

Guest Editors' Introduction

Donald Q. Cannon and Larry C. Porter

The 150th anniversary of the Church in the British Isles was marked in 1987. On 19 July 1837, Elders Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, Joseph Fielding, Isaac Russell, John Goodson, and John Snider arrived in the British Isles on a mission prompted by an inspired statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

God revealed to me that something new must be done for the salvation of His Church. And on or about the first of June, 1837, Heber C. Kimball, one the Twelve, was set apart by the spirit of prophecy and revelation . . . to preside over a mission to England, to be the first foreign mission of the Church of Christ in the last days.¹

The sesquicentennial of the opening of the British Mission has been celebrated in a variety of ways in a number of places. Brigham Young University sponsored a symposium in January in which four General Authorities and a number of members and scholars in various disciplines participated. Symposium participants presented papers on a wide range of topics. During the summer, particularly during July, several tour groups visited Church sites in the British Isles. The Mormon History Association held its annual meeting 5–13 July. The Church History and Doctrine Department of BYU held its annual symposium in the British Isles from 18–27 July. In addition, commemorative historical markers were dedicated at selected sites by Church dignitaries. On Sunday, 26 July 1987, six area conferences of the Church were held in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland with a combined congregation of approximately thirty thousand. President Ezra Taft Benson presided at the London area conference.

This is the first of two special issues of *Brigham Young University Studies* planned to preserve some of the spirit of that celebration by publishing papers delivered at various times during 1987. While most of the papers are from the BYU symposium held in January, some are from other meetings and symposia.

This first issue will feature articles on two general subjects: (1) studies or commentaries that give an overview or emphasize the coming

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of the Church to Britain and the gathering of the British Saints and (2) studies that emphasize individuals. The articles in the second issue will treat (1) studies of the Church in English-speaking countries other than England and (2) studies or commentaries emphasizing the development of the Church as a religious entity in Great Britain.

Having been one of the direct participants in the first apostolic mission to England in 1837, and having served as the presiding officer of the mission until the return of members of the Twelve in 1840, Joseph Fielding reviewed the progress of the Church in the British Isles in an August 1841 letter to Elder Parley P. Pratt, and reflected:

When we first came to England there were seven of us, if I may call myself one, but now there are, I suppose, about 7,000. The little one has become a thousand, and the strong one shall soon become a great nation. What hath God wrought?²

Enjoying the perspective of time, the editors and writers of these two issues on the Church in Great Britain now have an opportunity to expand the ramifications of Joseph Fielding's pensive query.

NOTES

¹Joseph Smith, Jr., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1946–50): 2:489.

²Joseph Fielding to Parley P. Pratt, in *Millennial Star* 2 (August 1841): 53.