

## The Moravian Burial-ground at East Tytherton

**T**his is a very special place of 'sleep'. The people here are almost all committed Christians. They lived lives such as bakers (the Edgescumbes), or carpenters (the Hannums), missionaries (the Hannas), and one poor girl (Leonora Carr) was even a slave in the West Indies. There were many tragedies, such as the unfortunate little John Pinker, aged 6, who drowned in the Village Pond, and families who were overcome by fatal epidemics, such as the Brights, and Elizabeth Sidnell, who died in the Calne Union workhouse, and Alfred Pocock Long, RFC., who was killed in an air accident at Upavon.

These people all have stories, most were lowly, but who loved Jesus as their Saviour.

**T**he Moravians were persecuted first in what later became Czechoslovakia, moved to Germany, were persecuted there, and spread to England in the 1730s. The community here started first as a Methodist 'society' before becoming part of the Moravians. In its founding years there was much local persecution with the evangelist, John Cennick, being drenched with filthy ditch-water and having a blunderbuss fired at him at point-blank range.

**C**hristians believe that believers 'sleep' until a final judgment that will remove all evil. Then everything will be made new - everything in heaven and earth, and the two will be united. Believers will have new bodies that will not decay. They will be like our present bodies, but will look in some way different, and will be transformed.

**T**his is all because of Jesus, who was raised from the dead, as the 'first fruits' of this glorious new creation, in which everything will be made new. Not just people, but all of creation ...

## Death and the Moravians



A typical springtime view of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century gravestones in East Tytherton Moravian Graveyard – Lamb's Acre – anticipating, with the rise of the primroses – the renewal of life and – the resurrection of the body

One of the most popular readings at funerals today is from a sermon delivered at the funeral of King Edward VII in 1910. In it, Canon Henry Scott Holland of St. Paul's contrasts two opposing points of view, neither of which he is recommending.

The bizarre paradox is that the first of these two views that he is rejecting has become the expression of the modern conquering of death: a conquest that is achieved by saying - 'What problem? There *is* no problem!' In this first presentation, death is seen simply as moving from one room to the next, with no break in continuity. The second view - like that of Bertrand Russell - is of death as an appalling cruelty and darkness. Neither view is the truly Christian view, although there may be something of each in a Christian understanding. But, left as they are, from a Christian point of view, these two views are a lie, and remove the Christian hope altogether. For while death is indeed an enemy, it is not simply a continuity of present life, but rather, a complete renewal - on God's terms.

To many moderns religious faith is delusion. To be deluded is to be mad, insane. It is cause for diminished responsibility in courts of law.<sup>1</sup> Yet, again and again, the Moravians of the eighteenth century rejoice to see their Saviour, and it is referred to time and time again as a time of happiness - not just to be faced with stoicism, but with celebration. Were these Moravians wiser than we imagine? Were they merely deluded? What do we mean by this?

We want to suggest that the Moravians (and many other Christians) were indeed wiser than we moderns. For they had a practical theology of suffering founded on God's love, blessing and grace in Jesus that demonstrably helped these people to enjoy positive health and happiness and thereby greater longevity than other people at the time.

Moderns would say that the Moravian theology of the sufferings and death of Jesus arose from a need to cope with the suffering and death that was all around them in the 1700s. For, after all, people's responses to the raw facts of life in their own time, have to address the problems of their time.

Far from placing death in a realm where it was unreal, and going into denial about it, these early Moravians faced it squarely in the face, as indeed people had to in this time. These people were not great heroes, conquering in their aloneness and heroism. Death was part of God's world, not a world which God had left to run itself. Neither was it a friend, a moving from one room to the next, with no break in continuity. Death was an enemy to be defeated, but in God's way - not man's. God was intimately part of the activity and events of His universe. At the heart of this was Jesus, the Saviour of the world, who had died so that people who had rejected Him could receive Him! This was a God who loved His world, who was not indifferent to it, and Whose strategy was to heal the world through the work He was doing in His people.

His people had a new kind of grace that people today find difficult to receive. For it is a free grace! Paradoxically, the very fact that God's grace is free, and not related to whether a person has lived a 'good' life, is what seems to make it so hard for very many people to receive. It is demanded that natural justice should be rewarded by the deeds that people have done. This seems to be what is felt to be just. But over and beyond this is a divine strategy for healing. The Moravians on the other hand (following their Lutheran forebears), would have said that only a theology of grace - of a free salvation, not based on deeds done in life - can truly release people from anxiety into a 'freeing sense of security'. When we are secure in our salvation, then we are free! No longer do people need to pretend before God, but can be open before Him. No longer is there a need to dress up good deeds in ulterior motives, in order to secure salvation! These Christians are now ready to face death without fear, even positively, with rejoicing!

What kind of Christians might such beliefs create? Were these people wimps, running away from life's challenges, as some moderns might suggest? Or might it indeed encourage the quite opposite characteristics of toughness and perseverance?

Far from concentrating on their own personal happiness, the Moravians developed goals that were not just related to their own spiritual needs (although they included this) but ones that were focussed on other people and their need for the Saviour. Indeed, the fulfilment of their own spiritual needs drove them to the work of mission without fear of loss of their own lives. In this they, paradoxically, would have found increased wholeness, spiritual and mental health. Far from being religious wimps, they were completely the opposite. It drove local families to the West Indies, to work amongst the slaves, such as the Angell family. Moravians came to Tytherton from the West Indies: missionaries, such as Bishop Hanna, and even ex-slaves, such as Leonora Carr, and Ann & Sarah Briggs. It provided the Moravians (and other Christians) with powerful goals, and thereby with the toughness and perseverance to achieve them. Here we have their stories, to the extent that we can reconstruct them, from often very scant paper trails.

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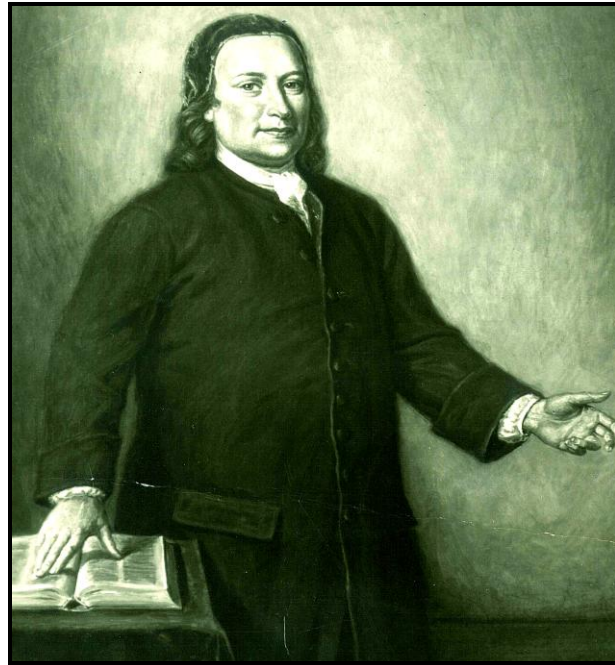
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*(By kind permission of the Moravian archives)*

None of these achievements were accidents. Leadership was, as in almost any movement, an absolutely key element. It seems highly likely that the present day existence of the Moravians owes itself to the extraordinary person of Nikolaus Ludwig, Graf (Count) von Zinzendorf (1700-60). The Moravians derived their name from Moravia, in what used to be the republic of Czechoslovakia. They were persecuted there. They then travelled to Saxony (Germany), where they were given protection, until they were again persecuted. As before, they travelled away from the seat of persecution. This time they went to England, and thereby formed many settlements all over the country.

Zinzendorf was a highly aristocratic and authoritarian leader. He was also well educated, particularly in the German Pietist tradition. Pietism was a movement within the Lutheran church (of which Zinzendorf became an ordained minister) that sought to rediscover the

spiritual and emotional side of what it meant to be a Christian. However, he was not just authoritarian, but also authoritative. His ideas in setting the agenda for the Moravians was innovative and imaginative, especially in the areas of education and community, and this would only have succeeded with strong and visionary leadership, whatever the downside of this leadership style, especially from a modern, more democratic perspective.

Research shows that outside of Germany, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, that there was a stronger drive for more democratic styles of leadership, particularly after Zinzendorf's death in 1760. The social composition of Bethlehem was very different from Herrnhut in Germany. In America, farmers and traders dominated, while in Germany the old aristocracy held sway.<sup>2</sup> It is very likely that East Tytherton was far more like Bethlehem than it was like Herrnhut. There were consequently fears that the Moravians in Bethlehem could drift away from the practice and ideals of their very first settlement in Herrnhut, in what became East Germany.<sup>3</sup> Might this explain why there were so many German missionary leaders at East Tytherton? Was the founder of the East Tytherton community, John Cennick, seen as something of a loose cannon? He had, after all, been first a Methodist follower of John Wesley, then George Whitefield, before handing the Tytherton Community over to the Moravians.<sup>4</sup>

That Zinzendorf was held in high esteem in East Tytherton, can be seen in the number of names that appear to be directly derived from the Zinzendorf family. Some of these are so unusual, that no other origin is at all likely, for example names like Christian<sup>5</sup> and Renatus (after Zinzendorf's son, meaning 'born again'), Anna (Anna after Nitchsmann, Zinzendorf's second wife) Benigna (after one of Zinzendorf's daughters, *cf.*, the Bright and La Trobe families, both buried in the graveyard), Ludwig (after Zinzendorf himself). Ann (without the 'e' or 'a') was the usual spelling in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other unusual, or Germanic names, such as Beata (blessed), as in Beata Hannum (born 1773), may also testify to this. One child is named 'Christian David' (Otridge, born in 1752) presumably after one of Zinzendorf's closest associates

of this name. Claire Figes comments that '10% of the babies named in the Moravian Baptism Register up to 1800 were given Christian or Christiana as a first name', which she takes to be symptomatic of this.<sup>6</sup> Strangely, though, there appear to be no children named 'Nicholas'. Was this too sacred or felt to be too presumptuous?



**John Cennick (1718-55), founder of East Tytherton Moravian Community**

*(Below):* John Cennick (photographed by kind permission):





The following extracts are taken from John Cennick's *Diary* (in the Moravian archives, in Muswell Hill, London). They show how John moves in small steps, first sensing the need for a property in which to worship on a more stable and regular basis, having already established various small

groups in people's homes around the locality. These were modelled on what he had learned from John Wesley and the Methodist 'societies', a term which John adopts. It is important to note that John is still in his very early twenties at this stage, and full of energy and zeal. It is not until later, when John wants to be freed up to extend his evangelism that he hands the societies over to the Moravians. This may have been part of his desire to avoid the extremes of both John Wesley (who taught that holiness was achievable by personal effort, albeit with the help of the Holy Spirit) and George Whitefield (who taught that holiness was completely determined by God, and was entirely a matter of grace).

Zinzendorf, the count who effectively relaunched the Moravians with a new vision after years in the wilderness, sought to be ecumenical (by eighteenth century standards) and avoid controversy by putting the stress on inner experience, rather than rational discourse about doctrine. This ultimately had the less fortunate effect of creating a church that wasn't completely sure of where it stood, being uncertain of its source of authority. Was it the Holy Spirit (individualism and a more mystical approach), or the Scripture ('believers' church'), or tradition (institutionalism and the sacraments)? Methodism found itself in a similar uneasy balance between being rooted in institutional, state church traditions, and an appeal to inner commitment and individualism.<sup>7</sup>

**John Cennick resolves to buy the house in East Tytherton,  
Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1742**

On Sat: Sep: 4<sup>th</sup> I went to see  
Tetherton w<sup>th</sup> Bro: Grace. Here a house was  
offer'd us w<sup>ch</sup> we might use for preaching  
&c that of Ja: Crew's in Foxham being far  
to small to hold our Society. As soon as  
I saw the House I resolv'd to buy it in  
Faith that hereafter it might be a Fold  
for y<sup>e</sup> Flock to assemble in, tho' at this  
it was far out of y<sup>e</sup> way.

On Sat: Sept: the 4<sup>th</sup> I went to see Tetherton with Bro: Grace. Here a house was offer'd us which we might use for preaching &c that of James Crew's in Foxham being far to (sic) small to hold our society. As soon as I saw the House I resolved to buy it in Faith that hereafter that it might be a Fold for the flock to assemble in, tho' at this it was far out of the way.

**The first burial at Tytherton, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1744**



The first burial may have been under the flowerbeds near the door on the left of the picture (c. 1930)

Shortly after rebuilding his house at Tytherton, Cennick buries  
Elizabeth Pinnel 'before his own door'.

1744. In the beginning of this year 1744  
I rebuilt & altered my Dwelling-house at Ty-  
-therton

On March 7<sup>th</sup>. Sister Eliz: Pinnel of  
Cocklebury went to eternal Rest, who because  
she belong'd to our Society was denied burial  
by her parish Minister, & after I had twice  
sent to him to bury her at his peril & he  
refus'd stiffly, I buried her before my own  
Door in Tytherton on Wed: March 13. & had a  
This was

Transcription

**1744**

**In the begining of this year 1744 I rebuilt & alter'd the Dwelling=house at Tetherton.**

**On March the 11 Sister Eliz: Pinnel of Cocklebury went to eternal Rest, who because she belong'd to our Society was denied burrial by her Parish Minister, and after I had twice sent to him to bury her at his peril & he refused stiffly, I burried her before my own Door in Tetherton on Wed: March 13. & had a pretty Opportunity at her Funeral. This was the begining of the Burying=Ground, and this Sister had the honour to be the first Corn sown there. She was a single woman & about 27 years old.**



**Susannah Pullen**  
**1693 – 1764**

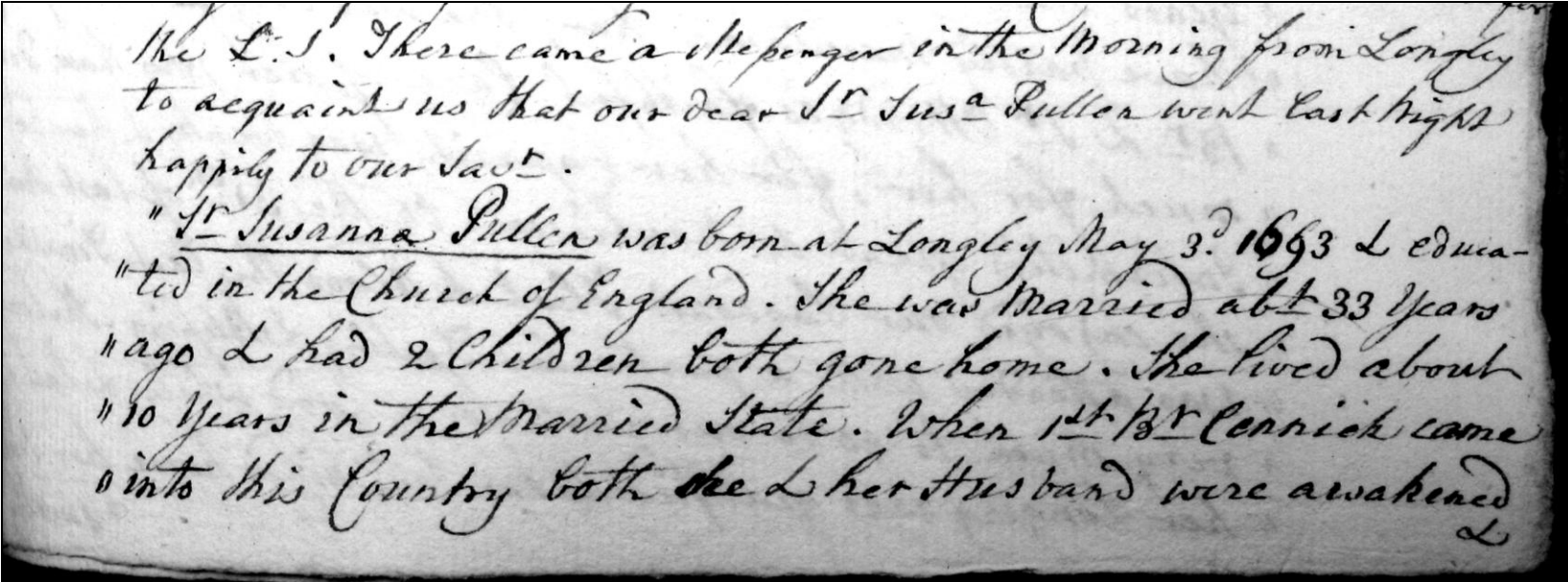
Supported by Parish Relief and Brothers & Sisters in Christ



Su[sannah] Pullen  
Wid.  
Depd. Aug. 24 1764

Aged 71 Yrs.

The story of Susannah Pullen is significant, because it illustrates something of the social origins of many of the first converts of the Moravian church. They were very poor. But they also had a real love for each other, that resulted in material and physical support. In the case of Susannah Pullen, for a period of 12 to 14 years she was cared for in the home of fellow Christians, the Ottridges. We reproduce here the original MS from the Moravian Archives in the *Congregational Diary* for 1764, without further comment. The description is strong enough not to require it.



The L.S. There came a messenger in the Morning from Longley to acquaint us that our dear S<sup>r</sup> Sus<sup>a</sup> Pullen went last night happily to our Saviour.

" S<sup>r</sup> Susanna Pullen was born at Longley May 3<sup>d</sup> 1693 & educated in the Church of England. She was married abt 33 years ago & had 2 Children both gone home. She lived about 10 years in the married state. When 1<sup>st</sup> B<sup>r</sup> Cennick came into this Country both she & her Husband were awakened &

Transcription



**There came a Me[s]senger in the morning from Longley [Kington Langley] to acquaint us that our dear Sr. [Sister] Susa. [Susanna] Pullen went last night happily to our Savr. [Saviour]. Sr. Susanna Pullen was born at Longley May 3<sup>d</sup>. 1693 & educated in the church of England. She was married abt [about] 33 Years ago & had 2 Children both gone home. She lived about 10 Years in the Married State. When 1<sup>st</sup>. Br. [Brother] Cennick came into this Country both she & her husband were awakened & he soon after departed relying on our dear Saviour. She went up & down for some Years under the load of her sins & fell into great distre[ss], even more than commonly [?]. But at length our Savr. manifested himself to her Heart eased her entirely of her Burden & won her whole Heart to himself & from that Time she has gone on an even happy Course. When the Brn. [Brethren] came her Heart was knit to the ongn. [congregation] directly & she was embodied into it by Reception Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> 1748, wch. [which] was the same Summer as the Congn. was settled. Augst. 13<sup>th</sup> next Year she was admitted to the Communion & she has always a cordial Relish for our Saviour's Flesh & Blood. Her Election was very weighty to her, & she often told our Savr. with a truly thankful child-like Heart: Dear Savr. twas all thy own doing, I shd. [should] never have known thee if thou hadst not conquered me by Love. She had that Property of a faithful Widow that she longed for the Salvation of others & if she could have carried every Body upon her Sholders to our Savr. & the Congn. she would have done it. How- ever she often prayed our Savr.**

**with Concern abt. it. The Brn. & Srs. all loved her very much & she was a legiti-mated respected Sr. among them. For the last 12 or 14 Years she has lived with Br. & Sr. Ottridge & the Parish have partly maintained her, she was very thankful for Br. & Sr. Ottridge's faithful Care of her who have done much for her, for her Capacity was weak & her bodily Infirmities great & troublesome. On the 31<sup>st</sup>. of last Month she enjoyed our Saviour's Flesh & Blood the last Time & it was attended with a particular feeling & Bleſsing. She longed very much to go to our Savr. for a good while & last night her longing was gratified & our savr. kiſsed home her soul sweetly to himself in the 72<sup>d</sup>. Year of her age.**



### **Acknowledgements**

We are very grateful to the Moravian Archives in Muswell Hill, London, for kind permission to photograph the documents presented here, and to Miss Lorraine Parsons, the Archivist, in particular.

### **NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> A. Sims (2009). *Is Faith Delusion: Why religion is good for your health*, London, Continuum, 117-118.

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Lindt Gollin (1967)., *Moravians in Two Worlds* New York, Columbia University Press, 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-7.

<sup>4</sup> The disagreements over predestination were not trivial, although they might seem so to us today. That John Wesley, who believed in individual freewill (and presumably the collective predestination of the church, rather than that of individuals) should therefore oppose

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slavery vehemently (he called it the 'sum of all villainies' and an 'execrable' trade) is not surprising; George Whitefield, believing in individual and collective predestination, supported slavery (and actually held around 50 slaves in Georgia), as did his co-worker, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (founder of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, which later became part of the Congregational church). This theology conveniently became part of the legitimization of slavery, as exemplified by John Pinney, a leading Bristol slaver who wrote '... surely God ordain'd 'em for the use and benefit of us: otherwise his Divine Will would have been made manifest [to the contrary] by some particular sign or token.' (John Pinney, letter, 1760s, cited in Madge Dresser & Sue Giles (1999) *Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery*, Bristol, Bristol Museums and Art Gallery, 44). The Moravians, through Zinzendorf, were Lutheran and therefore very close to Calvinism and a strong view of predestination. But Zinzendorf was also highly pragmatic. The combined desire to follow the teaching of Jesus and Paul to evangelise, plus not upset the slave owners, must have informed the pioneering missions of the Moravians amongst the slaves in the Caribbean. This made good psychological sense: acting against a person - the planters - in a way that robs them of their freedom - is certain to increase their resistance (D. Myers (1978) *The Human Puzzle: Psychological Research and Christian belief*, New York, Harper & Row, 107-112. See also Jon Sensbach (2001), *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic world*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 140-3, who cites Zinzendorf's meeting in St. Thomas on 15th February, 1759. Zinzendorf addressed a largely Black audience in a speech that was apparently intended to appease the Governor and the planters, and which is seen by Sensbach as establishing the Moravian approach to slavery - acceptance of whatever state one finds oneself in, so that (here Sensbach does not bother to look at the New Testament passages in question, as he should have done) one does not bring disrepute on the name of Christ (*cf.*, 1 Tim. 6.1-2). Earlier Zinzendorf had gone a considerable way in breaking down barriers by being part of such behaviours as prayer rotas with Black people, giving them offices and duties, and so on (Sensbach, 139-40), which would have ultimately worked against slavery, much as Paul's other teaching to the early church would have done (*cf.*, Galatians 3.28-9, parallels in 1 Corinthians 12.12-13, Colossians 3.11, Rom. 10.12).

<sup>5</sup> We do need to be cautious in this. James Christian Young, for example, died in 1803, aged 81. He must have been born in about 1722 - before Zinzendorf had been heard of in East Tytherton. He could, of course, have decided at a later date, to be called 'Christian', but until there is positive evidence otherwise we must assume that these are his birth names. Paul Christian Angel, born in about 1755, would appear to have been named for Zinzendorf, especially as there are indications that this was a zealously missionary family (see Claire Figes (1993), *1743-1993: 250 Years of the Moravian Settlement at East Tytherton*, 10).

<sup>6</sup> Figes, *op cit.*, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> See especially D. Durnbaugh (1968). *The Believers' Church*, Kitchener, Herald, 31, for a very helpful figure.