

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN EARLY VICTORIAN BRITAIN: THE MORMON EXPERIENCE, 1837–1860

MALCOLM R. THORP

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

Historians have long recognized that sectarian rivalry was an important feature of the early Victorian religious scene, and that such conflicts occasionally turned from verbal abuse to violence. But, in the case of smaller sects, such as the Latter-day Saints (LDS), knowledge of such incidents of violence has thus far remained obscure, either due to the lack of sources or the inaccessibility of such evidence.¹ An exploration into LDS records, however, reveals a pattern of considerable animosity, which suggests that toleration, although conceived as a religious virtue by most early Victorians, was not altogether operative as a practice.

This essay examines the documented instances of popular disturbances against the Mormons, with the specific intention of determining the frequency and the intensity of such activities.² In addition, the geographical locations and sizes of communities involved in such events are examined, as well as information concerning participants in such disturbances. Finally, this study attempts to ascertain, as far as it is possible, the effects such events had on the church.

Not long after the arrival in Britain of the first LDS missionaries from America (July 1837), sectarian animosity was aroused against this new religion. However, Heber C. Kimball, the leader of the first contingent of Mormon missionaries, recorded that religious opposition was actually a factor that favoured the spreading of the new message. On 8 October, he wrote that religious leaders in Preston had stirred up the local citizenry with cries of ‘false teacher’ and ‘false prophet’, but this propaganda only created curiosity that favoured Mormonism.³ As missionary successes continued, however, the first incidents of violence occurred. At the village of Walkerfold, Kimball reported that

¹ For a regional study of persecution, see John Cotterill, ‘Midland Saints: The Mormon Mission in the West Midlands, 1837–77’ (University of Keele Ph.D. thesis, 1985), 306–71.

² ‘Persecution’ is defined here as any organized public demonstration aimed at disrupting proselytizing activities, especially when such events ended in physical violence. Excluded from consideration within this study are the numerous examples in which individual Saints were dismissed from employment, or ostracized by family and friends because of their religion.

³ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Historical Department (hereafter HDC), Manuscript History, 6, 8 October 1837.

‘the Saints were suffering much persecution some have been driven from their homes and otherwise ill-treated.’⁴ Nor was Preston free from disturbance. On 31 May 1839, an angry mob of ‘noisy and restless’ ‘evil spirits’ stoned missionaries as they attempted to preach in the streets, although no one was seriously harmed.⁵

During the early years of the church in England (1837 to 1852) sectarian attacks on Mormons were primarily intended to bring about public ridicule, to demonstrate communal disapprobation. Usually such incidents were sponsored by local clergymen or socially prominent citizens who supported such public humiliations. It can also be said that such attempts at derision were often highly successful. One Mormon missionary wrote that, following the break-up of his first outdoor meeting by a hostile crowd, ‘it produced many disagreeable feelings to see so much ridicule and contempt heaped upon men for preaching the truth.’⁶ Indeed, as E. Lloyd Peters has observed, ‘The sanction of ridicule sears the soul.’⁷

Some of the most significant accounts of persecution in the early years are found in the journals of Wilford Woodruff, the LDS Apostle who also registered some of the most dramatic missionary successes in the remote villages surrounding Ledbury, Herefordshire. He described the sectarian opposition at Dymock, Gloucestershire, on 16 September 1840:

Mr John Simons the Rector of the Church in Dymock manifested much of the Spirit of the Devil by stirring up mobs against the Saints which had disturbed the meetings of the Saints in several instances, & on this occasion as we began to gather together the beat of drums pails pans & sticks was herd through the street, & the mob soon Collected & Parraded in the streets in front of the house. We Closed the window shutters & doors in the room whare we ware, & I opened meeting by Singing & Prayer & no sooner had we Commenced than the mob armed themselves with eggs, bricks, rocks, & evry thing els they could lay their hands upon & began to throw them upon the house like a shower of hail stones for nearly an hour. They dashed in the windows scattered Stones, Brick, & glass, through the rooms, broke the tile on the rooff & continued such depredations untill the close of the meeting.⁸

Also typical of the violence encountered in these years was the experience of Alfred Cordon at West Bromwich, where, in May 1841, he encountered much opposition from Methodist preachers. However, public ridicule could be counter-productive; Cordon related that there was a revulsion against the tactics of the Methodists. But, when Cordon moved his missionary labours into the nearby village of Swan,

⁴ HDC, Manuscript History, 6, 6 September 1837.

⁵ HDC, Manuscript History, 7, 31 May 1839.

⁶ HDC, James Amasy Little, Journal, 23 July 1854, 44.

⁷ Quoted in Robert D. Storch, ‘“Please to Remember the Fifth of November”: Conflict, Solidarity and Public Order in Southern England, 1815–1900’, *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Robert D. Storch (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1982), 83.

⁸ Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, I (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 516–17.

a local Primitive Methodist leader named Moss effectively organized the citizens against Cordon. Moss asserted that 'Englishmen are men of understanding we dont want Americans to come and teach us, and his prayer was O Lord keep me from the doctrine of the Latter day Saints.' Incited by this denunciation, the crowd attempted to pull Cordon from the platform where he was preaching, and the Saints present were forced to flee from a volley of stones.⁹

More serious, at least in terms of the potential for violence, was an incident at Lightwood Green, Montgomeryshire. In January 1842, attempts to shout down Mormon missionaries led to a fist-fight in which a Brother Richard Ashley was struck in the mouth, and 'four or five' of the anti-Mormons were removed from the Saints' meeting house. In retaliation, an angry mob formed and surrounded the building. They then proceeded to throw stones (one of which, hurled through the window, injured a sister). The mob then attempted to beat down the door with sticks. The severity of the situation prompted Joseph Horton, a sympathetic non-Mormon, to fire a loaded gun over the head of the angry crowd as a warning. This action had its desired effect, as the mob withdrew. But persecution continued throughout this region, as meetings were frequently disturbed.¹⁰

While anti-Mormon demonstrations did result in injuries, there was only one recorded instance where persecution was at least a factor in the death of a victim. In early 1841, at Tirley, Gloucestershire, a local member named John Davis agreed to allow his home to be opened for church services. There was, however, considerable communal opposition to the Saints in this village, especially from a man described as being an apostate Methodist. An angry crowd surrounded Davis' house and threatened the Mormon preacher with violence. In the conflict which followed, Davis was badly beaten when the mob knocked him down and kicked him to the extent that he began bleeding from the lungs. Several weeks later, Davis died of complications that were related, at least in part, to this beating.¹¹

The area in the 1840s most affected by opposition to the LDS was South Wales. In towns such as Tenby, Pembroke and Fishguard, as well as the surrounding villages, missionaries were constantly harassed by various Methodist preachers. At Fishguard in 1849, the Saints were forced to resort to secret midnight religious services, and in 1852 they were forced to leave the town.¹² At Little Newcastle in 1848, the home where the Saints worshipped was surrounded by an angry mob. Stones were showered on the roof and through the windows. Then the

⁹ HDC, Alfred Cordon, Journal, 23 May 1841, 188-90.

¹⁰ HDC, Charles Smith, Journal, 4-5.

¹¹ 'Journal of Mary Ann Weston Maughan' in Kate B. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, ii (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1959), 354-5.

¹² Brigham Young University Library (hereafter BYU), David John, Journal, 15; BYU, Thomas D. Evans, Autobiography, 26.

Mormons were driven into the street when the legbone of a horse was thrown down the chimney, thus filling the house with smoke and soot.¹³ On another occasion, guns were fired at the Saints' meeting house at Little Newcastle.¹⁴

Perhaps even more serious was the experience of Thomas D. Evans at Pembroke. Describing persecutions in 1850, Evans wrote:

A mob got after us and marched us out of town to the music of tin pans, horns and bad eggs. They drew me by the hair of the head & threaten'd to throw me in the river if I did not deny that Joseph Smith was a prophet. They stood on the bridge, and held me by the hair of the head over the water. I always felt to trust in the Lord while doing his work. They were the one frightened as a large man walked into the crowd, they all scatter'd when I turned to look for the man to thank him he was no where to be seen. The thot came to me many times that he was one of the 'Three Nephites'.¹⁵

While Evans' account of his escape might suffer from later embellishment, the severity of the incident demonstrates that such events could often get out of hand, as the emotions of the crowd could turn law-abiding citizens into perpetrators of violence.

An examination of the pattern of persecution to 1853 reveals that the LDS experience was similar to that encountered by the Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, teetotallers and Millerites.¹⁶ It once again suggests the fierce sectarian hatreds of the 1840s, but also that the Mormons were not treated any worse than other such missionary groups of this time. While there were stories of beatings by mobs and incidents where stones found targets, an analysis of such accounts suggests that the aim of the persecutors was public humiliation, not bodily harm. In addition, it would appear that persecution was largely a regional phenomenon, with most incidents in the 1840s occurring in villages and small towns of the West Midlands and South Wales. Few episodes happened in the large cities where Mormons were active, undoubtedly because of the religious fragmentation, coupled with the indifference to sectarianism that was a feature of such communities. Perhaps the best summary of popular hostility was offered by Thomas Ward, a leading LDS church official, who wrote that 'We have in this land the protection of the laws, and though the spirit of persecution has been often exhibited, it has been as it were an individual affair, and confined to separate localities.'¹⁷

Following the public announcement in England in January 1853 that

¹³ HDC, John Price, Journal, 14 August 1848.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5 September 1850.

¹⁵ Evans, Autobiography, 24. 'Three Nephites' are characters from the Book of Mormon who, according to the story, were granted their wish not to die. From time to time, in popular accounts, they are said to make appearances, usually in threatening situations.

¹⁶ Louis Billington, 'Popular Religion and Social Reform: A Study of Revivalism and Teetotalism, 1830-50', *Journal of Religious History*, x (1979), 272.

¹⁷ *Millennial Star*, 15 July 1846, 6-7.

confirmed earlier rumours concerning the practice of polygamy in the territory of Utah, there was a change in the pattern of anti-Mormon activities. Instead of sporadic sectarian opposition that had occasionally turned to violence, which had typified the past, opposition was now well-organized and effective in presenting the message that Mormonism represented a threat to British society. There emerged, in short, a crusading zeal to much of the opposition to the Latter-day Saints.

This new approach can be clearly seen in the pamphlet literature of the time. Edward J. Bell, an Anglican minister at Norwich, for example, wrote in an 1853 pamphlet that, while religious toleration was a virtue, the issue of Mormonism raised civil and domestic questions. 'It [Mormonism] is used as a means,' averred Bell, 'by which to work upon the better feelings of the uninstructed and ignorant, and thereby to decoy away, from their English homes, the able-bodied and industrious to the Salt Lake Valley'. While Bell did not openly advocate violence, he did argue in favour of making the issue of Mormon proselytizing activities a secular question, thus removing it from the umbrella of toleration.¹⁸ Others, however, went beyond Bell. An anonymous pamphlet, printed for the inhabitants of Dunstable in the early 1850s, applauded the public concern over the issue of LDS propaganda, and concluded that 'I hope it will be continued until they are driven from the town.'¹⁹ Josiah Lowe stated in 1852 that he could not justify persecution against the Saints; instead, he advocated banishing Mormonism from the land!²⁰ One critic of LDS practices even stated that 'Mormons ought not to be allowed to live on the earth.'²¹

The change in approach can also be seen in the emergence of public crusaders who ardently championed the cause of public morality against the Mormon threat. Three of these figures stand out as important instigators of violence. Dr John Brindley was a highly successful promoter of proper Victorian religious values, especially the idea of respectability. In the early 1840s he was a popular writer on the evils of Chartism, socialism, as well as the cultist practices of the Swedenborgians. In 1842 he also turned his attention to what he considered to be a new threat posed by Mormon missionary successes.²² Thus he vented his spleen by attempting to expose the dubious historical claims of the *Book of Mormon* in a pamphlet that demonstrated a reliance on shop-worn arguments which were by then commonplace.

¹⁸ Edward John Bell, *Latter-day Delusions; or, The Inconsistencies of Mormonism* (Norwich: Thomas Priest, 1853).

¹⁹ *The new heresy!! An Exposure of Mormonism* (Dunstable: Harper Twelvetrees [1850]), 2.

²⁰ Josiah Lowe, *Mormonism Exposed . . .* (Liverpool: Edward Howell, 1852), 50.

²¹ HDC, Manuscript History, Letter from Thomas Bullock, 25 August 1857.

²² John Brindley, 'A Short and Easy Method with the Mormonites', *The Antisocialist Gazette*, 8, 1 May 1842, 142.

In 1857 Brindley returned to the subject of the Mormon menace. In that year, he began a series of public lectures throughout the towns of the West Midlands. In Birmingham, he began publishing a weekly magazine entitled *The Antidote*.²³ His avowed purpose in this periodical was to convince women of the dangers ('brute lust') of Mormonism. He claimed that at no time did he advocate violence against the Mormons. But he argued that 'the horrible condition of things existing in the Utah settlements is enough to excite a Birmingham crowd, when they see so many of their brothers and sisters going thither.'²⁴ Brindley denied all responsibility for the destruction of property that occurred in the aftermath of his public lectures, even though there can be no question that his vitriolic vilifications were a factor in inciting religious hatred that turned to violence in the summer of 1857. Indeed, he went so far as to pin the blame for violence on the Mormons, claiming that a caretaker at the Thorpe Street Chapel had precipitated the attacks by threatening local boys with a pitchfork.²⁵

Andrew Balfour Hepburn was undoubtedly the most prodigious opponent of Mormonism at this time. A former policeman in Glasgow and Edinburgh, he had joined the LDS Church at Biggar, Scotland, in 1844. Some ten months after his conversion, Balfour left the Church embittered, evidently, by what he considered to have been misrepresentation. In 1850 he launched a career as a public anti-Mormon lecturer at Kilmarnock and claimed to have won a libel case brought against him at Ayr by the Mormons in September of that year. By 1852, he was lecturing throughout northern England, and in 1853 he became the leading spokesman for the London Anti-Mormon Society. He claimed that the Mormons had consistently persecuted him. On fifteen occasions he had been summoned by the Mormons before magistrates, merely for asking questions in their meetings. But he did admit that on 15 August 1854 he had been arrested in Stepney (London), and had been found guilty of disturbing the peace.²⁶ Indeed, in many of the areas where Hepburn campaigned there were violent outbursts against the Mormons, including (as we shall see) Luton and Soham.

William Saunders Parrott, like Hepburn, was a former Mormon. In 1856 he left the Bristol Branch, claiming that Jesse Martin, the local leader, had cheated him out of considerable sums of money. Encouraged by J.B. Clifford, the Vicar of St Matthews, Bristol, Parrott began a series of lectures in which he sought to expose the licentious practices of his former religionists. Parrott displayed considerable skill

²³ There were twenty-two numbers of *The Antidote* published between 27 June and 21 November, when the journal ceased publication.

²⁴ *The Antidote*, 6, 1 August 1857, 41.

²⁵ *The Antidote*, 10, 29 August 1857.

²⁶ Andrew Balfour Hepburn, *Mormonism Exploded; or, The Religion of the Latter-Day Saints* . . . (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1855), 2-4, 12.

as a writer, and his pamphlets were replete with vivid imagery that portrayed the Saints as licentious predators. Like many popular crusaders, Parrott claimed that the Mormons should not be protected by toleration. For, he said, Mormonism represented an intolerable threat to the fabric of social life which therefore placed its adherents beyond the pale of civilization. He said:

It is lamentable to think that such heartless licentiousness should be allowed to flourish in Christian England, in the garb of Christianity, in the nineteenth century; and that they should obtain a license [for preaching and public worship] for 2s. 6d., which protects them while so doing!²⁷

Unfortunately, such irresponsible rhetoric was taken seriously by many, and there is considerable evidence that the imagery of Mormonism as a threat to civilization was used as a pretext to commit violence. Thus, at Luton on 29 October 1854 Mr John Everett, a Wesleyan preacher, interrupted the Saints' outdoor meeting, by raising questions to his fellow citizens:

He wondered how the people could bear with us [Mormons] as long as they had; 'for my part I am tired of listening to such stuff, it is like the grinding of old bones; they ought to be hooted out of town; they came here to polute our citizens. . . . serve them as you would a dirty cat; or a dog that you want to get rid of; tie a tine kettle to his tail and set him running through the streets.'²⁸

The outraged crowd then attempted to pull the LDS preachers from the pulpit but, fortunately on this occasion, a Mr Willis, who was described as an influential citizen, intervened in the interest of fair play, and violence was averted.

But, throughout many of the nearby East Anglian towns, there was a number of disturbances. At Norwich, on 1 October 1853, outdoor meetings were disturbed by 'the rabble' both in the morning and the evening. Influenced by religious sectarians, the Saints were pelted with stones. Some young women caught one of the LDS girls, Elizabeth Funnel, and pulled her dress over her head. Another young girl, not a Mormon, had her head cut open with a stone thrown by a large boy, who was caught by several of the men and taken to the police. Episodes of violence continued, however, and on 10 October it was reported that 'our out doors [meetings] were much mobed [*sic*] and abused.' On 14 October Mormons were again stoned, and a Sister Rachael Taylor was knocked down when struck by a rock. Another Mormon, a Brother Harding, had to be rescued by three policemen when a mob threatened to 'jam the Holy Ghost out of him.'²⁹

²⁷ William Saunders Parrott, *The Victim of Mormonism; or, A Voice of Warning to My Countrymen*, second edition (Bath: H.E. Carrington, [1857]), 2 and *passim*.

²⁸ I1DC, Charles Dana, Journal, 29 October 1854.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 10, 14 October 1853.

At Soham opposition was highly organized and seemed to have had the complicity of the leading citizens. On 16 February 1853 a mob disturbed the LDS meeting. When a policeman was brought in, he told local Mormon leaders that he had no authority to remove anyone from the meeting. Following the conclusion of the services, there 'commenced such a scene of confusion . . . it was as if a Legion of Devils had just been liberated from Solitary [*sic*] Confinement they put some of the lights out and broke 4 or 5 of our [benches].' As Church leaders attempted to leave the premises, they were stoned, and the mob attempted to 'throw us down by running against us.' The next day William Fowler, the Branch President, swore out a warrant against John Steadman and Edward Jarvis, two of the ringleaders. But, Fowler reported, the magistrates, being 'church persons', refused to act. 'Instead of trying the case they began to ask me questions on the wife doctrine', and the case was dismissed before Fowler was ever sworn in.³⁰

Without legal protection, the violence continued. Then, on 1 April (All Fools Day) a crowd of 1,500 assembled together at the Crown Inn. They began a procession to the homes of the Saints. In the mock wedding ceremony that was performed, seven girls were dressed in bridal dresses with white veils, while one male played the part of the bridegroom.³¹ Such a continuous level of harassment did have its effect, for Fowler wrote that several of the Saints 'were on the eve of Apostacy through fear and Persecution which was yet raging as hard as ever I found that smashing windows groning throwing Stones &[tc] was the order of the day.' He also related that there was further excitement in Soham, due to the lectures of Hepburn, who told local citizens that the only way to get rid of the Mormons was to drive the elders out of town.³²

At Southwold, persecution was so intense that missionaries were forced to leave. On 18 September 1854 two Mormon elders were paraded out of town, accompanied by banners representing Brigham Young with forty wives and a portrait of Joseph Smith that had four horns. According to Charles Harper, this was a 'regular mob influenced by the Priests & great men of the town.'³³

But the most significant incidents involving violence against the Mormons were centred in Birmingham in the summer of 1857. Local hostilities were aroused by the lectures of Brindley, whose crusade appears to have caught considerable public attention. Trouble began on 14 July when Daniel Moore, an ex-Mormon, and four accomplices

³⁰ HDC, William Fowler, Diary, 16, 22 February 1853.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1 April 1853.

³² *Ibid.*, 23 April 1853.

³³ BYU, Charles Harper, Diary, 18 September 1854. At Retford the town corporation forbade Mormons from preaching in public, claiming that, when they did in former times (early 1850s), great crowds of people collected and there were disturbances. HDC, Matthew Rowan, Journal, 3 February 1854.

attacked Joseph Howard and 'beat him in a brutal manner'. A witness for Moore, however, testified that Howard had struck the first blow, and the case was dismissed. By this time tensions were so acute that on 19 July the local LDS leader, Charles J. Jones, wrote a letter to the Lord Mayor asking for special protection. While this was being ruminated by local officials, a group of '40–50' persons disturbed Sunday services at the Cambridge Street Chapel on 26 July, and the meeting had to be cancelled. The following day, Jones called on the Mayor and was promised assistance against further outrages.³⁴

On 27 July, however, the mob 'in open day' broke into the Thorpe Street Chapel and had to be evicted by the police. The following night, at the conclusion of a Brindley lecture at the nearby Town Hall, a mob estimated at about 1,500 'consisting of youths of low grades, from age of 18 to 20' attacked the Cambridge Street Chapel and ransacked the premises to the extent that the building could no longer be used. They then proceeded to the Villa Street Chapel, where the Saints were forced to flee for their lives by crawling through a small window in the back of the building. The mob then broke windows, light fixtures, and benches, as well as ruining hymnals. By the end of the evening all three chapels were severely damaged by rioters, with an estimated 350 smashed windows.³⁵ Several of the Mormons had been brutally beaten, and others were so intimidated that they were forced to flee to other areas of the town.³⁶ Jones wrote that, 'such a site I never before saw. Hundreds of people came to look at same [destruction] and seemed to rejoice we were so much annoyed.'³⁷ Nor was this the end of the trouble. On 9 August the mob returned to the chapels, flinging brickbats and rocks 'at an enormous rate' through the broken windows, and insulting the members on their way home.³⁸ As a result, religious services had to be suspended until law and order could be restored.

Other towns affected by such disturbances were Bath, Bristol and Cheltenham. At Bath, windows were broken in the Mormon chapel, and local church leaders were threatened. On one occasion, about twenty panes of glass were smashed, the mob kicked the door in and threatened to 'fire the chapel'.³⁹ Religious services had to be suspended, and as late as January 1858 it was still too dangerous for such meetings to be held.⁴⁰ Similar commotions occurred in Bristol; mob actions resulted in property losses and forced cancellation of services.⁴¹

³⁴ HDC, Charles J. Jones, Journal, 15, 19, 26 July 1857.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29–30 July 1857.

³⁶ HDC, Eli Harvey Peirce, Journal, 9 August 1857.

³⁷ HDC, Charles J. Jones, Journal, 30 July 1857.

³⁸ HDC, Eli Harvey Peirce, Journal, 9 August 1857.

³⁹ HDC, Manuscript History, 19, Letter from Edward Hanham to Orson Pratt, 22 August 1857.

⁴⁰ HDC, William Yeates, Journal, 18 January 1858.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24 October 1857.

Persecution in the 1850s followed the pattern of the earlier decade in being largely a regional phenomenon. As might have been expected, London and the Home Counties were almost entirely free from any serious episodes. In the northern cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Bradford, and Leeds, where there were appreciable numbers of Mormons, there were few disturbances. In Manchester, for example, there was an organized Anti-Mormon Society, which attempted to disrupt Mormon missionary activities. But this movement failed to arouse widespread local support and was no more than a nuisance to church leaders. In Scotland as well, there were minor incidents at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Arbroath, but for the most part these efforts failed to arouse religious passions.

The storm centres of opposition continued to be the West Midlands (which contained the highest concentration of LDS population) and South Wales. And, as we have seen, several East Anglian communities witnessed persecutions, as the Mormons began to establish branches and conferences in this region in the 1850s.

The evidence also suggests that violent opposition was most commonly found in medium-sized towns (with populations between 20,000 and 60,000). To be sure, there were the exceptions. Birmingham and Stepney (London), with populations listed in the 1851 census as 232,841 and 110,775 respectively, do not fit this general pattern. Birmingham was a city with a rather high level of social and religious tensions⁴² (although, as we shall see, actual church attendance was not high), which helps to explain why an outside agitator, such as Brindley, could find popular support. The episode at Stepney in August 1854 can be explained by the presence of Hepburn, and it appears that his followers were not primarily local residents, but followers who accompanied him to this locality.

Turning to the 1851 Religious Census, we find that there were fourteen towns listed in the Census where significant anti-Mormon disturbances occurred in the decade of the 1850s.⁴³ If we add the total populations of these towns, as well as the numbers of worshippers on Census Sunday, we find that the index of attendance was 51.8 per cent, compared with a national average of 49.7 per cent for all towns in England and Wales with a population of 10,000 or more. For purposes of analysis, if we exclude Birmingham and Stepney from these figures as being atypical, then the index for religious attendance jumps in the remaining twelve towns to a high figure of 61.6 per cent. Such figures

⁴² Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 95–6.

⁴³ *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship, England and Wales – Report and Tables* (Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1852–53, lxxxix). For the sake of analysis, I have used the categories established by K.S. Inglis, who has taken the total attendances at specified places of worship on Census Sunday and divided these by the population in that area to get the index of attendance. While there are problems with the figures in the 1851 survey, it is argued that they still yield a rough index of religious observance for communities. See K.S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xi (1960), 74–85.

at least indicate that disturbances usually occurred in communities where there were high levels of religious interest (as at least nominally demonstrated in church attendance). This might also explain why anti-Mormon violence was minimal in the northern industrial towns, where levels of religious worship were significantly lower. Thus, indifference might explain the lack of northern episodes.

There were fewer incidents of violence in smaller towns and villages after 1853, largely because LDS missionaries found little receptivity; hence proselytizing was largely abandoned in such places. In rural communities there was considerable hostility to Mormonism because of the continued existence of paternalistic controls that enforced opposition to all forms of nonconformity. This can be observed at Millbornport, where Samuel Francis, a missionary in 1850, discovered that the local school superintendent, as well as a wealthy glove manufacturer, had induced the townsmen to drive him out.⁴⁴ Thomas Wright Kirby encountered persecution as long as he remained in the village of Redmarley in Gloucestershire in 1855. He related that a rich young farmer provided 'the low lived' with cider on condition that they would oppose Kirby. On one such occasion, Kirby stated that the mob, numbering about thirty participants, had blackened their faces and dressed in 'the most horred [*sic*] looking clothing.' They brought with them cow and sheep bells, while others had baking pans of every description. In addition, the mob brought rags, to dip in the muck and hurl at Kirby. Leading this procession, 'They had two deaf and dumb young men (brothers) on the lead'. Walking two and two, the noise that was created by this procession caused all the villagers to come to their doors. In retrospect, what Kirby witnessed was a well-orchestrated communal pageant, aimed at uniting the local citizenry against the undesirable outsider.⁴⁵

As examples used here suggest, in episodes where there was violence, there was usually some religious sanction given for such behaviour, usually by clergymen or prominent citizens. This typically took the form of a moralistic denunciation (for example, 'Mormonism was beyond the pale of civilization') or through a pronouncement that tended to suspend obligations of toleration ('the only way to get rid of Mormons is to drive their Elders from the town'). In most instances where it has been possible to analyze crowd behaviour, respectable people were present and provided the moral sanction for attacks against Mormons, even though the actual violence was carried out by groups of lower social status.⁴⁶ William Cutler, for instance, described

⁴⁴ HDC, Samuel Francis, Diary, 8–9.

⁴⁵ HDC, Thomas Wright Kirby, Journal, 55–6.

⁴⁶ This is somewhat different from Mormon persecutions in America, where respectable citizens participated in such violence, and also attempted to engage public officials and local militias in such campaigns. See Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 60–1.

a disturbance at Bristol in 1850, in which such social distinctions were clearly observed:

The Christian party [i.e., mob] were [sic] old middle aged & young women & an allmost innumerable number of children who joined them in shouting . . . The men were generally a rough, ragged & filthy. The three principal leaders were dressed rather respectable . . . The females were a most miserable looking set of beings; several of them were great slab sided, bushy headed, dirty faced, fould mouthed, double fisted, impudent & ragged portion of beings, that I have ever beheld, professing to belong to any of the human family.⁴⁷

In all instances where Mormons attempted to identify the social elements involved in committing acts of violence, invariably they used such terms as the 'baser sort' or the 'rabble' to describe their persecutors. Interestingly, the group most often mentioned were 'half grown boys' – young boys perhaps in the age-group of twelve to fourteen. It would appear that many of the episodes involving violence were created when this group was given encouragement by respectable citizens of the community. We might infer that the 'rabble' was not primarily motivated by religious antipathies. From this perspective, it can be said that many of the episodes of violence against Mormons were senseless acts, triggered by sectarian antipathies, but ultimately becoming opportunities for ruffians to unleash their hatreds by attacking unpopular elements within the community.

What effects did persecutions have on the LDS community? From the beginning of the Church, leaders had taught that persecution would follow the establishment of the truth, but that opposition would ultimately fail and would only tend to build up the Kingdom. In the short run, however, it was asserted that the Saints would be confronted by vicious persecutions. Heber C. Kimball said in 1840 that many Saints in England would have to sacrifice their lives for the gospel.⁴⁸ Similarly, Wilford Woodruff told of a revelation in which there was only going to be a short season for missionary work in England, and that persecution was soon to come upon the Church as one of the calamities preceding the Second Coming.⁴⁹ As opposition mounted in the 1850s, so too did the intensity of communal beliefs that a 'great' and terrible persecution was about to begin, and, unless members fled from 'Babylon' to safety in Zion, they would be forced out by their persecutors.⁵⁰ In fact, as we have seen, violence never reached the level of intensity predicted by Church leaders. But, such fears did help to unite members of the sect and created an unusually high level of internal cohesion. On the other hand, the intensity of opposition experienced by the Mormons after 1852 was likewise a

⁴⁷ HDC, William L. Cutler, Diary, 1 September 1850.

⁴⁸ HDC, John Needham, Journal, 34.

⁴⁹ HDC, Alfred Cordon, Diary, 14 October 1840.

⁵⁰ HDC, Robert Clarkson, Journal, 19 October 1852.

factor in the decline of convert baptisms.

It is generally recognized that the 1830s and 1840s were decades of bitter sectarian conflict, but that such hostilities dissipated by the 1850s. Indeed, historians seem agreed that, by the 1850s, new patterns of public behaviour, marked by obedience to the law and disinclination to violence, were increasingly becoming accepted norms. The Mormon experience suggests that this observation should not be stretched too far, for sectarian animosity was still capable of breaking out of the peaceful equipoise of this decade.

