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Mormon Passage of George D. Watt

Ronald G. Watt

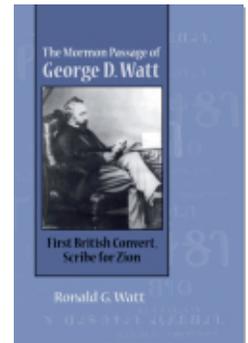
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EARLY LIFE IN BRITAIN

The dung which the farmer puts into his land, is not pleasant to work among but offensive to the smell, but not standing this, and many other troubles such as wind and rain &c. &c. he endures and gets in his seed. . . . It will just be so with us Bro. Geo. We go forth breaking up the fallow ground at the same time sowing greacious seed some times with tears and many afflictions, but the promise is we shall return to Zion, with joy.

George D. Watt to George A. Smith, December 22, 1840

On May 18, 1812, in the St. George Parish in Manchester, England, a son was born to James Watt and Mary Ann Wood Watt. More than a month later, this boy was christened George Darling Watt after his mother's oldest brother.¹ He was born just as the Industrial Revolution was sweeping Great Britain. Manchester, located in the English Midlands, is approximately two

1. George D. Watt never knew when his birthday was. When he received a patriarchal blessing from Peter Melling in 1840, he gave his birthdate as January 16, 1813, but the date that appears thereafter in LDS Church records is January 16, 1815. Births were not recorded officially by the state or county, so children were completely dependent upon their parents' memory of the event. Probably George's mother could not remember the date. Only if a baby was christened in the state church (Church of England), would that date be known by later generations. The actual date is May 18, 1812, as recorded in the records of St. George Parish, Manchester, England. See George Darling Watt, christened June 21, 1812, recorded birth as May 18, 1812, St. George Parish birth records, Parish Register printouts, microfilm of typescript, film no. 1235364, Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Family History Library). Charles Dickens, the great English writer about the lower classes, had been born just a few months earlier in Portsmouth, England.

hundred miles north of London and thirty-nine miles east of the port city of Liverpool. The Industrial Revolution changed Britain from a rural, agricultural nation to one with large cities teeming with factories.

Life in these factory towns was precarious. Factory workers put in more than twelve hours a day. Slumlords packed their tenants into quickly built row houses that lacked adequate water and proper sanitation. Twentieth-century economic historians like T. S. Ashton acknowledged that these conditions were gruesome but argued that they were temporary, that the Industrial Revolution bettered living conditions for the masses.² However, when George D. Watt was born, any amelioration lay three decades or more in the future. Watt grew up breathing smoke-filled air and walking on sewage-filled streets.

Politically the welfare of slum dwellers was taking a backseat to concerns about the threat posed by Napoleon in France, a period that had begun in 1789 with the French Revolution. The British at first sympathized with the French Revolution, but later they were horrified by its excesses and stood prepared to suppress with the utmost harshness signs of a similar uprising among England's poor. Napoleon, who rose to power in 1799, channeled his nation's energy into conquering Europe. Finally, a British-led coalition of the other European countries defeated the French and exiled Napoleon in 1815; but even though the British won, the economic and social effects strongly impacted the England where baby George grew up.³

The disruption of the British economy during the Napoleonic wars brought unemployment. Factory owners wanted the tariffs on wheat abolished, making bread less expensive and leading to reduced wages for the workers. One faction of the working classes, led by the Chartists, wanted representation in Parliament.⁴ Great Britain in the nineteenth century had a monarch with a Parliament consisting of a House of Lords, whose hereditary peers inherited their seats along with their estates, and a House of Commons with elected members who represented only a small part of the male population.⁵

Religiously the country had fragmented into several Christian denominations. This process had begun during the English Civil War in the

2. See Thomas Southcliffe Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830*, 1st rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). An earlier work by Paul Mantoux, *The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century: An Outline of the Beginnings of the Modern Factory System in England* (London: J. Cape, 1928), emphasizes the changes in the factory system.

3. For a summary of the war, see R. K. Webb, *Modern England, from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York, Toronto: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1969), 129-51.

4. The Chartists received their name because of their petition, which they called a charter. They obtained signatures from millions of people and presented the charters to Parliament. They wanted to have all men receive the electoral franchise, have equal electoral districts, have a secret ballot, and a few other items. Parliament ignored their requests.

5. See Webb, *Modern England*, 242.

seventeenth century and continued in the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of Methodism. In 1740 John Wesley began an experiment of taking religion to the masses in the English countryside. When the Church of England parish priests locked their churches against the Wesleyan preachers, Wesley took his enthusiastic religion to the fields and streets. Wesley, however, never intended to leave the established church. After his death in 1791, his followers created a formal church. Open-air preaching and revivals gradually ended. The Methodist movement also splintered.

One of the groups, the Primitive Methodists, organized about 1811, had the greatest impact on England during this period. "Primitive" referred to their expressed desire to return to the religion of the New Testament church. The Primitive Methodists restored revivals and open-air preaching. They found their adherents in the countryside and the colliery villages. Sometimes they became so emotional that they rolled on floors with groaning sounds, which gave them their nickname of "routers."⁶

George D. Watt thus entered life at a time of great religious and social ferment in England. His father, James, had been born in Gatehouse of Fleet in Kirkcudbrightshire, a mountainous area best suited for pasturing cattle and sheep, in southwestern Scotland. Gatehouse faces south toward the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea some thirty miles away. Glasgow is about eighty miles north. Gatehouse, situated on the Fleet River, in 1800 could boast the small manufacturing presence of four cotton factories, a brass foundry, a wine company, a brewery, and a tannery.⁷

James had no birth recorded in church ledgers, suggesting that his parents, Andrew Watt, a lint miller, and Margaret McBurnie Watt, did not belong to the Church of Scotland. Andrew had been born in Kirkcudbrightshire, and his three children by Margaret were all born in Girthon Parish, also in that county. Andrew owned property and was elected bailee (similar to a city councilman) in Girthon. James was their second child and first son. He had an older sister, Margaret, born about 1780, and a younger one, Jannet, born in 1792, which suggests that his own birth occurred about 1790. Andrew's wife, Margaret, died, and he married Hannah McKean. They had two children, Charles, born in 1798, and Mary (ca. 1806–8).⁸ James, the oldest

6. Julia Stewart Werne, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). Lorenzo Dow arrived first in Ireland where he held street meetings. See Malcolm R. Thorp, "The Setting for the Restoration in Britain: Political, Social, And Economic Conditions," in *Truth Will Prevail: The Rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the British Isles, 1837–1987*, edited by V. Ben Bloxam, James R. Moss, and Larry C. Porter (Solihull, UK: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 64.
7. James's father and mother and several of his brothers and sisters were still living in Anworth, near Gatehouse, when the 1841 census was taken. See Scottish Census, 1841, County: Kirkcudbrightshire, Parish: Anworth, vol. 855, microfilm of holograph, film no. 1042833, Family History Library.
8. *Ibid.* Jannet's death record in the Kirkcudbright cemetery book identifies her mother

son, apparently saw little future in Gatehouse and moved to the city of Manchester, about 150 miles to the southeast.

On May 3, 1811, James Watt, a “traveler” (probably traveling salesman), married Mary Ann Wood by license in Manchester Cathedral.⁹ Mary Ann’s mother, Mary Ann Kennan, had married Joshua, her father, in Rochdale, England, on February 8, 1787, where their first two children were born. Then the family moved to Manchester, where the remaining four children were born, all christened in their parish church or in Manchester Cathedral. Joshua was neither a rich factory owner nor an impoverished factory worker. As a small businessman, he kept long hours so that his shop would be open before and after the working day as customers dropped off shoes to repair. Wood showed great pride in his ability to make and repair shoes.¹⁰

Since Mary Ann’s brother, George Darling Wood, had no family, the Watt family shared his home in Manchester. The St. George parish records note George Watt’s christening on June 21, 1812, followed by that of daughter Margaret five years later on October 17, 1817.¹¹ According to family tradition, James Watt and George Darling Wood sailed for America, seeking the fountain of youth, and died in New Orleans, but this is not true.¹² Since this fanciful notion was actually more popular three centuries earlier, it is more likely that James’s motivation was simply economic betterment. The two must have left shortly after Margaret’s birth. The brothers-in-law sailed to Bahia (present-day Salvadore), Brazil’s main port and capital, where George D. Wood died on June 16, 1825. James Watt had his tombstone engraved, “Even his Failings lean’d to virtue’s side.”¹³ It is not known when James left South America. He went to Australia sometime after that continent’s settlement. Possibly he traveled there because of the gold discovery in 1851.

as Margaret McBurnie. Andrew died in Skyreburn on December 5, 1849. His granddaughter, Margaret Watt Brandreth, put a headstone on his grave in 1867 in Anworth, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, that lists all the children’s names and usually their birthdates. Andrew’s children’s birthdates come from this source, except for James Watt, whose birthday on August 2, 1790, comes from Ida Watt Stringham and Dora Dutson Flack, *England’s First “Mormon” Convert, The Biography of George Darling Watt* (n.p.: privately printed, [1958]), 8. The latter is not the best source, so his birth year has been estimated. Sources for a few of the children are estimated from the 1841 census. This gravestone was discovered in about 2000 by Shawna Strobel, a Watt descendant, with the assistance of a paid researcher in Britain. For more information on calculations of births, see e-mail from Shawna Strobel to the author on June 20, 2006, in author’s possession.

9. Manchester Cathedral Parish marriage records, May 3, 1811, no. 225, p. 90, microfilm of holograph, film no. 438,189, Family History Library.
10. Part of this is family tradition, but part of it is knowing the working hours of the factory workers. He had to be there when they needed him.
11. St. John’s Parish Register printouts, June 21, 1812, microfilm of typescript, film no. 1235364, Family History Library.
12. Stringham and Flack, *England’s First “Mormon” Convert*, 8.
13. David Asprey, e-mail to Robert M. Holbrook, November 30, 2004, photocopy in author’s possession.

There he died in 1858.¹⁴ James's absence naturally meant that George D. Watt's mother played an even greater role than usual in his life.

It is not clear when Mary Ann abandoned hope that James would return. She thought that he had died in New Orleans.¹⁵ The Church of England required a divorce decree, the knowledge of the spouse's death, or the passage of seven years without news (presumption of death) before it allowed remarriage. Watt may have been seven or eight years old when his father and uncle sailed away. Years later in a letter to his sister in the 1860s, he wrote that their paths diverged "when we were children being fatherless and motherless too in all but name. We did not have a parents' home to comfort and bless us, a father to educate and form our early impressions."¹⁶ Watt was allowed to roam the streets of Manchester during Mary Ann's working hours.

He described himself as small for his age, and he often came home bruised and battered from encounters with bullies.¹⁷ He was of an age to work in a factory, and certainly the added income would have been welcome, but for some unknown reason, Mary Ann did not take that step.

It is not known how long James had been gone before Mary Ann decided to marry again. However, on March 4, 1825, she married Joseph Brown, a widower and policeman, in Manchester Cathedral when Watt was almost fourteen. Brown was from Rochdale, a city about ten miles north of Manchester.¹⁸

The new marriage brought problems. Brown, a widower who already had a large family, had no room in his house for Watt and his sister. Besides, he did not want the children. Mary Ann placed Margaret with her sister, Bridget, and her brother-in-law, William Howard. No one wanted Watt. Joseph Brown wanted nothing to do with this wild boy and kicked him out of his house. Now Watt was completely alone and permanently on the streets of the gigantic city of Manchester, where crime was rampant and other boys who were homeless were organized into gangs.¹⁹ He told his

14. Information on Andrew Watt's headstone.

15. Just before George D. Watt died in 1881, he wrote an autobiographical sketch that was read by the reporter who wrote his obituary in the *Salt Lake Herald* on October 25, 1881. He included in the obituary that James Watt had died in New Orleans. Mary Ann Brown, his mother who lived with him, also believed that James had died in New Orleans.

16. George D. Watt to Margaret Brandreth, n.d., ca. 1863, shorthand, George D. Watt Papers, Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives) (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, 2006).

17. George D. Watt, "Little George, a True Story," *Juvenile Instructor* 1 (January 15, 1866): 5-6. Between the years 1866 to 1869, Watt wrote twenty-nine articles in the *Juvenile Instructor* under the title of "Little George" and signed them Uncle George. These stories appear to be fictional, but they are autobiographical.

18. Manchester Cathedral Parish marriages records, March 4, 1825, p. 137, microfilm of holograph, film no. 0438193, Family History Library; "Geo. D. Watt Dead," *Salt Lake Herald*, October 25, 1881, 8.

19. Watt to Margaret Brandreth, ca. 1863. This is earlier than the fictional *Oliver Twist*

sister, “Our mother’s second marriage did not improve our condition so far as home comforts. . . . I was cast out, driven forth in a heartless manner upon the cold bosom of a wicked and ungenerous world.”²⁰ Years later in 1867 in a serialized autobiographical essay he wrote for the children in Mormondom and entitled the “Little George” stories, he said—referring to himself in the third person—“Sometimes bad boys would beat him, and they were not afraid to do so, for he had no father to tell and no brothers to take his part.”²¹ At times strangers gave him food and a place to stay the night. Usually he would “crawl into an out-house and cuddle up in a corner all alone, and then he would cry himself to sleep.” Because of his deep-seated faith in God, he never turned to crime. He would “pray to God in his trouble, for his mother taught him, when he was a very little boy to pray, and to believe that whatever he asked for would be given him.” Then “he would pray that God would forgive these bad boys, and then he would feel better and go to his play again.”²²

He must have been homeless from the time of the marriage until late fall of 1825, when Mary Ann found him and placed him in a poorhouse/workhouse.²³ Poor laws established during Queen Elizabeth’s reign provided care for the “worthy poor” who were unable to take care of themselves. In the early nineteenth century, poorhouses were usually workhouses where the county allowed a factory to use the residents for production purposes.²⁴ Years later in the “Little George” stories, Watt said that a “kind lady found him,” and after obtaining a writ of admittance from a magistrate to a poorhouse, she handed him over to the gatekeeper. “Little George screamed with terror,” crying aloud to the kind lady “for help, but she had hastened away.”²⁵

The poorhouse was an education for Watt. He made friends, was beaten by an old nurse, and was befriended by a teacher, also a poorhouse inmate, who taught him to read and write. Because of the kindness of this teacher, “he was willing to do anything that this kind-hearted old gentleman told him

written by Charles Dickens, but it does not take much to imagine what could have happened to him.

20. Ibid.

21. Watt, “Little George,” 5–6.

22. Ibid.

23. For background on the poorhouse, see Brian Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971). Inglis integrates the poorhouse into the larger framework of what was happening among the lower classes, especially the youth in Britain. Poorhouses were for the old and insane in society. Workhouses were for the poor who could work but needed some state support. Watt’s institution was a combination of poorhouse and workhouse.

24. See Gordon B. Hindle, *Provision for the Relief of the Poor in Manchester, 1754–1826* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press for the Chetham Society, 1975), chap. 3.

25. George D. Watt, “Little George in a Work House,” *Juvenile Instructor* 1 (March 15, 1866): 23–24. The kind lady in his story had to be his mother because he later tried unsuccessfully to find her. Presumably he would not search for a stranger.



From Gordon B. Hindle, *Provisions for the Relief of the Poor in Manchester, 1754-1826* (1975)

Manchester poorhouse where George Watt could have been an inmate.

to do.”²⁶ The rigid regimen was difficult for a boy who had basically lived with no schedule. The residents rose at 5:00 a.m., ate their breakfast, and had twelve hours of labor with short breaks for lunch and evening meals.²⁷ Although probably the meals were skimpy for a growing adolescent, Watt recalled in 1867 that he had had more than he had had as a waif on the streets. He said, “He liked well enough to eat his breakfast and his dinner and his supper, when they were ready.”²⁸ In the letter to his sister, Watt commented that the “poorhouse saved me from starvation or worse infamy.”²⁹

The governess of the establishment befriended him, and after several weeks, she arranged for Watt to visit his mother. To his dismay, he found another family living at his old home. Mary Ann had, apparently without telling Watt her plans or her new address, moved into Joseph Brown’s house in Rochdale, just north of Manchester. One can imagine his disappointment. He detoured to look at the shop windows and street life of Manchester’s fashionable district. The contrast to his own life was stark: the velvet-cushioned carriages of the rich, the silk skirts of the ladies, and the fine pantaloons and boots of the gentlemen must have made him feel that they were creatures from another world. He was a little boy, unnoticed in the crowd. He sensed that “though he was only a little drop in the stream of human life that seemed to be rushing headlong without pain or purpose, in this way he would sometimes dam up the channel for a moment and check the onward progress of the mighty stream.”³⁰

The highlight of Watt’s rare outing came when he joined with other children in watching a man with a long box. The man set up his box, which

26. George D. Watt, “Little George at School,” *Juvenile Instructor* 1 (June 15, 1866): 46.

27. See Hindle, *Provision for the Relief of the Poor*, chap. 4.

28. Watt, “Little George at School,” 46.

29. Watt to Margaret Brandreth, ca. 1863.

30. George D. Watt, “Little George Visits the Big City,” *Juvenile Instructor* 1 (December 1866):

appeared to be seven feet high. It was a Punch and Judy show, the first Watt had seen. The show delighted him. Before he arrived back at the poorhouse, he met some boys who yanked at his shirt. He “lost his temper and then with his fist he hit one of them a good blow to the face, knocked him down and ran.”³¹ They pelted him with rocks and mud. The gatekeeper quickly opened the gate in response to his knocking, probably saving him from a beating.

After a little more than a year in the poorhouse, Watt’s grandfather, Joshua Wood, must have convinced a fellow cobbler to take him as his apprentice, probably as an indenture that lasted only a year or two.³² His new master and mistress took him into their home, which also served as their shop. Watt slept in the upstairs room, sharing it with the master’s twenty-one-year-old son, who befriended him.³³ He learned all the aspects of making and repairing shoes.³⁴

On Sundays his master’s son took him to a Primitive Methodist Sunday school. Watt called it the “ranter’s church” “because they shout and scream until they are out of breath and fall down on the floor,” and in praying “they all shout and pray together, making a ranting noise.”³⁵ On Sundays the Primitive Methodists had a series of meetings throughout the day. The children went to Sunday school, where they learned not only Christian principles but also the rudiments of reading, writing, and mathematics. About midday class meetings were held in homes and shops. George’s master sponsored such a class meeting.³⁶ At the end of the meeting, everyone paid the leader two pennies. An evening meeting followed at a chapel. This meeting was followed by another prayer meeting, attended only by the most faithful.

Because of the other children’s abusive actions toward him, Watt’s kindly mistress took him to services at a Wesleyan Methodist Church.³⁷ He spent about two years with this couple. The poorhouse and his apprenticeship with the cobbler were Watt’s preparation for life. He learned order and the importance of conforming to social expectations. He mastered a trade and also learned to read and write—a lasting and important acquisition in his young life.³⁸

31. Ibid.

32. For a social history of the period, see Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1959).

33. George D. Watt, “Little George in His New Home,” *Juvenile Instructor* 2 (September 15, 1867): 141; Watt, “Little George—His New Home,” *Juvenile Instructor* 2 (October 15, 1867): 156. Watt never mentions names in the stories. Usually shops in that period were on the first floor, but this one was upstairs.

34. George D. Watt, “In Trouble,” *Juvenile Instructor* 3 (March 15, 1868): 46.

35. George D. Watt, “Little George at Sunday School,” *Juvenile Instructor* 2 (November 1, 1867): 166–67.

36. George D. Watt, “A Ranter’s Class Meeting,” *Juvenile Instructor* 3 (January 15, 1868): 12.

37. George D. Watt, “He Goes to Another School,” *Juvenile Instructor* 4 (March 27, 1869): 54.

38. See Stringham and Flack, *England’s First “Mormon” Convert*, chap. 13. Although there is

Probably in the late 1820s, when he would have been in his middle teens, Watt went to live with Andrew Watt, his grandfather, and Hannah, his stepgrandmother, in Skyreburn, Scotland, near Gatehouse. People of this county continued their traditional occupations of sheep herding and fishing. Andrew spent time at the Bay of Skyreburn, probably involved with a small fishing fleet. Watt refers to the sea in his writings in terms that communicate a fascination with boats and the water.³⁹

His grandfather sent him to school, where he made friends and had many activities. "The old house and its surroundings are upon my memory," he mentioned in a letter to his uncle and aunt in 1863. He described his grandfather sitting on a three-legged stool with his feet propped up, telling tales, and his grandmother "drawing from an ancient tobacco box a bit of the weed to prepare a pipe to comfort and undo her much adored and glad companion." Aunt Jannet, their daughter, was "bustling around to make everything comfortable for everybody around her or silently spinning by the light of the evening [or] by the light of the old lamp." His Uncle Charles surreptitiously also indulged in the tobacco habit.⁴⁰

In 1828 his mother and stepfather moved to Preston, a bustling cotton-manufacturing town, about twenty miles northwest of Manchester, where Joseph Brown became a jailer as well as a policeman. Watt decided to leave rural Kirkcudbrightshire and journey to the city to seek his fortune with them. In 1800 Preston had a population of sixteen thousand. By 1837 the town had forty-five thousand inhabitants with fifteen thousand employees in its thirty-eight factories. Preston had stone row houses, whose outdoor toilets allowed sewage to flow into the largely unpaved streets. Preston also had its share of labor disorders. In 1836, 660 spinners went on strike, forcing 7,840 factory workers out of employment for four months.⁴¹

In his letter to his uncle in 1863, Watt wrote, "When I left my grandfather's protection and went to England and found my mother and stepfather's family in the town of Preston, my stepfather Brown did not make me welcome" and "cast me out to fend for myself." He found himself now older but in the same condition he had been in when he left their home before. "This conduct driving me to seek companionship with evil company, it cast me about as I was to pray to God for aid asking him to raise up friends for me." He "succeeded in finding employment and lodging in a family who were strangers to me."⁴² Watt may have been a contract weaver, working on

no evidence that Watt ever earned a living as a shoemaker, he kept the tools of the trade in his Utah home and made and repaired his family's shoes until his death.

39. In his diary of 1851, Watt vividly describes crossing the ocean. See the excerpts in chapter four.

40. George D. Watt to Jannet and Charles Watt, January 16, 1863, shorthand, Watt Papers, (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, 2006).

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

a home loom. Later he worked in a factory. In Preston he met Mary (Molly) Gregson, a pretty young factory worker.⁴³ They announced their wedding banns at Preston's St. John's parish church and, three weeks later, were married on June 13, 1835. Twenty-four year-old Watt signed the register, but eighteen-year-old Molly, illiterate, made her mark.⁴⁴ Their poverty was so intense that they did not even have a bed for several years.⁴⁵ Coupled with his indigent childhood, this continuing privation affected his outlook for the rest of his life.

Watt retained an interest in Methodism. When his stepfather expelled him, he mentioned that "he joined a religious sect," which undoubtedly was James Fielding's congregation in Preston at the Vauxhall Chapel.⁴⁶ Fielding had probably been a Methodist minister. He and his brother-in-law, the Reverend Timothy Matthews in Bedford, taught the restoration of spiritual gifts and premillennialism. Fielding had been raised a Methodist, and these beliefs undoubtedly influenced his teachings in the Primitive Episcopal Church at Vauxhall Chapel.⁴⁷

George and Molly were members of Fielding's congregation by the time their first child, James, was born on July 14, 1837, in Preston.⁴⁸ One of the most devout in Fielding's congregation, Watt became an "exhorter" and a class leader in that sect.⁴⁹

Meanwhile an American movement that would greatly affect the Watt family was gathering force. In 1830 Joseph Smith, not yet twenty-five, organized a new church in New York State. Smith claimed to have received a set of gold plates from an angelic messenger, translated them by the power of God, and published to the world the narrative of Israelites who had come to America, their promised land. The existence of this new scripture was a claim of continuing revelation to a prophet who had restored Christ's

43. "George D. Watt at the Institute," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 15, 1874, 1; George D. Watt to Margaret Brandreth, 1863, shorthand, Watt Papers (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, 2006). In this letter, Watt calls Molly pretty.

44. St. John's Parish marriage records, June 13, 1835, microfilm of holograph, film no. 094015, Family History Library. Banns are called when a couple who are too poor to pay the fee go to the parish church and have the curate post the marriage date.

45. George D. Watt to Joseph Fielding, June 9, 1840, holograph, Joseph Fielding Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Perry Special Collections).

46. George D. Watt to Jannet and Charles Watt, January 16, 1863.

47. Malcolm R. Thorp, "Early Mormon Confrontations with Sectarianism, 1837-1840," in *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain*, edited by Richard L. Jensen and Malcolm R. Thorp (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), 49-69; Thorp, "The Field Is White Already to Harvest," in *Men with a Mission, 1837-1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles*, edited by James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 331-32.

48. Salt Lake Temple Sealings, vol. B, p. 173, microfilm of holograph, film no. 184653, Special Collections, Family History Library.

49. "Geo D. Watt at the Institute," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 15, 1874, 1.

church. The church moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where the members built a temple. One of its newly appointed apostles, Parley P. Pratt, began a three-month mission to Toronto, Canada, in 1836, where he baptized Isaac Russell and Joseph Fielding, both born in Britain. Pratt was also instrumental in converting another Englishman, John Taylor, a future apostle.

These new converts wanted to explain their newfound faith to friends and family members in England. In June 1837, after Pratt and his converts returned to Kirtland, Joseph Smith asked Heber C. Kimball, an apostle, to proclaim the gospel in England. Joined by Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, and Joseph Fielding, and reinforced by three converts from Toronto: John Snider, John Goodson, and Isaac Russell, Kimball traveled to New York City, where they all booked passage on the 895-ton sailing vessel, the *Garrick*. They boarded on June 29, 1837, and sailed on July 1.⁵⁰

Twenty days later, the ship docked at Liverpool, a harbor that was full of ships from around the world. More than twenty had arrived that very day. Standing on the deck within sight of Britain's leading port city, Heber C. Kimball "poured out my soul in praise and thanksgiving to God for the prosperous voyage . . . and while thus engaged, . . . the Spirit of the Lord rested down upon me in a powerful manner, and my soul was filled with love and gratitude, and was humbled within me, while I covenanted to dedicate myself to God, and to love and serve him with all my heart."⁵¹

Mormon missionaries set foot on Liverpool's docks at a moment when religion was in the air and a topic of discussion. Mormons later said that the land had been prepared for the preaching of their gospel. According to one study of 280 British Mormon converts baptized before 1853, 101 or 36 percent were either Wesleyan or Primitive Methodists. A total of 58 or 20.7 percent were Anglicans.⁵² When the missionaries first arrived, they began preaching in Lancashire, an area that had been heavily harvested by new religions like Joseph Smith's upstate New York and was sometimes called the "Burnt-over District."⁵³ The Mormon elders attracted not only members of the more prominent denominations but also seekers who eagerly listened to a message about the restoration of ancient principles.⁵⁴

50. Larry C. Porter, "Beginnings of the Restoration": Canada, an 'Effectual Door' to the British Isles," in *Truth Will Prevail*, 3-43.

51. James R. Moss, "The Gospel Restored to England," in *Truth Will Prevail*, 71-103; Heber C. Kimball, *Autobiography*, n.d., p. 98, holograph, Heber C. Kimball Collection, LDS Church Archives. The autobiography was written by a clerk.

52. Malcolm R. Thorp, "The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts in Britain, 1837-52," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 51-66; also see Thorp, "The Field Is White Already to Harvest," app. A, 323-44.

53. Thorp, "The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts, 51-66.

54. For an excellent article on contemporary teachings, see Grant Underwood, "The Religious Milieu of English Mormonism," in *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain*, 31-44; see also Robert Lively, "The Catholic Apostolic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: A Comparative Study of Two Minority Millenarian Groups in

The Mormons first concentrated their ministry among the urban poor.⁵⁵ Kimball was shocked at the class divisions and extremes in Liverpool: “We wandered in the streets of that great city, where wealth and luxury, penury and want abound. I there met the rich attired in the most costly dresses, and the next moment was saluted with the cries of the poor without covering sufficient to screne [screen] them from the weather.”⁵⁶

While the missionaries waited three days for their luggage to clear customs, they found lodgings and spent most of their time praying to ascertain the Lord’s will about where to begin. They felt prompted to journey to Preston, almost thirty miles to the north, where Joseph Fielding’s brother, James, lived. From a distance, the missionaries found Preston appealing, but they entered a dark, dingy, and dirty town, its thirty-eight mills belching smoke and soot.⁵⁷ The cheeriest note was a set of election-day banners for a parliamentary seat that proclaimed, “Truth Will Prevail.” They took it as a propitious omen.

James, who had read his brother’s letters about this new religion, was willing to listen to the missionaries’ message and opened his chapel to these Americans. On Sunday morning, George D. Watt listened attentively when James Fielding announced that the American missionaries would speak in the afternoon.⁵⁸ Many of those who crammed the chapel to capacity that afternoon were motivated by curiosity, but Watt and others were serious seekers. Kimball, the first speaker, “declared that an angel had visited the Earth and committed the everlasting gospel to man.” Then Orson Hyde bore his testimony. In the evening, John Goodson, one of the American missionaries, and Joseph Fielding spoke. James Fielding, alarmed at his congregation’s great interest, closed his pulpit to the Americans. Undaunted, they preached in homes and scheduled the first baptism for July 30, the following Sunday.⁵⁹

Watt later wrote, “I was at the first meeting that those American Elders attended, which was a Sunday morning prayer meeting. I then knew that they were the true servants of the Most High, before they had opened their lips to say a single word in my hearing.” He continued, “I was with them both body and spirit, and was ready to stake my earthly all, and even my life on the truth of their testimony before I had heard it.”⁶⁰ Hearing the missionaries

Nineteenth Century England” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1977).

55. Joseph Fielding, *Diary*, September 11, 1837, p. 9, typescript, LDS Church Archives; Heber C. Kimball to Vilate Kimball, September 2, 1837, holograph, Kimball Collection; Orson Hyde to Marinda Hyde, September 14, 1837, *Elder’s Journal* 1 (November 1837): 19–22.

56. Kimball, *Autobiography*, p. 99.

57. *Ibid.*; Heber C. Kimball, *Diary*, June 21, 1837, holograph, Kimball Collection.

58. Kimball, *Autobiography*, p. 102.

59. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 31–33.

60. George D. Watt, “Elder F. D. Richards, May 8, 1867,” *Millennial Star* 29 (July 6, 1867): 427–30.

only confirmed his belief: "When they introduced the Gospel, and bore testimony of the marvelous work which God had commenced in our day, I was there, and my body was filled with light, even the light of Christ."⁶¹

On July 30, 1837, the day of the baptisms, the American missionaries walked to the River Ribble, where they found thousands of Preston's citizens lining the river to observe.⁶² Kimball baptized nine people that day, recalling in his autobiography that "two of the male candidates when they had changed their clothes at a distance of several rods from the place where I was standing in the water, being ebb tide, being so anxious to obey the gospel, that they ran with all their might to the water, each wishing to be baptized first; the younger George D. Watt, being quicker of foot than the elder, outran him, and came first into the water."⁶³ This vignette reveals both the depth of Watt's commitment to Mormonism, which would stand him in good stead later, and his impulsiveness, which sometimes worked against him. Years later, Watt remembered, "When the time came for the first baptism, I was there, to be the first who should open the watery grave in a foreign land under the administrations of the truly authorized servants of God in this last dispensation."⁶⁴ Kimball also baptized Watt's mother, Mary Ann Brown.⁶⁵ The others baptized that day were Charles Miller, Thomas and Ann Walmsley, Miles Hogden, George Wate, Henry Billsbury, and Ann Dawson. Molly, Watt's wife, was also converted, but she was still convalescing from the birth of their first child, James, on July 14.⁶⁶ There is no known date for her baptism.

Within the next few weeks, James Fielding lost most of his congregation and wrote bitterly to Joseph, "I do not believe at all that you were sent of God to rend my little church to pieces."⁶⁷ Fielding in 1838 joined forces with Richard Livesey, an early anti-Mormon pamphleteer in England, who wrote a tract denouncing the Book of Mormon.⁶⁸

61. Ibid. Watt had already expressed discontent to Fielding because he felt his church lacked the spiritual gifts manifested in the New Testament church.

62. Richard L. Evans, *A Century of Mormonism in Great Britain* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1984), 32–33; Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 34–36.

63. Kimball, *Autobiography*, p. 105. The identity of the other man who ran the race is not known. It probably was Charles Miller since he was the second person baptized. The Clegg family has a tradition that it was Henry Clegg Sr. If so this seems odd because Clegg was not baptized for several months after that. See Garth N. Jones, "Who Came in Second?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 (Summer 1988): 149–54.

64. Watt, "Elder F. D. Richards," 427–30.

65. Margaret B. Smurthwaite, notes on Mary Ann Wood (Watt) Brown, 1998, typescript, in author's possession.

66. Kimball, *Autobiography*, pp. 105–6; for information on the birth of James, Watt's son, see Salt Lake Temple Sealings, vol. B, p. 173.

67. James Fielding to Joseph Fielding, August 27, 1838, holograph, Joseph Fielding Papers, LDS Church Archives; see also James Fielding to "Dear Sisters," May 28, 1840, holograph, Mary Fielding Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives; and Thorp, "Early Mormon Confrontations with Sectarianism," 57.

68. Thorp, "Early Mormon Confrontations with Sectarianism, 49–69.

The missionaries baptized converts but waited until mid-August to confirm the gift of the Holy Ghost on them. On August 4, Jennetta Richards, Willard Richards's future wife, was baptized and confirmed at the same time. About a week later at Ann Dawson's house, the missionaries confirmed between forty and fifty converts, among them George Watt. Many years later, he recalled, "When the laying on of hands was administered for the gift of the Holy Ghost to the first few who had been baptized for the remission of sins in foreign lands, I was there, and through that ordinance I received an abiding testimony, even the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy."⁶⁹

The missionaries expanded their work into villages near Preston. By September Ann Dawson's home, where they first held their meetings, was too small, and so the missionaries rented a large hall, known as the Cockpit because it had earlier been used for cock fighting, although it was now the site of temperance and preaching meetings. By October there were 160 Mormon members in Preston and the surrounding area. Kimball organized five branches and called and ordained teachers and priests in the Aaronic priesthood to take charge of them. Watt was one of the teachers.⁷⁰

On December 25, the newly organized British Mission held its first conference in the Cockpit, attended by three hundred from more than twenty-four branches. That conference approved Watt as one of ten to be ordained as a priest.⁷¹ The missionaries also blessed a hundred children and ordained seven men as teachers.

The American elders had brought a new spirit and hope for the working classes of Britain. On April 8, 1838, a little more than three months later, the church held a second conference in the Cockpit. This time it was attended by almost seven hundred—almost half of Britain's fifteen hundred members—from more than twenty-six branches.⁷² Kimball, who was returning to the United States, selected Joseph Fielding as the new mission president with Willard Richards and William Clayton as his counselors. On April 20, Kimball and Hyde sailed aboard the *Garrick* for New York City, their passage paid by the English Saints. Watt probably donated a few shillings also.

On October 24, Fielding said, "In Preston, the work of sifting is still going on, but those who are faithful are increasing in Faith, but the Chaff is blowing away."⁷³ When Fielding, who was spending all his time in church work, needed a new pair of trousers, Watt, as a priest, asked the branch

69. Watt, "Elder F. D. Richards," 427–30.

70. Joseph Fielding, *Diary*, October 10, 1837, p. 12.

71. *Ibid.*, December 27, 1837, p. 15.

72. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 53; Evans, *A Century of Mormonism in Great Britain*, 62.

73. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 65; Fielding, *Diary*, October 24, 1838, p. 28.

to contribute money. The branch members refused, even though about three months later, they purchased two new coats for Fielding. At this time, Fielding noted their frugality when he said, “The Saints in Preston are pretty careful.”⁷⁴

A controversy in the branch began in March 1839, when some of the Preston Saints reacted against Willard Richards’s tendency to criticize them openly.⁷⁵ Even Joseph Fielding felt that Richards was too severe and unaccommodating to the members’ shortcomings. Also Richards had fallen in love with Jennetta Richards, the daughter of a wealthy minister. Her parents had money, and she dressed better than the other members.⁷⁶ Watt probably stood aloof from this internal bickering and continued to support Richards in every endeavor.

During this period, Watt commented to Joseph Fielding that he “had to pass through many temptations, have given way in many instances and done those things which I ought not to have done and left undone those things which I ought to have done.” He thought that “he had to pass through many repentings and many sorrowings through my wickedness.” Even with all of that, he emphasized that “the Lord has been merciful to me and has not taken his spirit from me.”⁷⁷

As a Mormon, Watt evidently felt no desire to return to his profession as a weaver. In February 1840, his stepfather, Joseph Brown, probably helped him get a position with the police in Bury, a rural area fifteen miles southeast of Preston. He sought counsel about this potential move from Willard Richards, who encouraged him to take the job and “blessed George Watt as he was about going to Bury as Rural Police.”⁷⁸ These events suggest a special bond between the plainspoken Richards and the new convert.

Fielding, however, expressed pessimism about Watt’s testimony at that time. He said, “Much talk of Elder G. Watt engaging as a Police Man—I think it is not wise in him, but Bro. Richards takes the responsibility on himself.”⁷⁹ A little more than two months later, he recorded his pleasure in his diary that Watt was still stalwart in the faith: “He has been at Bury sometime as [a] Police Man; he is standing fast.”⁸⁰ On July 4, 1840, Watt reported that he, Molly, and the almost-three-year-old James had made the move and “we got a better living than we should do if there was only myself working

74. Fielding, *Diary*, March 12, 1839, p. 33; June 7, 1839, p. 37.

75. *Ibid.*, March 12, 1839, p. 27.

76. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 65; Fielding, *Diary*, March 12, 1839, p. 33. Richards was also Jeannetta’s maiden name.

77. George D. Watt to Joseph Fielding, July 4, 1840, photocopy of holograph, Joseph Fielding Papers, Perry Special Collections. He does not describe the nature of these temptations.

78. *Ibid.*; Willard Richards, *Diary*, February 12, 1840, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

79. Fielding, *Diary*, February 29, 1840, p. 60.

80. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1840, p. 73.

at the factory.”⁸¹ Watt returned to Preston fairly frequently. He delivered his first recorded sermon there on May 2.⁸² George, Molly, and James also came back for the birth of their second child, Willard Richards Watt, who was born in Preston on July 23, 1840, probably assisted by the sisters in the branch.⁸³ During his time in Bury, Watt also found time to go four or five miles south to Manchester, where he preached the gospel.⁸⁴

In America the Mormon church had run into intense persecution. Mobs had expelled the members from Independence, Missouri, in November 1833, and they had settled first in Clay County and then in northern Missouri with their headquarters at Far West, where Joseph Smith had joined them in the spring of 1838. That fall, in the short-lived, but violent, Mormon War, the Mormons fled to Illinois under pain of death, leaving Smith and a few others imprisoned in Liberty, Missouri, during the winter of 1838–39. As one of his last official acts in Missouri, on July 8, 1838, Joseph Smith had instructed the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to go to Britain and proselytize.

Hampered by poverty, illness, and the need to relocate their families, the apostles set off in twos and threes when they could. (William Smith and John E. Page refused to go.) John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff reached Liverpool on January 11, 1840. Woodruff lamented that “the poor are in as great Bondage as the children of Israel in Egypt.”⁸⁵ After a brief stay in Preston, Woodruff departed for the area called the “Potteries” in Staffordshire, about thirty-five miles southeast of Liverpool, while Taylor and Joseph Fielding returned to Liverpool to open a sustained missionary drive there. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, and George A. Smith, the other apostles, arrived in Liverpool on April 6, 1840. In a meeting on April 9 in Preston, they accepted Willard Richards as a new apostle.⁸⁶ Then the missionaries scattered to many places in the British Isles. Young and Parley P. Pratt traveled to Manchester to set up mission headquarters, where they published a hymnal and, in May 1840, launched *The Latter-day Saints Millennial Star*, a semimonthly paper.

81. Watt to Joseph Fielding, July 4, 1840.

82. Fielding, Diary, May 2, 1840, p. 73.

83. Salt Lake Temple Sealings, vol. B, p. 173. This was the sealing of Willard Richards and James Watt to their parents, George D. and Mary Gregson Watt. Thomas Winters and Elizabeth Golightly Watt were proxies, and the sealer was J. R. Winder with W. W. Riter and G. Romney as witnesses. Richard, Elizabeth’s oldest son, was the proxy for his deceased half brothers.

84. Robert Williams, Autobiography, 1859, LDS Church Archives. Williams said that Watt was his missionary companion in Manchester. The only time Watt was close to Manchester was when he was in Bury.

85. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men With a Mission*, 108–9; Wilford Woodruff, Journal, January 14, 1840, microfilm of holograph, Wilford Woodruff Papers, LDS Church Archives.

86. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d rev. ed., 7 vols. (repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973), 4:118.

Meanwhile, Watt discovered that the improvement in his financial situation was not adequate, and he asked if “there was any way to extricate me from my present bondage.” He felt that he had “learned many good lessons from the experience I have had” and wished “to praise the Lord for his goodness that he has helped me hitherto.” He wanted to emigrate to the “promised land” of America, but he also felt the urge to be a missionary in his native land, for “the Lord knows that it is the desire of my heart to persuade the children of men to flee from the wrath to come.” Reluctant to seem dismissive of Richards’s priesthood blessing, he asked Fielding to query Heber C. Kimball, for “I entered this force by council and I think it would not be safe to leave it without council.” Even though Molly wanted him to continue his employment at least until they were able to purchase a bed, Watt had his eye on a higher calling: “Dear Brother, the Lord knows my heart concerning these things. I desire to glorify him in every step that I take. I want to be found of him when he comes, having my lamp trimmed and burning that he may welcome me to the Marriage Supper.”⁸⁷

If Fielding and/or Kimball responded, their answers have not been preserved. But three months later in October 1840, Orson Pratt called for volunteer missionaries, and Watt, who had been ordained an elder at the October conference, readily accepted this challenge.⁸⁸ In preparation he received a patriarchal blessing from Peter Melling, who had only been a patriarch for six months, which warned him that “thou has much affliction to pass through” but said he would see great signs and be supported by ministering angels. If he endured faithfully to the end, he would have eternal life. As long as Watt was humble, “thou shalt be blessed with great wisdom.” As for his missionary labors, he was told that he would “go forth in the strength and power of God to prune his vineyard for the last time and to warn the people of what is coming upon the earth.” Melling also told him, “Many shall rejoice that they heard the source of thy voice and inasmuch as thou will hold fast and be faithful thou shalt be gathered with thine and be brought to the land of Zion.”⁸⁹

Samuel Mulliner and Alexander Wright, both native Scots, first took the gospel message to Scotland in December 1839. They spent most of their time in Glasgow, but in January 1840, the two preached in Edinburgh. On May 18, 1840, Orson Pratt and Samuel Mulliner traveled to Edinburgh, where their baptisms included Mulliner’s parents.⁹⁰

Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, is situated about two miles from the south side of the Firth of Forth, a long inlet leading out to the North Sea.

87. Watt to Joseph Fielding, July 4, 1840.

88. Smith et al., *History of the Church*, 4: 214–17.

89. Peter Melling, “Patriarchal Blessing of George D. Watt,” 1840, vol. 8, p. 145, microfilm of holograph, Patriarchal Blessing Collection, LDS Church Archives.

90. Orson Pratt to Parley P. Pratt, April 16, 1841, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

With a population of 166,909 in 1836, the city had established itself as a trading and fishing center. Edinburgh was a mercantile, educational, and professional city, rather than a manufacturing center. Thus, it was almost free of the smoke-belching factories of more industrialized regions.

Pratt stayed with Samuel Mulliner's parents and took a six-month lease on a public hall, where he preached three times on Sunday and twice during the week.⁹¹ The Mormon missionaries found Edinburgh unwelcoming. It did not have the large laboring class for whom Mormonism had rapid affinity. As a result, the missionaries worked very hard for their converts—about forty-three by the time Watt joined Pratt at the end of October. With Watt as his companion, Pratt rented a hall in Leith, about a mile north of the heart of Edinburgh, for two Sundays and another at 40 Richmond Street that could hold about fifty people. One of their first tasks was to furnish the hall with benches. The missionaries slept in an adjoining room. Pratt felt pleased that he had finally begun to “lay the foundation of a church in Edinburgh.”⁹² As soon as Watt arrived, the two began to preach in the streets. Generally the two missionaries split up on Sunday mornings with Watt preaching at first in Leith and later at 40 Richmond Street.⁹³

One of their baptisms was a tailor named George Watt (no relation), whose wife was also named Mary. To alleviate confusion in the months before the tailor and his wife left for Nauvoo in March 1841, Watt began consistently using “D” as part of his name.⁹⁴

In early December 1840, the missionaries were still preaching in the streets but were limited by the cold. That month Watt wrote to George A. Smith in Staffordshire that the work “rolls slowly” but he and Pratt expected it to “roll on a little faster” since, after months of ignoring the Mormons, other ministers had begun warning their congregations about them, and hecklers had begun interrupting their street meetings. This mild persecution was encouraging, for as Watt commented, “When the priests begin to Bark the sheep get terrified and runs into the fold, that is kept by the true shephard.”⁹⁵

Also in December, William Smallwood, a Methodist minister, challenged Pratt to a debate, a two-night event staged in the Mormon meeting hall and chaired by an unnamed gentleman, not a member of the church. The debate centered on two issues: (1) “the means by which a sinner obtains

91. J. S. Mulliner, “The Scottish Mission,” ca. 1908, copy of typescript, LDS Church Archives.

92. Orson Pratt, quoted in Wilford Woodruff to George A. Smith, November 21, 1840, holograph, Woodruff Papers.

93. Orson Pratt to Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith, November 6, 1840, holograph, George A. Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives.

94. The confusion continued in Nauvoo, and I cannot be absolutely certain that all of the Nauvoo references to George Watt are to George D., rather than to the tailor. This second George, however, never went west, so the confusion ends after 1845.

95. George D. Watt and Orson Pratt to George A. Smith, December 11, 1840, holograph, Smith Papers. Both Watt and Pratt signed this letter, but Watt wrote it.

forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit,” and (2) “Are the miraculous gifts necessary for the Church of God in the present day?”⁹⁶ The chapel had a good crowd of investigators, and Pratt showed his expertise with the scriptures. Smallwood countered with what the missionaries considered to be slander about the Mormons. The chairman ruled that Pratt won.

Watt felt the discussions strengthened the Saints, influenced many that Mormonism was good, and convinced some to be baptized. After the first night, one person was baptized, and two more baptisms followed the next evening.⁹⁷ The debate may have had a positive impact, for sixteen were baptized in the chilly Firth of Forth. Watt confirmed them the following Sunday. By mid-January, Watt had baptized ten more, bringing the number of members in Edinburgh to 122. “The work in this city is in a healthy state,” Watt commented.⁹⁸

Because of the constant flow of letters between the apostles, Pratt and Watt knew about John Taylor’s work in Liverpool and on the Isle of Man and also about Parley P. Pratt’s success in publishing the *Millennial Star*. Watt also learned about church news from the United States. Orson Pratt was torn between corresponding with the missionaries throughout Britain and writing tracts and pamphlets. When he found that Watt was capable of drafting acceptable letters, he entrusted that aspect of the work to him, usually adding a few personal comments. Pratt, thus freed up, devoted himself to writing the thirty-one-page *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*. It includes the first published account of Joseph Smith’s vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ, the visits of the Angel Moroni, the emergence of the Book of Mormon, and a set of Mormon beliefs that closely resembled what Joseph Smith published in 1841 as the Articles of Faith.⁹⁹

A few days before Christmas, Watt and Pratt received a letter from George A. Smith complaining of his poor health. To comfort and cheer him, Watt composed a little essay on life’s opposites: he told Smith that “when we have traveled a long distance on a rough road the more we enjoy the smooth.” Then he mentioned that “in order that we may know what the sweet is, we must first taste the bitter.” Watt felt that the person who knows what good health is, is the one who has known the opposite: “Who feels the most thankful to God for health and strength of body, than the man who has had his body racked with pain and born down with affliction.” He concluded by passing on news about Pratt: he “enjoys himself well,” has a good fire to sit by, books to read, clothes to put on, food to eat,

96. George D. Watt and Orson Pratt to George A. Smith, December 4, 1840, holograph, Smith Papers.

97. Ibid.

98. George D. Watt to George A. Smith, January 16, 1841, holograph, Smith Papers.

99. Orson Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (n.p., 1842).

teeth with which to eat, and an appetite. "He is in good spirits, Yea he feels mighty well, and expects to see home some time this centry [century]." ¹⁰⁰

On December 30, Orson Pratt left for Glasgow, leaving Watt to carry on in Edinburgh. Seven days later, Watt reported to George A. Smith that he had preached twice on Sunday, confirmed nineteen, and baptized seven more on Monday. ¹⁰¹ Although Watt did not complain, he missed Molly and their sons: "I told you all the news, and I feel homesick, I never was so long away from my family before. I intend to go and see them when Bro. Pratt comes home if it is the Lord's will." ¹⁰² Two weeks after Pratt's return, Watt returned to Preston.

Since Molly was illiterate, Watt had heard nothing from her, and the absence had not been easy on her. Watt wrote to Brigham Young on January 29 expressing his concern: "My wife is almost worked to death in one of Babalons murdering mills," probably as a spinner or a weaver. "She is now off her work sick. May the Lord soon deliver his people from this modern, Egyptian oppression." Watt affirmed his desire "to labor night and day in unity with my Brethren to effect this great work . . . in about 3 weeks if all's well and if the Lord will." ¹⁰³ He wrote a similar letter to Orson Pratt. ¹⁰⁴

Working in the textile mills was, in fact, arduous. Employees labored twelve hours or more six days a week. Molly had probably been working in a factory since she was a child and died of "consumption" (tuberculosis) sixteen years later, almost certainly caused or exacerbated by the lint-filled air, the insalubrious living conditions, and the close-packed tenements. A historical study of Oldham, another textile-mill community just north of Manchester and not far from Preston, showed that deaths from tuberculosis among women were more than twice the national average. ¹⁰⁵

Watt wrote to Young on February 9, obviously anxious to return to his missionary labors. Molly's health had improved, but the woman who tended the two boys could no longer do it, and he needed to find someone else, but the other members in Preston were even more destitute than he was. "Satin desires to block up my way and to hinder me from going forth to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ," he complained. He did not see how he could return to the mission field since the Edinburgh Saints could not support his family and Orson Pratt, too. Molly did not see how it could be

100. George D. Watt and Orson Pratt to George A. Smith, December 22, 1840, holograph, Smith Papers.

101. George D. Watt to George A. Smith, January 6, 1841, holograph, Smith Papers.

102. Ibid.

103. George D. Watt to Brigham Young, January 29, 1841, holograph, George Washington Blair Collection, LDS Church Archives.

104. Orson Pratt to George A. Smith, February 1, 1841, holograph, Smith Papers.

105. John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: English Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), graphs on 92–93. In Oldham one in eight women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four died.

the Lord's will to make her return to the factory while she was nursing six-month-old baby Willard. Watt felt he needed either to emigrate to America or find some work to support his family. Caught between his duty to his family and his call as a missionary, which "lies near my heart," he sought advice from Brigham Young.¹⁰⁶ Unknown to Watt, most of the apostles, including Orson Pratt, had begun planning to return to the United States in about a month, just after the April conference. No answer has survived from Young, but he probably shared this plan with Watt and advised him to move his family to Scotland.

At the end of February 1841, Watt returned to Edinburgh, bringing his family with him. In March Orson Pratt wrote to George A. Smith about his own plans to return to Nauvoo, ending his letter with an acronym signature: Give All Some, Oatmeal Pancakes." Watt, enthusiasm revived, added a post-script poem, putting Smith's initials at the beginning of three of his words:

At the conference I shall see you
 So I bid you now adieu
 From colic pains, may he free you
 And gouty toes
 With Gravy Apples Soup to feed you
 And potatoes
 I subscribe myself
 Greasy Dish Water¹⁰⁷

In 1842 Watt read Orson Hyde's *A Voice from Jerusalem*, an account of his journey to Palestine and its sacred sites. Watt's first publication was a letter from Edinburgh to the *Millennial Star*, addressed to Thomas Ward, the editor, where he praised *A Voice from Jerusalem* as "worth its weight in gold to every lover of Zion's cause."¹⁰⁸ He claimed that a person "cannot read it but with a heart bursting with that joy peculiar to the Saints, which only can find vent in a flood of tears." He also commented on Hyde's "glowing and awe inspiring description of a thunder storm upon the bosom of the mighty deep."¹⁰⁹

On April 6, 1841, Watt attended the annual meeting of the British Mission in Manchester and was called to preside over the Edinburgh Conference. The meeting simultaneously approved his ordination as a high priest, an ordinance conducted on that same day. It is not known who

106. George D. Watt to Brigham Young, February 9, 1841, holograph, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives.

107. Orson Pratt and George D. Watt to George A. Smith, March 20, 1841, holograph, Smith Papers.

108. Church publications first started in Manchester when Brigham Young established the headquarters there. With the beginning of emigration, the headquarters and publication center moved to Liverpool in April 1842.

109. "From G. D. Watt, Edinburgh, April 19, 1842," *Millennial Star* 3 (May 1842): 15.

ordained him.¹¹⁰ As conference presidents reported progress, Watt stated that membership in Edinburgh stood at 203.¹¹¹ After the meeting, Watt returned to Edinburgh, while the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, except for Parley P. Pratt, returned to America.

Orson Pratt summarized his ministry in Edinburgh: “On the 20th of March I left upwards of 200 disciples under the watch-care of elder George D. Watt, a faithful and humble brother from Preston in England.”¹¹² Pratt had had a marked influence on his young convert/companion. Watt gained a broader worldview, an openness to ideas in general, and a pleasure in intellectual activity from him.

Due to Pratt’s tutelage and the *Millennial Star*’s welcome of such offerings, Watt also tried his hand at poetry. Although rough in both rhyme and versification, these efforts clearly communicate his exuberance for the Lord’s work. In addition to the jocular effort to Smith, he also experimented with more serious subjects, creating this couplet for a January 1840 letter:

Christians if your hearts be warm
Frost and snow will do no harm.¹¹³

In an addendum to Orson Pratt’s letter a few weeks later, he added,

I have no doubt that you have seen
Among other trees the olive grow
And is it not an evergreen
In Summer, Winter, Frost & Snow

When cold December ushers in
And frosty winds begin to blow
The Olive it’s an evergreen
And blooms among both Frost & Snow

The Church of God’s an evergreen
In Summer, Winter, Frost & Snow
While other Sects are dead it’s green
And bears immortal fruits below.¹¹⁴

In his final letter to George A. Smith before the latter’s departure from England, Watt wrote,

The frosty winter now is past
The sleety rain and snowy blast

110. Watt was ordained after the second meeting. “Conference Minutes,” *Millennial Star* 1 (April 1841): 301–4; Brigham Young, Journal, May 25, 1851, holograph, Young Papers.

111. “Conference Minutes,” 301–4.

112. Orson Pratt to Parley P. Pratt, April 11, 1841, *Millennial Star* 2 (May 10, 1841): 10–11.

113. Watt to George A. Smith, January 16, 1841.

114. George D. Watt, postscript to Orson Pratt’s letter to George A. Smith, January 21, 1841, holograph, Smith Papers.

And spring again begins to cast
 Her mantle ore us
 Now man may sing, so may the Beast
 Join him in chorus
 The farmer Braks his fallow ground
 With Joy he throws his seed arround
 Hoping his Barn will soon abound
 With fruits of labour
 And looks to see his table crowned
 With Bread and Butter

So does the servants of the Lord
 Throw in their seed, which is the word
 And hope to have a good reward
 For all their labour
 When earth and all things are restored
 By our rewarder

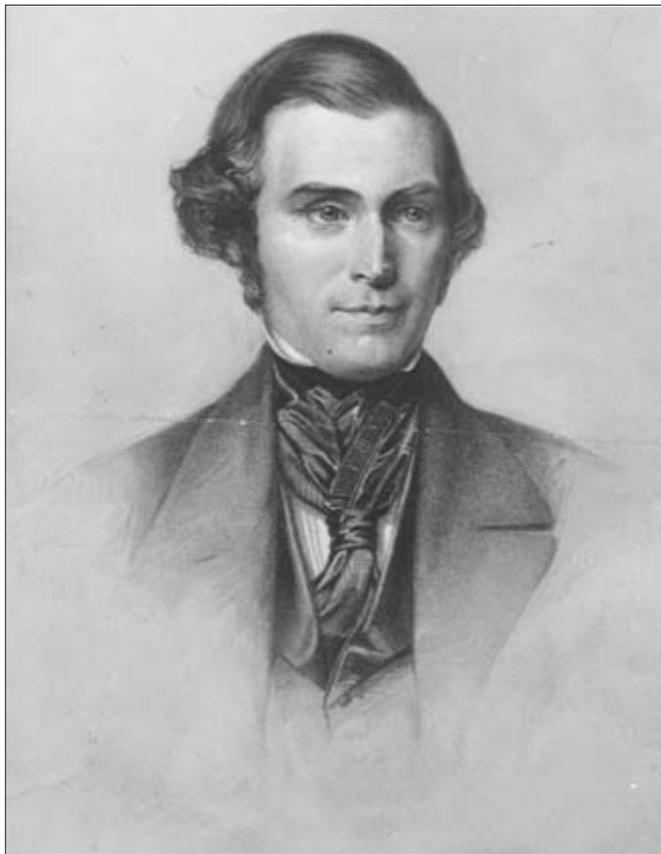
Though Babel's Preists may cry Delusion
 And men of science cry confusion
 The hellish hosts put all their force on
 Against this Church
 But they will find at Christs Desention
 Who's in the lurch¹¹⁵

In addition to Watt's missionary work, he provided leadership to the Edinburgh branch and conference, establishing new branches in Sterling and Wemyss across the Firth of Forth. This gave a total of three branches to the Edinburgh Conference.

Although specific vignettes about Watt's labors are rare, a couple have survived. A Wemyss man named Robert Crookston received urgent invitations from his newly baptized aunt and cousin to come hear the preaching of George Watt, their minister in the "Church of Jesus Christ." Although Crookston admired his own minister's ability to deliver extemporaneous sermons, he was confused by his insistence that all they needed was "saving faith," a term Crookston did not understand. Seeking enlightenment from ministers of other congregations left him more confused until he heard Watt, sometime in early 1841. Watt "preached faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance from our sins, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. He showed that a man must be called of God as was Aaron." Crookston wrote, "I was converted on the spot and was baptized that very evening in the Duddenston Loch or Lake."¹¹⁶

115. Pratt and Watt to George A. Smith, March 20, 1841.

116. Robert Crookston, *Reminiscence*, n.d., pp. 3-5, typescript, LDS Church Archives.



Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Orson Pratt

Crookston returned home and confronted his minister, then appealed to Watt to come preach in Wemyss. Watt arrived on a beautiful spring day, enthusiastically informing Crookston, “There will be more turning over the leaves of dusty Bibles in the next three months than has been in the past 20 years.” Crookston rented a large hall, and Watt soon baptized twenty people. After several weeks, he sent two other elders to take charge of the branch and returned to his duties in Edinburgh.¹¹⁷

William McFarland, another Scotsman in the Edinburgh area, had long felt that angels should still appear to men as they had in olden times. When Watt told him that he must yield obedience to the baptism in the true church, McFarland told him, “If you will only give me that knowledge, you may dip me in any mud hole you please, for I have been hunting for that

117. *Ibid.*

knowledge all my life, and have been unable to find it." Watt baptized him on June 4, 1842.¹¹⁸

Another significant event during Watt's stay in Edinburgh was his learning Pitman shorthand, a system devised and taught by Isaac Pitman, a schoolteacher. In 1837 Pitman published his "Stenography Sound-Hand," a forty-sound alphabet system. He taught in Bath at his Phonetic Institute and lectured throughout the United Kingdom. The University of Edinburgh was on his circuit three times, and Watt may have attended one or all three of these lectures. It is not clear, however, whether Watt learned the system from a book or Pitman's correspondence course. Still, it was a skill he used for the rest of his life, and it changed the way the church promulgated its religion.

The semiannual conference in Britain in 1842 was held on May 15 in the Navy Corn Exchange in Manchester. At this British Mission conference, presided over by Parley P. Pratt, the minutes show that Watt preached on an unknown topic the second day, seconded two proposals, and reported that the Edinburgh Conference had 271 members with 13 elders, 19 priests, 7 teachers, and 3 deacons. It had branches in Edinburgh, Wemyss, and Stirling.¹¹⁹

At the same time as these events were taking place in the British Mission, a focus of political and social tension in Great Britain was the attempts of the Chartists, a group of reformers from the lower class who wanted representation in Parliament. They had first presented their charter or petition in 1839 to the House of Commons, only to have it rejected. In May 1842, the Chartists presented another petition, signed by more than three million people. Again the House of Commons rejected it. In August strikes broke out in Lancashire and spread to Glasgow and the Midlands. The strikes failed, and the government arrested many of the Chartist leaders, suppressing the movement.¹²⁰ Watt does not comment on the movement, and Mormon converts do not seem to have been involved, but it probably supplied further evidence of Babylon's iniquities and the Saints' need to flee to Zion.

Among these fleeing Saints were George and Molly Watt and their children. On August 30, 1842, Watt baptized John Currie in Fifeshire, his last Scottish convert, and set his eyes on the Promised Land.

118. Archibald McFarland, [Reminiscence], photocopy of holograph, LDS Church Archives. William's son, Archibald, wrote this and talks about his father being converted.

119. "General Conference," *Millennial Star* 3 (June 1, 1842): 28–32.

120. Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform, 1815–1870*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), chap. 3.