

## Some Very Early Bremen Brethren

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Towards the end of the 1980s, when I was in my late teens living with my parents in Bremen in Germany, my father's relative, Fräulein Margarethe Pundsack decided it would be best to pass on a little book to my father for safe-keeping. Fräulein Pundsack, who was born in 1902, was the last remaining member of her family to be living in Bremen, a city in north-west Germany, some thirty-seven miles south of the mouth of the river Weser where it runs into the North Sea. Together with this small book came a couple of similar items. One was her personal birthday book, in which she had included my own birthday. The other was a personal birthday book that had belonged to her father, who had been born in Bremen in 1853. The two personal birthday books are entitled *Christliches Vergissmeinnicht* [Christian forget-me-not]. They measure about 2x4 inches, containing for each day of the year printed Bible verses and topically related hymn excerpts. The entries for births and deaths, which are all handwritten, are mainly for close family members, but they occasionally include a friend who had entered missionary service, for example one who had gone in 1886 to Togo. I was intrigued by some similarities between the three books that she had bequeathed to my father, and so I determined to piece together what seemed to be her family history: an odd task for me, perhaps, as she died in 1993.

The main book in the collection is a plain brown notebook, only slightly larger than the two personal books: measuring about 4x7 inches. The first page bears the title 'Geburtstags-Buch' [Birthday Book]. The other pages are then carefully allocated to fit the days of the year exactly. All the entries are handwritten, so that in neat, brown ink quill lettering, a Bible verse is assigned to each day, and a person's name is matched to the day, as appropriate for their birthday. It is, on further reading, the membership record of a Brüder

Societät [Brethren Society] in Bremen that had started meeting from 16 June 1793—the date of its own birthday, as it were. At the time of compiling the book in 1836, the membership number had risen to sixty. The round figure may have been the occasion for this membership register, to celebrate the society's growing support. However, the absence of writing on its cover or spine, its designation as a 'birthday book', and the absence of a street location for the inauguration of the Brüder Societäts-Saal [Brethren hall] which had taken place on 18 November 1800, may indicate intentional choices made by a society of a clandestine nature.

As I found similarities between all three birthday books in the birth dates for the grandparents of Fräulein Pundsack, I was able to establish that her grandfather had been Christian Pundsack (1805–1878) and her grandmother Franziska Pundsack (1817–1885). I was able to construct the family tree from there by using these books, but supported further, as Timothy Stunt has observed,<sup>1</sup> nowadays by genealogy websites on the Internet.<sup>2</sup> Going further steps forward in my searches, I established that a son of Christian and Franziska Pundsack had been born in Bremen in 1847 and died in Barcelona in 1917.<sup>3</sup> He was also called Christian Pundsack and followed in the family tradition of working as a merchant. His personal coming to faith occurred in Cuba, through the Swiss missionary Konrad Schelling of the British and Foreign Sailors Society.<sup>4</sup> Christian Pundsack (b.1847) then became a missionary: first in England, and from 1863 in Spain, in constant partnership with my great-grandfather, the Brethren missionary George Lawrence.<sup>5</sup> In 1888 he married a daughter of George Lawrence: Henrietta (b.1863, Barnstaple, d.1935, Barcelona). At that point in my searches, it became clear to me how closely related the two families were:

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1. Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Some very early Plymouth Brethren', *BHR* 5/2: 102–5.

2. Die MAUS Gesellschaft für Familienforschung e.V. Bremen <<http://die-maus-bremen.de/index.php>>, accessed June 2014.

3. Another of their sons was called Rudolf: he was the father of my Fräulein Pundsack.

4. *The Missionary Echo* (London: Yapp and Hawkins), Oct. 1874, 142.

5. Fredk A. Tatford, *West European Evangel: That The World May Know: Vol. 8* (Bath, 1985), 373.

Henrietta was my father's aunt Hetty. So the birthday books from Fräulein Pundsack were as much about my *own* family history. Franz Pundsack, one of the sons of Christian and Henrietta, kept the financial accounts of the missionary work in Spain.<sup>6</sup> A book published in Barcelona in 1880 by one of my father's other aunts, Bessie Lawrence, recounts vivid details of this time, for example in a letter written by Christian Pundsack (September 1879):

A few days ago we went with the Bible-coach to a popular feast ... I was again asked if I would remove the stall, and when I answered in the negative, the mayor ordered us to be taken to prison. ... the jailor, to see what we would do, left the door open for a while. Of course we would not leave the prison by stealth, and we spent the night in our cell ... The next morning, I telegraphed Mr. Lawrence to inform him of what had happened; I also sent word to the German Consul General in Barcelona ... We were then set at liberty and continued to sell the Scriptures in the coffee-houses. In the afternoon Mr. Lawrence arrived, accompanied by two influential Spanish gentlemen. They went to see the judge and mayor about the affair.<sup>7</sup>

Regular reports were sent to the missionary societies that supported their work, now archived by:

- Scottish Bible Society, who funded the Bible depots and coaches, featuring in the extract above;
- *Echoes of Service*, who supported the missionaries in Spain and published their letters for that purpose;
- Trinitarian Bible Society, supplier of the printing press that was also used for publishing the book by Bessie Lawrence.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Tim Grass, *Generations: British Brethren Mission to Spain, 1834-1990* (Isle of Man, 2011), 106.

7. Bessie Lawrence, *The Aurora in Spain: Dawnings of Gospel Light* (Barcelona: Evangelical Press, 1880), 32-33.

8. Presumably steam-powered: Plate 8, 'Spanish printing press', in Andrew Brown, *The Word of God among all Nations: A Brief history of the Trinitarian Bible Society (1831-1981)* (London, 1981), 88.



Bremer Marktplatz in 1859. The Pundsack dwelling is the middle building on the right, with a mixture of a Renaissance facade and a Gothic triangular gable.  
Source: see n.11 below.

Bremen appeared again in my searches when I read the letters of Robert Chapman, who wrote an encouraging pastoral letter addressed from ‘Bremen, Germany, 24<sup>th</sup> Feb., 1872: To my brethren in Madrid, well-beloved in Christ Jesus’.<sup>9</sup> Writing from Elberfeld in Germany to Barnstaple on 17 February 1872,<sup>10</sup> on a homeward journey from Spain and accompanied by ‘Brother Pundsack’, Chapman mentions meeting the ‘nursing father’ of the missionary Konrad Schelling in Basle, Switzerland. Chapman’s letter is followed by an editor’s note: ‘After a short stay at Bremen, where much kindness was shown to him for Christ’s sake, and where he was gladdened by the godliness of some of the relatives of his young companion, C. Pundsack, he embarked with him for Hull.’

At what address were they staying while in Bremen? This would have been in the city centre (Pelzerstrasse). The Pundsack family

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9. ‘Journal of a Visit to Spain’, in *Letters of the late Robert Cleaver Chapman*, (ed.) J. H. Hake. (London, 1903).

10. *The Missionary Echo* (London: Yapp and Hawkins), Apr. 1872.

home, pre-1860,<sup>11</sup> was even more centrally located—Am Markt, next to the town hall,<sup>12</sup> with one ancestor recorded as mayor for the years 1775–1787.<sup>13</sup> The wording in Chapman’s letter—‘some of the relatives of his young companion’—would indicate more persons than the parents of Christian Pundsack.

A persistent conundrum that presented itself to me was that for both events relating to the origin of this Brethren Society in Bremen—namely its founding date and the opening of the hall—double dates are given:

- ‘16. Juni 1793’, as well as ‘12. Juli 1793’, for: ‘Gründung der Brüder Societät in Bremen’.
- ‘18. November 1800’, as well as ‘29. Juni 1806’, for: ‘Einweihung des Brüder Societäts-Saals’ in Bremen.

Was this another clue to its clandestine nature—aimed at confusing the authorities? The separate dates for the founding month (June and July) could simply indicate two groups that merged later, or it may have been a technicality in determining their exact founding date. Especially if the earliest meetings took place in members’ homes, they may have needed to assemble in smaller groups at first, perhaps to avoid breaking the law. The two years for the inauguration of the hall (1800 and 1806) might be explained with the need for larger premises, instead of conjecturing that the first hall was closed down for whatever reason. The opening of a hall would indicate a substantial membership in numbers, and we can see that it had the support of at least one influential family of the city. As usual, Internet searches have provided some further answers. An out-of-print book by a local Bremen historian, Buchenau, gives the following details, in its edition from the year 1900:

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11. August Wilhelm Wedeking, ‘Bremer Marktplatz – 1859.jpg’, Collection Focke-Museum Bremen, <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bremer\\_Marktplatz\\_-\\_1859.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bremer_Marktplatz_-_1859.jpg)>, image accessed June 2014.

12. Wolfgang Schwarze, *Alte Bremer Stadtansichten* (Wuppertal, 1977).

13. <[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_Bremer\\_Bürgermeister](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_Bremer_Bürgermeister)>, accessed June 2014.

Eine Societät der **Brüder-Gemeine** wurde in Bremen bereits am 12. Juni 1793 gegründet; sie versammelte sich bis 1860 in Privathäusern, dann bis 1895 in dem erworbenen Hause Ansgariikirchhof No. 7. 1896 ward sie neu organisiert, und ihr Betsaal, an der Georgstr. No. 19 am 19. April 1899 eingeweiht.<sup>14</sup>  
[A society of the Brüder-Gemeine had already been founded in Bremen on 12. June 1793; meeting in private homes until 1860; thereafter meeting in a house purchased on Ansgariikirchhof No. 7. In 1896 it was re-organised, and its prayer hall, on Georgstr. No. 19, was consecrated on 19. April 1899.]

In English-language usage, these early Bremen Brethren were Moravians.<sup>15</sup> So this gives us the small distinction between ‘Brethren Society’ and ‘Brethren Assembly’. Finding this as the denomination is less surprising if we consider Georg Müller’s autobiographical accounts.<sup>16</sup> During his international tours, his speaking engagements in German often included invitations from the ‘Church of the Moravian brethren’, for example in 1882 in another Hanseatic city—Danzig.<sup>17</sup> Müller’s first experience in Germany of a different style of worship was with people we now call ‘Pietists’, a term used by August Francke, the founder of the orphanage in Halle in 1698.<sup>18</sup> Their practices differed in many ways from the established churches:

- the sole use of the Bible as the only canonical text;
- the non-liturgical form of prayer;
- emphasis on missionary work;

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14. Franz Buchenau, *Die freie Hansestadt Bremen und ihr Gebiet* (Bremen, 1900), 203, [online text] <[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL20501311M/Die\\_freie\\_Hansestadt\\_Bremen\\_und\\_ihr\\_Gebiet\\_Ein\\_Beitrag\\_zur\\_Geographie\\_und\\_...](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL20501311M/Die_freie_Hansestadt_Bremen_und_ihr_Gebiet_Ein_Beitrag_zur_Geographie_und_...)>, accessed June 2014.

15. Regina Ganter, ‘Herrnhut (Moravians)’, *German Missionaries in Queensland* (Brisbane, 2007), <<http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/missionary-training/herrnhut-moravians-1722-1869>> accessed June 2014.

16. Arthur Pierson (ed.), *Autobiography of George Müller* (4<sup>th</sup> edn., London: Pickering and Inglis), 544.

17. Flo Beck, ‘Haupthandelsroute Hanse.png’ [Main trading routes of the Hanseatic League in northern Europe], 2006 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Haupthandelsroute\\_Hanse.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Haupthandelsroute_Hanse.png)>, image accessed June 2014.

18. Clive Langmead, *Robber of the Cruel Streets: The Prayerful Life of George Muller*, Surrey, 2006), 33, 37.

- and the interpersonal form of address as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’.

In line with the last, the birthday book under investigation duly has every member given with the appropriate male or female title before the surname, so that we have ‘Bruder Pundsack’ instead of the civil term ‘Herr Pundsack’. These are aspects that apply across many such smaller groups emerging at that time, whether we are considering the Moravian or the Plymouth Brethren.

The question of church membership, and perhaps levels of mutual tolerance, should also be seen within the specific local context of Bremen. It has a long history of independence, as a city of the Hanseatic trade league. I would see this in contrast with the Prussian administration, as given for Bremen in genealogical records. We would usually expect less religious freedom under Prussian jurisdiction, whose politically motivated precautions were experienced firsthand by Georg Müller in 1825: ‘Prussian law at the time demanded no extempore preaching without an ordained minister present due to the volatile relationships between the political confessional camps.’<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, in Bremen the two major Protestant denominations, which were Calvinist and Lutheran, with both their main church buildings in the city centre, were working together more closely by the end of the nineteenth century, leading to a joint hymnbook for evangelical churches in Bremen.<sup>20</sup> (Fräulein Pundsack also passed her pocket edition of this hymnbook on to me, in its eighth edition from 1899.) The Calvinist church had been the traditional one for the Pundsack family for generations: in their social standing as patricians, rather than being affiliated with the Lutheran cathedral which was supported at times by the Danish court that was ruling Bremen, the merchant class to which they belonged had been able to keep its autonomy through the Calvinist church. Politically, just as in Victorian Britain, the middle class were gaining influence in

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19. Langmead, *Robber of the Cruel Streets*, 41.

20. *Bremische Evangelische Kirche, Evangelisches Gesangbuch der Bremischen Gemeinden* (1873; facsimile rpt: Bremen: Verlag Geffken & Sohn).

nineteenth-century Bremen. Nevertheless, the threat from ‘volatile relationships between the political confessional camps’,<sup>21</sup> (i.e. Catholic versus Protestant) was not an issue in Bremen, so that a Prussian jurisdiction could have safely allowed Bremen to continue with some independence, even in religious matters, because of its identity as a ‘free Hanseatic city’, a title that dated back to 1358.<sup>22</sup> Bremen retains that title with pride to this day, to denote regional identity and some measure of independence in its modern-day status as the smallest federal state in Germany (*kleinstes Bundesland*’).

A parallel to Bremen might be drawn with the hometown of my great-grandfather George Lawrence—Monmouth, where Nonconformity was strong.<sup>23</sup> George Lawrence married in 1860 in Leominster (a smaller market town near the county capital of Hereford), which became well known later for its missionary training conferences (1874–1906) supported by Müller and Chapman.<sup>24</sup> In view of the possibility of regional independence, in religious and political matters, I wondered how clandestine the Brethren Society in Bremen had to be. Perhaps their membership record was used for official purposes: not to hide their existence, but to provide evidence that they had enough members to register as a society. Once they had reached their membership of sixty, they may have had hopes of becoming an officially recognised religious organisation even as early as 1836, the year for which the last birthday is given in the book.

One question that remains is whether the Pundsack family continued their ties with the Brethren Society, and for how long. The joint hymnbook for Bremen’s Lutheran and Calvinist churches in 1873 was intended to address dwindling membership numbers, according to its foreword; whereas we can see that the Brethren

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21. Langmead, *Robber of the Cruel Streets*, 41.

22. Herbert Brenning, *Bremen To-day: A Survey of its History and Economy*, ET, Federico Lawrence, (Bremen, 1962).

23. The Chapels Heritage Society, ‘Nonconformity in Monmouth’, *Capel Newsletter*, 29 (Spring 1997), <[http://www.capeli.org.uk/uploads/newsletter\\_29.pdf](http://www.capeli.org.uk/uploads/newsletter_29.pdf)>, accessed June 2014.

24. Dust and Ashes Publications, *Addresses from the Leominster conference*, <<http://www.dustandashes.com/free-books/>>, accessed June 2014.

Society had been enjoying growing support. The year 1860, for which Buchenau noted some restructuring of the society's organisation, coincides with geographical restructuring in the city centre. A town planning photograph was taken in 1859 of the residential row of houses next to the town hall, including the Pundsack family home.<sup>25</sup> The following year, the entire row of houses, which we see in the photograph,<sup>26</sup> was demolished, leading to a sense of being socially uprooted for these patrician families. Excavations in the year 2002 allowed archaeologists a brief view of the cellar foundations of the house belonging to Pundsack's next-door neighbour: the oldest building, in Gothic architecture, dating back to the fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Would the Pundsack house and the adjoining private residences have been destroyed, anyway, considering that Bremen was badly bombed in the Second World War? No, because the air strike that was planned for the old city centre buildings was sabotaged, in the most gentlemanly way, by the British pilot who disobeyed orders at the last moment and changed his course towards open fields nearby.<sup>28</sup>

Today, the remaining buildings around the market square are under protection as a UNESCO world heritage site. Especially in light of this recognition, I reflect with some relief on the birthday book's safe-keeping from one generation to the next. Although this little book presented me with many questions, and it may lead to further questions, I have found that appropriate for me now is its entry for 1 January, which gives one of Müller's favourite verses:

*Habe deine Lust an dem Herrn, der wird dir geben, was dein Herz begehrt.* [Psalm 37: 4—'Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart'.]

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25. H. Wacker, 'Hundert Jahre Photographie und Lichtbildkunst', *Bremer Nachrichten*, 15 Jan. 1939, 13.

26. <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bremer\\_Marktplatz\\_-\\_1859.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bremer_Marktplatz_-_1859.jpg)>

27. Hans-Werner Siedler, 'Bremer Marktplatz: Grabung 2002', <<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BremerMarktplatz-Grabung.jpg>>, image accessed June 2014.

28. Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, *Freie Hansestadt Bremen: Out and about with Roland* (Bremen, n.d.).