ministers: Philip Jones of Tewkesbury-Natton, John Ridley of Woodbridge, Daniel Wright of Colchester-Braintree and Edmund Townsend of Mill Yard and Currier's Hall.⁴⁰ All but one of them received two hundred pounds. Joseph Stennett II, the minister of South Street Baptist Church at Exeter and Moderator of the Western Baptist Association and a practising Sabbatarian, also received two hundred pounds.⁴¹ It is clear that the consolidation and progress of the whole Sabbatarian movement resulted to a significant degree from the first benefactions of the Davis family and in particular from the dispositions of Joseph Davis Snr. at Mill Yard in 1691, 1700 and 1706.

Francis Bampfield, 1615-1684: Informed and Persuasive

photocopy of the Mill Yard Church Book at Dr. Williams's Library.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Black, *Last Legacy*, 72.

41 *Ibid.*

Preaching

Francis Bampfield, a graduate of Wadham College, Oxford, was the third son of Sir John Bampfield, sheriff of Devon and Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Drake of Buckland Abbey. The Drakes, of course, were the staunchest of English Protestant families, Sir Francis, Thomas Drake's brother, the most distinguished of them all. Francis Bampfield tells us that he was born of "religious parents", with an inclination to "love books" and "to delight in learning from a child".⁴² Joseph Ivimey later described him as "a man of great learning and judgment".⁴³ Bampfield's scholarship is most evident in his grasp of biblical languages and although he was chiefly known as a Hebraist, his works also give evidence of a thorough acquaintance with Greek. Whitley thought, probably correctly, that some of Bampfield's works prefigured Hutchinsonianism and the theories of Thomas Burnet.⁴⁴ Densham and Ogle more recently commented that he was "one of the most remarkable men of his time – a time when remarkable men were not scarce".⁴⁵

Bampfield was a relative late-comer to the Sabbatarian tradition. He had graduated MA from Oxford in 1638 and was shortly thereafter presented by his father to the living of Rampisham in Dorset, where he remained as rector for several years.⁴⁶ In 1655 he accepted an invitation to become Vicar of Sherbourne, a charge he maintained with distinction and with much popular support until 1662 when he was ejected for refusing to take the oath of allegiance. Calamy reminds us of the irony in this, since Bampfield was a staunch Royalist, his objection being to oaths in general. His real troubles began shortly thereafter, when in the following year he was arrested in nearby Shaftesbury for holding an unlawful conventicle and was imprisoned in Dorchester gaol for the next eight years and nine months.⁴⁷ This was the longest of several periods of imprisonment Bampfield was to suffer. One source states that he was "more frequently imprisoned and exposed to greater hardships for his Nonconformity than most other Dissenters".⁴⁸

It was while in Dorchester gaol that Bampfield became a Sabbatarian and commenced observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, to the consternation of

42 Francis Bampfield, *A Name, an After-One . . . an Historical Declaration of the Life of Shem Acher* (London, 1681), 2.

43 Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* (London, 1811-30), II, 480.

44 W. T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists* (London, 1923), 134.

45 W. Densham and J. Ogle, *The Story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset* (Bournemouth, 1899), 245.

46 A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934), 26.

47 *Ibid*; Ivimey, *History*, II, 476.

48 Benjamin Stinton, 'An Account of Some of the Most Eminent and Leading Men among the English Anti-paedobaptists', Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford, MS 36.G.A.e.10, fo. 61r.

many friends and acquaintances. William Benn, the ejected Presbyterian of Dorchester who, some years later in 1672, published Bampfield's *Judgement . . . for the Observation of . . . the Seventh-day Sabbath*, recalled that his conversion to the seventh day was "the discourse of many, the wonder of not a few, and the grief of some".⁴⁹ Dr. Geoffrey Nuttall records a letter from Isaac Clifford to John Pinney in 1666 which confessed to being "troubled" by Bampfield's new views of the Sabbath, with the fear that "many will make but a sad use of it".⁵⁰ In the event Bampfield convinced five or six fellow prisoners of the Sabbatarian position and gathered a congregation around him while in prison. Shortly after his release he was again apprehended and imprisoned for eighteen weeks in Salisbury gaol for preaching without a licence. In the more relaxed atmosphere of 1672 a general licence was issued to him as "a Nonconforming minister" to preach in any licensed place of assembly, a provision he was to use with great effect in the ensuing years.⁵¹

Bampfield's most effective labours in the Sabbatarian cause began after his removal to London in 1674. Within a year he had gathered a church in his own home in Bethnal Green and a year later, in 1676, a company was organised under a simple covenant which owned "the Lord Jesus Christ to be the one and only Lord and Lawgiver" and "the Holy Scriptures of Truth, as the one and only Rule of Faith".⁵² This was the beginning of the famous Pinners' Hall-Cripplegate Sabbatarian Church of Particular Baptists to which several generations of Stennetts would later minister and which would help to sustain the Sabbatarian cause in London and in the provinces for almost two centuries.

Bampfield's final sufferings began in February 1683, when he was arrested on a warrant from the Lord Mayor while preaching at Pinners' Hall on suspicion of having received Jesuit training and the fatuous charge of attempting to re-establish the Catholic faith. The following week the meeting was again disturbed by a constable and officers and Bampfield was pulled from the pulpit while offering prayer, taken before magistrates and ultimately, after months of imprisonment, to the Old Bailey charged with the persistent refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance. He was sentenced in January 1684 to be outlawed and detained at the King's pleasure, but died in Newgate a month later, a victim of the circumstances and the conditions.⁵³

Ivimey's comment points us to Bampfield's singular contribution to the

49 William Benn, *The Judgement of Mr. Francis Bampfield . . . for the observation of the Jewish or Seventh Day Sabbath* (London, 1672), 9.

50 G. F. Nuttall, *Letters of John Pinney, 1679-1699* (Oxford, 1939), 2.

51 Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 26.

52 Bampfield, *A Name*, 26.

53 Francis Bampfield, *The Lords Free Prisoner* (London, 1683), *passim*.

continuity of the Sabbatarian cause. He was, Ivimey says, “a man of great learning, and one of the most celebrated preachers in the West of England”.⁵⁴ Without doubt, Bampffield combined these two characteristics in his ministry to the Sabbatarian churches over a period of nearly twenty years. Informed and persuasive preaching has always been one of the hallmarks of vigorous Nonconformist church life and in few instances did they come together more effectively than in Bampffield’s pulpit ministry. His induction sermon at Sherbourne attracted a congregation of more than two thousand. During his nearly nine years in Dorchester gaol he preached on most days to local townspeople, according to Calamy, and according to his own testimony frequently as often as sixteen times a week.⁵⁵ Soon after arriving in London and before the establishment of his own congregation, Bampffield was invited to preach to both existing Sabbatarian congregations at Mill Yard and Bell Lane. Later he was sent by his own people on a preaching tour to strengthen the Sabbatarian churches in Wiltshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Berkshire.⁵⁶ The *Dictionary of National Biography* noted that he was “repeatedly imprisoned for preaching”. His own judgement on effective pastoral ministry was the existence of a “converted, edified, comforted, confirmed people”.⁵⁷ That such Sabbatarian congregations survived the hard times following the penal legislation of the post-Restoration era is due in no small measure to Bampffield’s preaching ministry between 1665 and 1684.

We have traced the fortunes of four prominent seventeenth-century Sabbatarians and through them the fortunes of the wider Sabbatarian community as they ebbed and flowed through years of relative freedom and long periods of repression. We have noted the specific strengths of each man and suggested that these strengths were seminal to Sabbatarianism’s survival and its consolidation in the eighteenth century. It would be misleading, however, to imply that the movement owed its survival to these four stalwarts alone. The gifts and qualities they demonstrated appeared and re-appeared in Sabbatarianism for the better part of a hundred and fifty years. The literature which began with Theophilus Brabourne serves as an illustration. Not only did that literature exert a considerable influence in its own day, it also set a precedent for later generations. Edward Stennett, who between 1658 and 1677 published three major works advocating the seventh day,⁵⁸

54 Ivimey, *History*, II, 480.

55 Bampffield, *A Name*, 21; Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 26.

56 Bampffield, *A Name*, 7.

57 *Ibid.*, 9.

58 In addition to *The Royal Law*, cited in note 8 above, Stennett also published *The Seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord* (1664) and, in response to John Cowell’s defection from the Sabbatarian movement, *The Insnared Taken in the Work of his Hands, an Answer to Mr John Cowell* (1677).

and Thomas Bampfield, who for a brief period had been Speaker in the Barebones Parliament, deserve mention. Bampfield's unfinished dialogue concerning the Sabbath with John Wallis, Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford, was prematurely terminated by his death in 1693. Others took up the cause. John Maulden of Mill Yard added three further works between 1708 and 1724 and finally Robert Cornthwaite, the last and most articulate and persuasive of all the Sabbatarian writers, contributed another six between 1731 and 1745. It is doubtful whether the Sabbatarian movement would have survived and rallied without its apologists.⁵⁹

There were of course other individuals worthy of note, and other factors in the complex scheme of events which enabled this small and relatively insignificant movement to survive as it did and find a lasting place in the history of English religious thought and practice. Yet the evidence remains strong that the combination of convincing apologetic literature, unwavering commitment, sustained beneficence and informed and persuasive preaching was at the heart of the Sabbatarian impetus. These factors, individually and together, were an effective antidote against the predominating spirit of the age. They dispelled the clouds of darkness and oppression which in earlier years had surrounded Edward Stennett and Joseph Davis, Brabourne, Bampfield and John James and at times the whole Sabbatarian movement. They gave it grounds for hope and enabled it to survive and, for a time, to thrive. Undoubtedly such factors did the same for many other causes that similarly languished under harsh legislation, hostile adversaries and unsympathetic friends. It might reasonably be concluded that they were crucial, not only to the survival of seventh-day Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, but also to the growth and stability of many religious minorities and that singly or together they made a significant contribution to the existence of a confessionally pluralist society.

⁵⁹ See Ball, *Seventh-day Men*, Appendix IV, for the works of Thomas Bampfield, Maulden and Cornthwaite.

