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The 'Invisible' Women of the Baptist Mission to Jamaica (1800–1860)

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ABSTRACT

Women played an integral, but understated and often unrecognised, part in Baptist missions such as Jamaica during the early nineteenth century. Yet they are largely absent from extant correspondence, only sparsely mentioned in mission journals and the writings of male missionaries. This paper, through examination of primary records of the Baptist Missionary Society and published memoirs, explores the extent of female mission activity and the lives of the women who undertook it. It demonstrates that parochial and mission work, although prescribed by defined gender roles prevailing in England at that time, offered women enhanced opportunities outside the domestic sphere. Missionary service, using Jamaica post-slavery as a case study, offered even greater opportunities for spiritual fulfilment by engagement both as teachers in the mission schools and as the wives of serving missionaries.

KEYWORDS

Women; Jamaica; Baptist; mission; 1800–1860

Education in early nineteenth century Britain and its colonies was provided largely by the churches and considered a vital part of mission work, offering women a pathway to overseas service. The Baptist Missionary Society insisted its (male) missionaries be married to provide an example of Christian family life but offered single women teachers the opportunity to participate in overseas missions and become potential wives for widowed missionaries. Jamaica, the largest of the Caribbean islands, was one of England's wealthiest colonies. It was also the focus of divisive opinion on the abolition of slavery, in which Baptist missionaries played a leading role. Annual statistics published in *The Missionary Herald* and *Baptist Herald* show that, after full emancipation in 1838, many more women than men were engaged in the Baptist mission to Jamaica.[1] As teachers and 'assistant missionaries', as missionary wives are sometimes described, they were highly influential in the education and religious instruction of local women and children.

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[1] *The Missionary Herald*, September 1841, 295; September 1843, 503; May 1844, 270–272, *Baptist Herald*, 1 April 1840, Vol. 1/22, 3; 17 March 1841, Vol. 2/11, 78; 28 February 1844, Vol. 5/9, 68–71; 25 February 1845, Vol. 6/8, 62–64, 23 September 1845, Vol. 6/38, 307.

The time frame covered by this paper does not extend past 1860 when women were first appointed as missionaries in their own right.[2] By this time the Jamaican Baptist mission, which had elected to become independent of its parent body in 1843, was significantly scaled back after the Jamaican economy contracted.[3]

Early Baptist history

The extent of women's participation in the church has been understated because of its supportive rather than leadership nature. Karen Smith maintains that early Baptist historians did not fully describe the contribution of women to church life.[4] She suggests this is because the institutional nature of recorded history encompasses meetings and official records, whereas female activity was directed towards cultural and educational contributions.[5] Mandy McMichael, similarly, points out that traditional narratives do not reflect the diversity of women's involvement.[6]

For instance, in his 1992 work, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society,* Brian Stanley makes no mention of women in the West Indies. This is particularly surprising as he discusses in some length Angus and Birrell's deputation to Jamaica in 1846 to investigate the financial state of the mission.[7] They reported three missionary widows in distressed circumstances:

> It will be seen that the Jamaican widows' fund is extinct. Its rules and the way in which its funds were invested were quite unsound and now when help is most needed, no funds are to be obtainable … The special attention of the deputation was directed to the pecuniary circumstances of Mrs Knibb and Mrs Burchell, as requested by the Committee. They also deemed it consistent with the spirit of their instructions to give early attention to the circumstances of Mrs Dutton … The case of Mrs Dutton is particularly affecting.[8]

Contributions to the Widows and Orphans' Fund had been invested in the building of churches, schools and mission stations, not readily liquidated to fund living expenses or repatriation to England for these widows.

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[2]John H.Y. Briggs, "She Preachers, Baptists and Other Women: The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life Since 1600," *Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 7 (1986): 344, doi:10.1080/0005576X.1986.11751727 (accessed November 2, 2018); Clare Midgley, "Can Women be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 355–6. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/499791 (accessed November 5, 2018); Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire*, 39.

[3]Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 149; *Notes of Deputation to Jamaica 1846-9*, Baptist Missionary Society, London, (unpaginated), held at Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.

[4]Karen E. Smith, "Beyond Public and Private Spheres; Another Look at Women in Baptist History and Historiography," *Baptist Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1991): 81–2, doi:10.1080/0005576X. 1991.11751860 (accessed November 2, 2018).

[5]Ibid., 82.

[6]Mandy McMichael, "Many Voices, the Complexity of Baptist Women's History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 53, no. 2 (2018): 74, http://go.galegroup.comezproxy.une.edu.au.ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA557051349 (accessed November 7, 2018).

[7]Joseph Angus and C.M. Birrell, *Notes of Deputation to Jamaica 1846-9*, Baptist Missionary Society, bound copy held at Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford University.

[8]Ibid., 24, 46, 52.

Baptist churches expanded in the nineteenth century and men assumed the role of pastors and the responsibility of conducting the formal business and finances of the church whereas women provided education and support for mission activities.[9] Ruth Gouldbourne explains that the rise of evangelicalism in the nineteenth century allowed women to develop new and influential roles in a realm between public and private space.[10] They engaged in pastoral work outside the home, but were not present in administrative, and documented, operation of the Church. While they did not enjoy the formal recognition of their male counterparts, their efforts in education, fund raising and mission work (as the wives of missionaries) provided a sense of personal achievement with less social restriction than other middle-class women of their time. Dana Roberts, in her history of American women in missions suggests that mission service offered a sense of purpose:

> The alternative to a purposeful life was, for middle-class women, an endless round of socials, gossip and mundane housework. For the lower class, hard labour, often on a farm ... Early missionary wives universally assumed that their primary mission work would be directed towards women and children.[11]

Roberts explains that mission wives usually shared the same theological motivation of a desire to 'save the Heathen' as their husbands but marriage was a necessary pathway to achieving that aspiration.[12]

Female education

Teaching provided an entry to missionary work overseas from the 1820s onwards. 'Baptists, like others, were readier to employ women overseas than at home', concludes John Briggs.[13] The task of bringing the word of God to 'heathen' people, especially within the British Empire, was valued by Protestant congregations and women were recognised as the purveyors of morality and civilisation.[14] Education and missionary work provided both the opportunity for fulfilment of spiritual ambitions and gainful employment. Briggs saw women's employment in teaching as a positive opportunity for participation in church activity:

> Many (Baptist) women opened proprietary schools, and thousands flocked to devoted Sunday School teaching ... Such enterprises not only engaged the energies of prominent Evangelical wives and daughters but also began to employ paid female agents of a lower social order as Bible women, scripture readers, district visitors, and mission

[9]Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, "Women and the Baptist Experience," *Baptist History and Heritage* 51, no. 1, (2016): 95. http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.une.edu.au/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA450505825 (accessed November 5, 2018).
[10]Ruth Gouldbourne, "Baptists, Women and Ministry," *Feminist Theology* 26, no. 1 (2017): 63, doi:10.1177/0966735017714392 (accessed November 5, 2018); Smith, "Public and Private Spheres," 81–3.
[11]Dana Roberts, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice, Macon G.A.* (Mercer University Press, 1997).
[12]Ibid., 31, 37.
[13]Briggs, "She-Preachers," 344.
[14]Johnson, *Missionary Writing*, 15–16, 45–6.

> superintendents ... Hymns, schools, charities and lastly missions overseas, perhaps the most important factor, all played their part in giving women new importance in the work of the kingdom. [15]

Engagement in teaching and parochial work in England provided a foundation for mission work overseas, either as a single schoolteacher or the wife of a missionary.

Aspiring Baptist and other non-conformist teachers could receive three months' training at the British and Foreign School Society's academy in Borough Road, London, founded by Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, in 1814. On entry students were expected to have a minimum level of education, defined as being able to read well, write legibly and understand basic mathematics.[16] They required references about their moral and religious character.[17] Correspondence from Baptist Missionary Society archives indicates that both missionaries and their wives, as well as men and women engaged as schoolteachers, received training at the Borough Road academy before departing for their mission posts.[18]

Sunday School teaching introduced many pious young women to teaching and future missionary work. Of the sixteen subjects chosen by Thomas Timpson in his 1841 anthology, *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries: with a survey of the condition of women in heathen countries*, eight are documented as having taught in Sunday Schools before engaging in missionary service. The others were similarly employed as governesses, school teachers or in charitable works.[19]

The Jamaican mission

Sunday School education was valued in colonies such as Jamaica. Until full emancipation in 1838, Sunday Schools provided the only access to education for both children and adults bound by slavery. Baptist records for 1839 claim a total of 5097 children in their day schools and 10 127 in Sunday Schools.[20] While the day schools employed teachers, the task of conducting Sunday schools and evening classes was usually undertaken by the missionaries' wives. Male missionaries are listed as the superintendents of Baptist mission schools in annual reports published in *The Missionary Herald* and the (Jamaican) *Baptist Herald*, but it was predominantly their wives (not named in

[15] Ibid., 343.
[16] Pamela Horn, *Education in Rural England 1800–1914* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 33–5; P.W. Musgrave, *Society and Education in England Since 1800* (London: Methuen and Co., 1968), 19.
[17] Horn, *Education in Rural England*, 39.
[18] *Correspondence from West Indies 1840–1846* (London: Baptist Missionary Society), 83. Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.
[19] Thomas Timpson (ed.), *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries; With a Survey of the Condition of Women in Heathen Countries* (London: William Smith, 1841), 83–333.
[20] *Baptist Herald*, 1 April 1840, vol. 1, issue 22, 3, Bound editions held at Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.

these reports), together with other women teachers, who delivered the education.[21]

Women worked side-by-side with their missionary husbands, enduring the same hardships and challenges. The Reverend James Coultart writing to a friend described his late wife as 'one so qualified for a missionary's wife' and 'her qualifications for her great undertaking commanded the respect of all who knew her'.[22] Mary Ann Coultart had run a girl's school in England before her marriage and departure for Jamaica.[23] In reading the memoirs of both men and women from the Jamaican mission, it is evident that women were valued for their ancillary support, though rarely acknowledged in correspondence or formal documents. Hall sees this omission as a reflection of the Victorian era patriarchal pattern evident through the structure of the church, missions and the family.[24] As Smith and McMichael explain, women's lack of formal recognition was a result of the supportive nature of their work, and their absence from formal administrative functions.[25]

Abolition of slavery

The Baptist mission held a special place in Jamaica because of the strenuous efforts of its pastors towards the abolition of slavery. Three Baptist missionaries, Knibb, Abbot and Whitehorne, were arrested in 1831 on a charge of inciting rebellion among slaves. They were later acquitted. In the ensuing violence many chapels and church properties were burned by groups of white planters and overseers.[26] Baptist missionary to Jamaica, John Clark, records one instance of a missionary's wife being knocked down by a crowd of insurgents. Her husband was tarred and feathered. Another had a narrow escape with her infant child when their house was burned down by an angry mob.[27] Missionaries' wives may have been excluded from the debate and dissention on abolition of slavery, but they were as vulnerable as their husbands to the consequences.

Women as teachers

Education was considered an essential part of missionary practice, with education of females best delivered by women. In some cultures, male missionaries

[21] *The Missionary Herald*, September 1841, 295; September 1843, 503; May 1844, 270–2, *Baptist Herald*, 1 April 1840, Vol. 1/22, 3; 17 March 1841, Vol. 2/11, 78; 28 February 1844, Vol. 5/9, 68–71; 25 February 1845, Vol. 6/8, 62–4, 23 September 1845, Vol. 6/38, 307.

[22] James Coultart, letter quoted by Timpson, *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries*, 100–101.

[23] Ibid., 95.

[24] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 95–6, 104.

[25] Smith, "Beyond Public and Private Spheres," 81–2; Mandy McMichael, "Many Voices," 74.

[26] W.J. Gardner, *A History of Jamaica from its discovery by Christopher Columbus to the Present Time* (London: Elliot Stock, 1873). Facsimile reprint, Gyan Books, India 2016, 279–86; John H.Y. Briggs, "Baptists and the Campaign to Abolish the Slave Trade," *Baptist Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2007): 277–80, doi:1179/bqu.2007.42.4.02 (accessed November 2, 2018); Peter Masters, *Missionary Triumph over Slavery: William Knibb and Jamaican Emancipation* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 2006), 23.

[27] John Clark, *Memorials of the Jamaica Mission* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1869), 115, 121, as quoted by Gardner, *History of Jamaica*, 365.

did not have access to women's residences and in others, such as Jamaica, extra-marital liaisons had tainted relations between white, colonising males and local women. By mid-nineteenth century, the common argument for both secular and religious advocates became that female education was essential as the source of a culture's morality.[28]

Timpson does not always include the religious denomination of the women in his anthology. Only one, Mary Ann Coultart, is recorded as a Baptist.[29] The Baptists were at the forefront of sending single women teachers to missions abroad. In 1821, a Baptist missionary, William Ward, gained approval from the ladies committee of the British and Foreign School Society to send the first single women teachers to Calcutta.[30] As early as 1796, William Carey had emphasised the cultural need for women as part of the Indian mission to access the local women's quarters. The earliest women to answer the call were the wives of serving missionaries.[31] In 1840, the Reverend William Knibb, who had trained as a teacher at the Borough Road academy before travelling to Jamaica initially to teach and later as a missionary, returned to England to attend the Anti-Slavery Convention, to seek funding for the Jamaican mission and to recruit both missionaries and teachers.[32] The following correspondence, from the Reverend John Clark in Jamaica to the Baptist Missionary Society in London in 1840, indicates that these teachers were formally trained, and that missionaries' wives were included in training:

> It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are about to send a schoolmaster and teachers for Brown's Town. I hope you will meet with efficient teachers and send them out with Bro. Clarke or Bro. Knibb. Bro. Clarke will be able to judge as to the fitness of my cousin Chas. Armstrong. If he is thought suitable please send him and his wife to the Boro' Road to get as good a knowledge of the British system as time will permit. We shall have a large and important day school here and therefore require a Master and Mistress conversant with the principles of education.
>
> Bro. Knibb has written to us regarding Miss Drayton of Gloucester. From what I recollect of her when she was a member at Devonshire Square, I think she is just the young lady we want to take charge of a school for the older girls and assist Mrs Clark in her female classes. I also hope that she too will come out to us.[33]

The Baptist Herald records that two day-schools were established in Brown's Town in 1841:

> One for the elder girls under the care of Miss Drayton, assisted by Miss Ann Cooper – sixty girls above fourteen years of age are in attendance. The other school is on the

[28] David W. Savage, "Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India," *Gender and History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 212, doi:10.1111/1468-0424.00055 (accessed November 2, 2018).
[29] Timpson, *Memoirs of Female Missionaries*, 89–101.
[30] Midgley, "Can Women be Missionaries?," 339.
[31] Karen E. Smith, "The Role of Women in Early Baptist Missions," *Review and Expositor* 89 (1992): 36.
[32] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 95; J.M. Cramp, *A Brief memoir of the Rev. William Knibb, late Missionary in Jamaica*, Montreal, Rollo Campbell, 1846, 18.
[33] John Clark, Brown's Town, Jamaica to the Baptist Missionary Society, London, letter 24 July 1840, *Correspondence from West Indies 1840–1846* (bound 1846) (London: Baptist Missionary Society), 83.

> British system under the superintendence of Mr Armstrong; there is already an attendance of one hundred and seventy children.[34]

This extract is indicative of the emphasis placed on female education in Jamaica post – slavery and its importance in promoting Christian values. It is worthy of note that sixty girls, the daughters of emancipated slaves, over fourteen years of age were in one school in Jamaica at a time when the education of lower middle-class girls in England was considered complete at fourteen, demonstrating the high standard of female education in the early Jamaican mission schools.[35]

Differing opinions are recorded on the levels of education of Baptist missionaries. Jamaican historian, W.J. Gardner, suggests that many of the early Baptist missionaries were better educated than their peers. 'Of scholastic attainments far superior to those of the early Wesleyan missionaries', he says.[36] Hall found that most of the young men applying to the Baptist Missionary Society had very limited education, having left school to go into trade at the age of twelve or thirteen. This lack of education was a source of derision from their superiors both in England and abroad, she claims.[37] Hall has not investigated the education levels of missionary wives.[38] The women chosen for Timpson's collection of memoirs mostly have formal schooling to age sixteen, often at a boarding establishment and, as previously mentioned, many taught in Sunday schools. Some ran private schools, others were governesses. Women recruited as teachers would have had some further education to equip them for that role. Therefore, it is likely that Baptist missionary women would have attained at least equivalent levels of education to their male counterparts.

In Jamaica, the civilising role of mission women was promoted as a counter to the promiscuous relationships between white men and local women. Hall sees the missionaries' abhorrence of the widespread practice of concubinage as a major factor in their campaign for the abolition of slavery.[39] William Knibb was outspoken on the need for female education, delivered by other females. He wrote to one of his English benefactors:

> I very much wish to have one or more separate schools for females from 10–14 years of age under the care of females, that they may be properly trained not merely in knowledge of religion but in those domestic duties and requirements which will fit them for those occupations and that situation they are intended in after life to fill.[40]

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[34] *Baptist Herald and Friends of Africa,* Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society, Falmouth, Jamaica, 17 March 1841, bound editions, vol. 2, no. 11, 80. Bound editions held at Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.

[35] P.H.J.H. Gosden, *How They Were Taught; An Anthology of Contemporary Accounts of Learning and Teaching in England 1800–1950* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 155.

[36] Gardner, *History of Jamaica*, 353.

[37] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 90.

[38] Catherine Hall to Elizabeth Chappell, personal email 16 August 2018.

[39] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 112.

[40] William Knibb, Kettering, Jamaica, letter to C. Young Esq., St Alban's, England, 19 December 1839, Knibb Letters, ref W2/11, Missionary correspondence and diaries relating to Jamaica and West Africa, 1804–1879, Baptist Missionary Society, London.

In 1841, Mr Knibb established a Normal or teacher training school, run by his wife, Mary. She continued after his death in 1845, assisted by her two daughters who had been educated in England and returned to the mission in Jamaica. In one of the very few letters from women found in the Baptist archives, Mary Knibb writes of her daughters' dedication to the school:

> My daughter Annie keeps the school here, the attendance at which varies from 52 to 134. She throws her whole soul into it and it was her dear father's dying request that she should persevere in it. All the children bring in is £8 or £9 a year which is all she receives except £4 given by some friends in England. In this hot climate it is hard, toiling work for one so young but she likes it well and that is everything. Kate superintends the Sunday Schools and with her sister is employed every evening in the week with class meetings, teacher and working meetings.[41]

Hall explains that missionaries' wives in Jamaica were delegated the task of examining local women for church membership and took an active part in teaching religious and domestic skills in the girls' schools even though they were not formally engaged as teachers.[42] Overseas mission service in the nineteenth century afforded women an independence and public life that would not have been possible in Victorian England.[43]

Women were not recruited as missionaries in their own right until 1858, although Timpson's earlier anthology contrarily describes his female subjects as 'missionaries'.[44] This lack of consistency in describing the role of mission women contributes to the understatement of their participation. *The Missionary Herald* delineates between missionaries, assistant missionaries, teachers and women missionaries (wives) in its report on the Jamaican Baptist mission to Africa in 1849, but the wives of missionaries are often unrecorded and unacknowledged.[45] For instance, *The Missionary Herald* report on the missionaries and teachers recruited for Jamaica by William Knibb in 1840, lists only the males of the group:

> Fifteen Christian friends accompany Mr Knibb on his return; three missionaries and two schoolmasters, with their wives, and five female teachers, who will reside at different missionary stations in connextion *(sic)* with the missionary families there. For this new branch of agency, which includes a Normal School, for the training of native female teachers, Mr Knibb has received many kind contributions … All who are acquainted with the state of female Society in our West Indian colonies will rejoice in the effort thus made to enlighten and instruct that important portion of our community, by means of these devoted young persons, each of whom has had considerable experience in the work of Christian education at home … Mr Charles Armstrong and Mr Henry Bloomfield having been trained with that view, go out as missionary schoolmasters; the

[41] Mary Knibb, Kettering, Jamaica, letter to Baptist Missionary Society, London, 16 April 1846, Baptist Missionary Society, Correspondence from West Indies 1840–1846, 133.
[42] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 158; Hall personal email, 16 August 1918.
[43] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 91; Smith, "Public and Private Spheres," 81–2.
[44] Midgley, "Can Women be Missionaries?," 338.
[45] *The Missionary Herald*, September 1849, 592.

> former in connexion with Mr Clark of Brown's Town; the latter to take charge of one of the schools under the direction of Mr Knibb.[46]

The report omitted the names of the five female teachers, which included Miss Anna Anstie who assisted Mary Knibb in establishing the Normal (teacher training) school at Falmouth.[47] The names of these women are shown in the following year's tabular report of schools run by the Baptist mission in Jamaica. They were also included in the signatures on a message card sent to the Baptist Missionary Society by William Knibb before their departure. [48]

Analysis of teachers listed in the 1841 report on Baptist schools in Jamaica, published in *The Missionary Herald*, shows twenty-two single women, five married women (presumably widows as their names do not match the names of missionaries on Jamaica at that time), thirty-five men and eleven married couples (Mr and Mrs). For example, they include Sarah Drayton, Joanna Clack, Charles and Catherine Armstrong who had all arrived with Mr Knibb's party the previous year. Mrs Nicholson and Miss Nicholson, probably mother and daughter, are shown as teachers at Hanover Street, Kingston and Misses Thomas, Troop and Johnson at Mr Knibb's home parish of Falmouth. Two Reverends are shown as *pro tem.* teachers but no mission wives are listed, although several are known to have been teaching in mission schools at the time.[49] Hannah Phillippo, for instance, lived above the schoolroom in Spanish Town where her husband was the pastor and she taught the girls while he taught the boys in the school there. Her name does not appear on any school reports.[50]

Sarah Drayton, who travelled to Jamaica with Mr Knibb's group, is shown as teaching at Brown's Town in 1841. She married the Reverend Henry Dutton, a widower and pastor of the Baptist mission in Bethany, six months after arriving in Jamaica and disappears from the teaching list until 1847 when she reappears as Mrs Dutton (by then a widow). Similarly, her sister, Caroline Drayton, arrived as a teacher in 1843.[51] The following year she married another widowed missionary, George Henderson of the parish of Waldensia, and disappeared from the records.[52] The Drayton sisters were daughters of Gloucester surgeon and staunch Baptist, George Box-Drayton. Sarah returned to England, with her two children, after she became a widow and subsequently emigrated to Australia. Her sister Caroline stayed on in Jamaica and is buried in the Brown's Town cemetery.[53]

In his lengthy memoir, the Reverend Philip Cornford, another of William Knibb's recruits, gives a glowing description of his wife's Sunday School involvement and points out the lack of recognition mission wives are accorded for their work:

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[46] *The Missionary Herald*, December 1840, 298.
[47] Francis Augustus Cox and James Peggs, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society from 1792 to 1842*, vols 1 and 2 (London, T. Ward and Co., 1842), 333.
[48] *The Missionary Herald*, September 1841, 476; Knibb letters, ref. WII.
[49] *The Missionary Herald*, September 1841, 476.
[50] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 96.
[51] *The Missionary Herald*, May 1844, 271.
[52] *The Missionary Herald*, June 1841, 295; September 1847, 596–7; May 1844, 272.
[53] Chappell family personal papers, Armidale Australia.

> The missionary's wife, on the other hand, has a sphere peculiarly her own. My beloved partner soon surrounded herself with abundant employment. The Sabbath School naturally commended itself to her fervent heart. There the aged and the young sat side by side to read the heavenly word, to catch the thoughts she so much loved to give or to answer her enquiries. O think not that the woman, who hides from your notice even in missionary reports, exerts no missionary power.[54]

Unfortunately, the first Mrs Cornford, whose name was Mary-Ann although her husband does not mention that in his memoir, died less than a year after arriving in Jamaica.[55] Neither does he mention his second marriage, the following year, to Anna Anstie who came to Jamaica as a qualified teacher but disappears from the records after her marriage.[56] Did these women cease teaching after marriage? Hall thinks not, explaining that it was standard practise for the wives of missionaries to teach in the mission schools without being listed on the staff, or presumably the payroll.[57] Marriage appears to have extinguished their formal qualification as teachers in the records of the Baptist Missionary Society.

Marriage prospects

Instances of single female teachers marrying widowed missionaries in Jamaica are common. Male missionaries were expected to be married, not only so their wives could provide support and extra help for the mission, but also to set an example of monogamous Christian marriage. The Baptist Missionary Society was, however, willing to send young single females overseas. Males outnumbered females in the white population of Jamaica in the early nineteenth century.[58] Most white planters and overseers kept a local mistress. 'England was for families, Jamaica was for sex,' Hall says bluntly. She describes Jamaica as a colony of absentee landlords and resident white overseers providing a model of disorder and licentiousness.[59] For missionaries, marriage was considered a necessary final preparation before sailing, observes Hall.[60] Of the sixteen women in Timpson's *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries*, nine were married to missionaries within eight weeks before departure; of the five single female women, three married widowed missionaries in India and one was already a widow when she travelled overseas.

Marrying a missionary provided a pathway to fulfilling work for pious young women. One of Timpson's subjects, Mary Ann Chambers, a Baptist, expressed a strong desire to enter missionary work in letters to her brother Hiram who was attending a missionary college:

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[54]Philip Cornford, *Missionary Reminiscences or Jamaica Retraced* (Leeds: J. Heaton and Son, 1856), 18.
[55]Ibid., John Clark, *Memorials of the Jamaica Mission* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1869), 183.
[56]Clark, *Memorials of the Jamaica Mission*, 183.
[57]Hall, personal email, 16 August 2018.
[58]Gardner, *History of Jamaica*, 426.
[59]Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 72.
[60]Ibid., 91.

> How I should have rejoiced to be with you … My soul does indeed long to be with the poor heathen …
>
> But, oh, distracting thought, I may be left in England, while you are labouring among the heathen. I think it has been given me to believe that our God will take me. [61]

Miss Chambers' prayers were answered when she was introduced to the Reverend James Coultart, who was already preparing to depart for Jamaica. A fortnight later they were married and three weeks after that sailed to Jamaica. Within five months of her arrival, she died of fever.[62]

Health and mortality

Hall has calculated the average length of service for missionaries in Jamaica as three years before ill health drove them home to England or to their heavenly home.[63] Death from fever, cholera, malaria or smallpox was compounded for female members of the mission by the risks of childbirth. Infant and child mortality was even higher than in England where at the beginning of the nineteenth century an estimated thirty percent of children died before the age of fifteen.[64] William and Mary Knibb lost seven of their nine children. Philip and Anna Cornford, four of seven; five of James and Hannah Phillippo's nine children did not survive infancy.[65] Memoirs and obituaries of missionary women abound with early deaths and bereavements. These tributes are mostly compiled posthumously by their husbands and eulogise the devotion of their late wives.

Concern at the high mortality rate of its 'female assistant missionaries' is expressed in the *Baptist Magazine*.[66] The article calculated the general average of deaths of females in the field compared to males as more than two to one. It attributes this imbalance to 'unavoidable hardships of the service' including 'suffering of the spirit, caused by separation from home and kindred and from the soothing influences of civilised society'.[67] This article emphasises the loss of experience to the mission, as well as personal loss, when missionary lives are cut short.[68]

The mission family

Distanced from their families and familiar lives, the missionaries looked to each other for support, companionship and comfort. Hall and Johnston both describe

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[61] Mary Ann Chambers, letters to Hiram Chambers, 1 June 1816 and 24 August 1816 in Timpson (ed), *Female Missionaries*, 7–19.
[62] Timpson, *Female Missionaries*, 19.
[63] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 96.
[64] Lynda Payne, 'Health in England (16th to 18th century)', *Children and Youth in History*, http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/166 (accessed November 8, 2018).
[65] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 96, 169–71; Cornford, *Missionary Reminiscences*, 102.
[66] *Baptist Magazine*, September 1846, pp. 562–4. (Bound editions).
[67] Ibid., 563.
[68] Ibid.

this as a concept of 'mission family'.[69] Many were in fact blood relatives as it was common for siblings, cousins and other family members to follow each other into missionary service. Others became related through marriage within the missionary community. Jamaica in the 1840s abounds with such examples: William Knibb's nephew Thomas ran a store in Falmouth; the Drayton sisters both came to Jamaica as teachers and married widowed missionaries there; Charles Armstrong, who came in 1841 as a teacher, was a cousin of serving missionary John Clark. Overseas mission stations provided an extended family. Their congregations, the broader Baptist church family, the family of empire and finally the 'family in heaven', formed a multi-layered definition of missionary roles and duties, based on a patriarchal model:

> Mr and Mrs Millard and Miss Clack form a pleasing addition to our domestic circle, and are, in every sense of the term, acceptable. Mr M. has a true missionary spirit, is pious, active and zealous, in short just such a brother as I desired for a fellow labourer. Miss C. who appears to be eminently qualified for the work of instructing youth and in whom superior intelligence is combined with high-toned piety, has commenced her task with a degree of earnestness and vigour that cannot, under the Divine blessing, fail to be attended with the most beneficial results, not only to our own daughter, but to the daughters of many of our people. [70]

This letter from the Reverend T.F. Abbot to *The Missionary Herald*, illustrates the family-type cohesion of mission stations. Missionaries frequently referred to each other as 'brother'. It also shows a concern for female education and indicates that the newly appointed female teacher was well qualified. Unfortunately, Miss Clack died of fever before this letter was published. She had been in Jamaica less than three months.[71]

In *Great Baptist Women*, A.S. Clement points out that 'from the beginning, the mission field provided women with opportunities for leadership in the church, the which seizing, they have been able to develop the talents God gave them'.[72] However, Hall maintains that this contribution was largely overlooked. 'Missionary wives received none of the public praise which was heaped on their successful husbands', she argues.[73] Feminist theologians like Smith and Midgley also query whether women in Baptist missions received sufficient recognition for their work. [74] Recorded history was not only compiled by men, from documentation of the public sphere of activity, but it neglected to encompass the diversity of female participation.

Missionary wives provided an example of respectable feminine domesticity to the indigenous women and support at home for their missionary husbands. However, in practice, the roles of male missionary and missionary's wife

[69]Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 94; Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire*, 52.
[70]The Reverend T.F. Abbot, St Ann's Bay, Jamaica, letter to *The Missionary Herald*, London, July 1841, 368.
[71]*Baptist Herald*, 12 May 1841, cited by Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 94.
[72]A. S Clement, cited by Smith, "Public and Private Spheres," 82.
[73]Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 96.
[74]Midgley, "Can Women be Missionaries?," 337–9; Smith, "Public and Private Spheres," 82.

overlapped in both the pastoral and educational spheres, affording women greater participation in pastoral work than they would have experienced in England, Midgley suggests.[75] In the memoir of Margaret Clough, one of Timpson's 'female missionary' subjects, her Wesleyan missionary husband comments that it was unusual for a young woman 'to attain the same height in public life … as she did as the wife of a missionary'.[76] Midgley and Smith define the roles of missionary wives as operating in a separate, complementary sphere to their husbands.[77] While reflecting the gender roles of nineteenth century England, they actively contributed to schools, Sunday Schools and pastoral work without infringing on the patriarchal model and without formal status.

Conclusion

The seemingly subsidiary role adopted by mission wives must be evaluated in the context of nineteenth century mores. Smith points out that early Baptist women teachers contributed to the advancement of women in the church, while accepting their position as culturally defined.[78] For single women, the role of teaching not only provided them an income in church run schools, but also offered the opportunity to serve overseas, usually in colonies of the British Empire. Their matrimonial prospects were enhanced in foreign mission stations.

In Jamaica at the time of full emancipation of slaves, women outnumbered men in the Baptist mission community. They played an integral part in mission life and were exposed to the same risks and hardships, from disease and social isolation, as their male peers. The contribution of both single female teachers and the wives of missionaries, however, is scantly recorded. Both taught in mission schools, Sunday schools and conducted evening classes for adults. The missionary wives do not appear in school records, and marriage appears to eclipse the status of female teachers, who frequently married widowed missionaries. Their recognition, like their work, was within the private rather than public sphere. In the Baptist archives for Jamaica, women are conspicuously absent from extant correspondence and make only rare appearances in mission society journals. The lack of a formally defined position, coupled with their exclusion from administrative records, has diminished recognition of the significant participation of these women.

Notes on contributor

Elizabeth Chappell is an Australian journalist and author. She is currently completing a Master of Arts at the University of New England, Armidale. Ms Chappell is a direct descendant of Baptist missionary the Reverend Henry Dutton and Sarah Drayton.

[75]Midgley, "Can Women be Missionaries?," 358.
[76]Ibid., 343.
[77]Ibid., 339, Smith, "Public and Private Spheres," 82.
[78]Smith, "Public and Private Spheres," 83.