

to return to that country as *British Council* Librarian (1971-1973) on secondment from Lancaster.

John was for many years a well known member of the Christian Brethren, although in later years he attended a local Baptist Church. His thanksgiving service was held at the *Lancaster Baptist Church* on Tuesday 31 May 2016. He was a man of wide sympathies and interests and his circle of acquaintances and friends included such people as the late New Testament scholar, Professor F.F. Bruce, who gave our annual lecture in 1982. He contributed to various books including the first edition of the Lion Handbook *The History of Christianity* where he wrote on church music.

Readers will wish to pray for Penelope Andrews and other members of his family at this sad time of loss. He had a son, Brian, six grand-daughters, and two great-grandsons.

I am sure that we would all echo a tribute to John by his friend and university colleague Graham Rand: "*John will be fondly remembered by ex-colleagues and former students for the depth and breadth of his knowledge, his gentle humour and his humanity. He will be greatly missed*". I am grateful to Graham for some of the information included in this obituary tribute.

**Graham Hedges**, *Hon. FCLIP, MCLIP*, is Secretary of Christians in Library and Information Services.

## ARTICLES

**LOUIS HEMMINGS** recalls a visit to the former *St. Deiniol's Library* (now re-named *Gladstone's Library*) to carry out two diverse research projects

### **A BAPTIST BIBLIOPHILE AND A QUEST FOR OLD BELIEVERS**



I was working for the revived *Association for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge* St Ann's Book Centre, in St Ann's (Anglican) Church in Dublin. One of my key customers was Leslie Harris, a retired Baptist pastor, and book collector. I envied the books he ordered: Puritan biographies, Early Church History, Baptist history and some Irish historical and political interest titles also.

Before Leslie came in to collect and pay for his special orders, I would often quickly browse through his interesting books. As we became friends, I was regularly invited for tea, on Sunday afternoons. I admired his home-made library, housed in a garage, complete with naive



catalogue and numbering / subject system. When I went his home, more times than not, I left with a loaned book or two, recently sold by me to him ...

When Leslie heard that I intended a weekend visit to *St Deiniol's Residential Library*, he took note. That almost-secret library was left to the English nation by Gladstone, Victorian British Prime Minister, complete with building and bequest. It is situated in the Gladstone model estate village of Hawarden, near Chester.

Leslie asked, would I mind looking up items relating to the Cromwellian Dublin Baptists, who worshipped in Swift's Alley, Dublin. I agreed to do this, even though the aims of my visit were theologically quite very different. The purpose of my visit, originally had been to read up on the fascinating and stubborn sect called, *Russian Old Believers*, or Old Ritualists.

Old Believers eccentrically separated from the official *Russian Orthodox Church* having protested against trivial church reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow in the mid 1600s. They were hounded, many murdered, by the blood-thirsty Tsars and then, in turn, by the Soviet leaders.

Leslie intended to write a history of the Baptists in Dublin but died before that was accomplished. Nevertheless, our joint primary research was accessed by historian Kevin Herlihy, editor of *The Irish Dissenting Tradition, 1650-1750*.

At *St. Deiniols* there are over 250,000 printed items on the open shelves. Much of what I wanted to read was archived in the gargantuan accordian-rail shelving system. What lent great appeal to this spurious, autodidactic "*scholar*" were its many nooks and crannies, old fashioned shelving and carels. Books could be read lit by green shaded lights.

After a few initial hours reading about the Old Believers, I decided to deal with Leslie Harris' Baptist history research request. Afterwards, I would then get back to the primary aim of my visit. Needless to say one piece of research led to another.... before I knew it, the whole long weekend had passed, and I was soon due to return to Dublin. It was frustrating not to have accomplished my own particular research purposes. However, I got generously refunded for all my expenses, by Leslie.

That unfinished library quest took place thirty-five years ago. I have

read up a bit more about the Old Believers since and watched a few *YouTube* television documentaries.

Much to my surprise, a recently befriended young Lithuanian granny, Tatjana Popova, turned out to be a cultural Old Believer. She could trace her Old Believer lineage back to Russia three hundred years previously. I was very impressed. When she heard that here in Ireland, was someone who actually knew about the Old Believers, she was equally impressed. We had personal meetings for language exchange: English for Tatjana, and Russian for me. Tatjana had the greater need, so the bias was on teaching her English.

Tatjana said that God must have sent me to her. She became one of my best friends. This secret Slav appreciated the fact that she was my only Russian friend in Ireland. We often talked about Old Believer customs and culture. Now I was learning about the Old Believers...from a direct descendant! She was a living, laughing book to this amateur historian and autodidact....

### Old Believer and Firm New Friend

your Slavic-accented English sweet,  
your grasp of grammar.....incomplete!  
we have good fun every time we meet  
- Old Believer and firm new friend....

**Louis Hemmings** is a poet and bookseller and the founder and proprietor of *Samovar Books*. *Gladstone's Library* is located at Church Lane, Hawarden, Flintshire, CH5 3PF – see [www.gladstoneslibrary.org](http://www.gladstoneslibrary.org)