



GRACE, GRIT AND GUMPTION

The Exploits of Evangelists
John Pugh, Frank and Seth Joshua



Geraint Fielder

The Evangelical Movement of Wales

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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Dedication:

To the churches of my youth:
Caersalem, Tabernacle and Penyrheol Hall, Gorseinon.

To the church of our marriage:
Heath Church, Cardiff.

To the churches of my ministry:
Whitefields's Presbyterian Church, Abergavenny;
Highfields Free Church, Cardiff





Acknowledgements



The impulse that produced this book was provided by two lectures I gave at gatherings of the Evangelical Movement of Wales – one to the Bala Minister's Conference and the other as the Aberystwyth Annual Conference's Historical Lecture, both in 1996. There have been a dozen or more further occasions when I have been invited to give the lecture in various parts of South Wales and each time was encouraged to 'get it published'.

My own searching has brought a lot of additional material to the light, but much of the story of the Joshua brothers and John Pugh has already been told by T Mardy Rees, F. R. Hist.S, *Seth And Frank Joshua – the Renowned Evangelists*' (1926) and Howell Williams, *The Romance of the Forward Movement* (1946). Sadly these books have long been out of print and unobtainable, so I have sought to recraft and rewrite sections of them and quote extensively from them.

Several friends have helped form this book. I wish to thank Alun Ebenezer of Gorseinon for introducing me, first, to a 1945 newspaper article on Seth and Frank Joshua and then to books in Welsh on John Pugh, again long out of print. I am grateful to others for translating the books for me – in particular Nerys Davies, along with Ceinwen Elias, Gwyneth Samuel and John Phillips. Mrs Shirley Edwards of Neath introduced me to Mr Vernon Mills who passed on his personal recollections of Seth Joshua's ministry in the 1920s. Helpful corrections, criticisms, suggestions, information and encouragements



have come from Eric Alexander, Dr Oliver Barclay, Roger Brown, Lady Elizabeth Catherwood, G. Wyn Davies, Martyn Fielder, Graham Harrison, Dr Carl Henry, Joy Horn, Peter Lewis, Dick Lucas and Dr David Wright.

This thrilling, at times heroic, story of three evangelists, who, by God's grace, can be accounted great among any of that calling, has been largely lost to the memory of Christians in Wales and is virtually unknown to a wider Christian public. The task of writing it has been a happy one and has helped revitalize my Christian commitment. May reading it do the same for others.

Abergavenny, 1999.





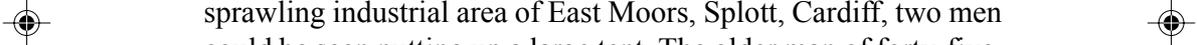




Introduction



Beelzebub takes a knock



One Saturday morning in May 1891, in the unchurched and sprawling industrial area of East Moors, Splott, Cardiff, two men could be seen putting up a large tent. The older man of forty-five, John Pugh, was unused to swinging a sledge-hammer and he had lumbago for a month. The younger man, Seth Joshua who was in his early thirties, was adept at the job. Just as they finished, one of the rough characters of the area passed by. He was curious as to what was going on.

‘Hello, guvnor, what is this, a boxing show?’

‘There is going to be some fighting here,’ said Seth.

‘When are you going to start?’

‘Tomorrow morning at 11 am.’

‘Tomorrow’s Sunday.’

‘Well, better the day, better the deed.’

‘Who’s on?’

‘I’ve got to take the first round.’

‘Who’s with you?’

‘He’s a chap called Beelzebub’

‘Never heard of him. Who’s he?’

‘O he’s a smart one I can tell you. Come tomorrow morning.’

‘I’ll be there.’



‘And strange to say, he was there,’ said Seth. ‘When I had given out the first hymn, “All hail the power of Jesus’ name” he knew he had been caught. Beelzebub went over the ropes all right, for the chap was converted that very morning’.¹

Those tent meetings on Sunday, May 5, 1891, were the beginning of a great surge of evangelistic activity to reach the unchurched working classes in Cardiff, most of whom were by now unable to understand Welsh. For the previous twenty years, before he came to Cardiff, Pugh, as we shall see, had laboured with exceptional success in ministries in English-speaking churches in the new mining towns of Tredegar and then Pontypridd. Those years from 1872 to 1891 showed him that the Welsh-speaking evangelical churches of that time, secure and successful in rural areas and country towns, and still warm with the afterglow of the 1859 revival, were getting seriously out of touch with a new urbanized generation growing up in the mining and seaport towns because most of that generation were monoglot English in speech. Untouched as many were by Christian influence, and thrown into living conditions that were primitive as regards amenities and dangerous to health, they were raw and rough in their ways and increasingly under the social scourge of the day, ‘the drink’. When Pugh moved to Cardiff his passion to reach the unreached led to the tent evangelism in East Moors. This joint initiative with Seth Joshua soon developed into what became known as the Forward Movement of the Calvinistic Methodist (Presbyterian) Church of Wales. It was an attempt to face and tackle the deep divide that was growing up between the churches and the rapidly changing social patterns of ordinary folk.

The world in which Pugh lived was a booming coal and railway building age. The entire Welsh coalfield was absorbing population, much of it young, able-bodied, working men, at a rate without comparison in the United Kingdom, and indeed was, for a while, a magnet for immigrants surpassed in the world by the United States alone. Cardiff became the largest coal exporting docks in the world. It had begun with the sinking of coal pits in village areas all over what became the South Wales coalfield. These villages had had a closely-knit, Welsh-speaking identity. When

more houses were built to meet the inrush of men to man the mines, new chapels soon followed, retaining their Welshness. Eventually however, as the immigrant population took over, the valleys became anglicized in speech. Though there had been plenty of personal ungodliness in the old village communities they had not been beyond the reach of the moral and spiritual influence of the chapel. But now the drinking clubs and betting shops became rife and took over. The local chapels and their traditional activities, all wrapped up in the Welsh language, did not touch these new needy but tough types. At first the bulk of immigration had come from rural Wales, bringing with them their cultural legacies in the chapels. Then increasingly newcomers arrived from England (and Ireland), uprooted from any religious background they may have had and hurled into a harsh, unchurched urban environment, destined to reject the old Welsh chapel based values.

The critical point for our story, and Pugh saw its implications early on, is that the English-speaking chapel in Wales was still a rarity in the late 1880s. The advent of English-speaking immigrants caused much heartsearching among the Welsh-speaking community. Some said the church should 'function in the Welsh language exclusively'. Others saw this was not consistent with the history of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism. The English leaders of Methodism – Whitefield, the Wesleys, the Countess of Huntingdon and others – had often been present in gatherings in Wales during the early days of the eighteenth-century reawakening. When the hearers could understand it, Howel Harris would preach in English as he accompanied Whitefield on their South Wales tours. One hundred and fifty years later, the tide of immigrant irreligion that was engulfing the urban areas of South Wales, would only be met by evangelism in English. However, as late as 1899 the Home Mission reported that an Atlantic passage in winter was not as stormy as the Calvinistic Methodist transition from Welsh to English.

Standing tall and massive in front of the former coal exchange on the Barry seafront is a statue of David Davies.² In front of the imposing Cardiff Civic centre, alongside that of David Lloyd-George, stands one of John Cory.³ Davies and Cory were two of



the entrepreneurs responsible for South East Wales industrialization and the resulting massive social changes. They were the builders of Barry Docks and, as coal owners in the Valleys, its main coal suppliers via their own Taff Vale railway. Within twenty years Barry grew from a village of less than 100 people to a busy seaport of over 30,000. In 1913 it surpassed Cardiff for a while as the world's greatest coal exporter. The Davies family and Cory will appear in our story as Christians supportive (in the Davies' case, massively so) of Pugh's vision of bringing the Christian message to the anglicised families whose men worked in docks and mines.

That vision was born in the heart of the son of a railway builder, John Pugh, of New Mills, Montgomeryshire, who lived from 1846 to 1907. Bilingual and born near the English border he was equipped by background to bridge the two language communities. It is important to say that Pugh was never one of those who thought Welsh an inferior language, best dropped if the Welshman was to throw off his supposed inferiority. He was a bilingual Welshman whose missionary heart bled for 'the stranger in their midst' who did not know Christ. In his attempts to reach them he showed himself to be a doughty fighter, obstinate, determined, a man of steel, but also tender and compassionate – a soul of emotions which could frequently break out into tears. First he, and later the Joshua brothers Seth and Frank, quite independently of each other at first, went out to the street corners and public houses of places like Tredegar, Pontypridd, Neath, Cardiff and Barry and saw the unreached drawn and won for Christ.

Our Lord's words in Matthew 22:9-10 were lived out in the ministries of Pugh and the Joshuas and were crucial in Pugh's calling as we shall see. 'Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find. So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad and the wedding hall was filled with guests.' Their mission was primarily to those neglected by any Christian influence and concern – a challenge to any generation, and once more a challenge to today's as we see a burgeoning underclass. It is also a virile boost to spiritual morale! We can't copy the past. But we can be stirred by these men to live out that text in our context. In a recent

correspondence Sir Glanmor Williams, formerly Professor of History at the University of Wales in Swansea, says, ‘These excellent men of the Forward Movement put us all to shame.’

The Three and the Thirty

We launch into the background and then the early story of a vigorous and courageous evangelistic adventure. It is a tribute especially to three men of God – John Pugh, Seth and Frank Joshua – who were gospel beacons in their age and whose full-stretch labours have not received the attention of history that they warrant. As men of resurrection power their memory deserves to be raised from the dust so that their spiritual life will motivate us once more. These three men we shall occasionally call ‘The Three’. They served their Lord as did the famous ‘three mighty men’ of King David as recorded in the Old Testament. By the death of John Pugh they had been joined by the ‘Thirty’ – the number of evangelists then serving the Forward Movement. No scripture describes more appropriately the spirit and exploits of these men than when the Spirit of God came upon one of ‘The Thirty’ of King David, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 12:18:

We are yours, O David!
 We are with you, O son of Jesse!
 Success, success to you,
 and success to those who help you,
 For your God will help you.

The story of the Three who became also the Thirty is a romance of faith in a harsh world of social deprivation, sometimes shameful poverty. It began without a following, in a borrowed tent, on a piece of waste ground. Yet in fifteen years it built forty-eight well-equipped centres seating 43,080 people, had 6,896 born again members, 1,056 on probation, 10,763 Sunday School scholars and 22,000 hearers.

Happily, some of these statistics have names and faces. They will enter our story from the ruins of their raw backgrounds. They will remain in our hearts as joyous recruits for Jesus. But first we trace the hand of God in the young lives of ‘The Three’.