

**JOHN JEWELL PENSTONE (1817-1902),
HIS FAMILY AND THE BRETHERN**

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In 1972 the Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship published a note by Mr R. Howard concerning the portrait of J.N. Darby by E[dward] P[enstone] which he had recently inherited and which is now in the National Portrait Gallery, London.¹ The painting had been bought some forty years previously from 'a lady living in Stamford Hill, London' who, Mr. Howard believed, was a Miss Penstone who had 'kept some of her father's paintings'. In an editorial foot-note, Mr Roy Coad mentioned that Edward Penstone had exhibited twenty-five pictures at the Suffolk Street Gallery and one at the Royal Academy between 1871 and 1889, and speculated that he was 'a relative of John Jewell Penstone' associated with the early Brethren. At the time, I submitted a brief paper (which was never published) providing some information concerning J.J. Penstone to supplement the problematical account of him in Henry Pickering's Chief Men among the Brethren.² Some thirty five years later the editor of this journal has begun an important study of the several artists who have been associated with the Brethren and once again the name of Penstone has come to mind. As I now have considerably more details of the man and his family, it seemed worthwhile to revise and enlarge my earlier paper.

At least seven generations of Penstone ancestors were born and had lived in Stanford in the Vale, Berkshire, before John Jewell Penstone (hereafter sometimes abbreviated to 'JJP') was born in Clerkenwell,

1. CBRF broadsheet Apr. 1972, pp.4-5.

2. H. Pickering, *Chief Men among the Brethren* (2nd ed. London 1931), pp. 82-3.



John Jewell Penstone

London, in 1817. His father, John Penstone (1792-1840) was the eldest of a large family and although the parish register entry of his marriage hasn't survived, we have a sworn statement, made in June 1816, of his intention to marry Ann Jewell of the parish of Saint James, Clerkenwell, Middlesex—a statement, which accompanied his request for a marriage licence.³ JJP's mother, was a daughter of Joseph Jewell who also came from Stanford in the Vale and who had been attracted to the Quaker communion when he came to London.⁴ It

3. A copy of this document has been given to me by Ms. Barbara Williamson to whom I am deeply indebted for many of these genealogical details. Ms. Barbara Williamson is descended from JJP's grandfather. Some but by no means all of the details can be corroborated in the International Genealogical Index [IGI]. Where I have given no source it can be assumed that Ms. Williamson provided the information.

4. Joseph Jewell whose mother died when he was ten years old was the son of a horsedealer and began life as a farm drudge and a bricklayer. Successively an ostler, drayman, and glazier he became a porter in the Old Plough Court Pharmacy, in Lombard Street, founded by the Quaker Silvanus Bevan in 1715. There, under the

was through this maternal grandfather, whom he described as ‘a beloved and aged servant of Christ’ that John Jewell Penstone, when he was about nineteen years old (c.1836) ‘first heard of the meetings of the Brethren and became acquainted with Mr John Eliot Howard’.⁵ However we may perhaps note that the account of him in Pickering’s *Chief Men among the Brethren* is somewhat misleading as its references to his early friendship with the Howards of Tottenham suggest that this association continued to the end of his life. In fact, unlike the Howard brothers, he supported Darby after 1846 even to the point of engaging in printed controversy with his former friends. The recollection of his first meeting with Brethren, cited above, is taken from his published answer to a pamphlet by John Eliot Howard,⁶ the very man to whom he had been introduced by his grandfather.

In 1845 John Jewell Penstone married his first wife, Matilda Harman Gould (1813-78) who was born in Grosvenor Square, London, and she was the mother of at least five children—Mary (b.1845), Persis Mary (1846-1904) William (1847-1880), Edward (1849-1916) and Fanny (1850-1910). The family was living in Chelsea until 1850 when they moved to Stanford in the Vale, Oxfordshire, where JJP’s father and both his (JJP’s) grandfathers had been born. We know nothing of Matilda Gould but three years after

direction of William Allen and Luke Howard, Jewell became head of the laboratory and a highly successful manufacturer of chemicals, overseeing the company’s move to Plaistow and later Stratford in Essex. For details of his extraordinary career see A.W. Slater [ed.], ‘Autobiographical Memoir of Joseph Jewell, 1763-1846,’ *Camden Miscellany* 22 (1964) pp. 113-78. Cf. D. Chapman-Huston, E.C. Cripps, *Through a City Archway: The Story of Allen and Hanburys 1715-1954* (London [Allen and Hanburys Ltd] 1954), p.32.

5. J.J. Penstone, *A Caution to the readers of ‘A Caution against the Darbyites’ with a few words on ‘The Close of twenty eight years association with J.N.D.’* (London [Morrish] ?1867), p.3. The event was recalled in autumn 1866 as ‘thirty years since’.

6. J.E. Howard, *A Caution against the Darbyites with a word to the authors of two recent pamphlets. And the testimony of Lord Congleton* (London [G.J. Stevenson] 1866). For some useful recent work on J.E. Howard see J.H. Kirkwood, C.H. Lloyd [eds.] *John Eliot Howard, Fellow of the Royal Society 1807-1883, A Budget of Papers on his Life and Work*, (Oxford [Lloyd] 1995).

her death in 1878, JJP married a second time and his second wife was Elizabeth Messer Wright (1815-1892). She was from a Bristol Quaker family and was a cousin of James Wright (1826-1905), George Müller's son-in-law and successor in the Ashley Down Orphan Homes.⁷

In describing JJP as a 'Bible scholar and Christian poet' the writer in *Chief Men among the Brethren* was diminishing somewhat the scope of his subject's talents. Penstone was evidently well read in secular history and his interests were certainly not confined to sacred studies. In the late 1850s he raised questions and responded to other people's questions in *Notes and Queries* on literary, artistic and historical subjects.⁸ The chances of Penstone, who was then living in Stanford in the Vale, reading such a journal as *Notes and Queries* would appear to be slim unless he was a subscriber.⁹ However he seems to have been something of an antiquarian and evidently was friendly with the prolific amateur Alfred John Dunkin (1812-79) to whose *Monumenta Anglicana* he contributed 'A visit to the village

7. For details of Elizabeth Messer Wright see the IGI and her cousin James see the IGI, <<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/richardtravell/richardtravell/>> under 'Neave Hampshire' [consulted August 2008] and A.T. Pierson, *James Wright of Bristol: A Memorial of a fragrant life*, (London [Nisbet] 1906), p.3. I am beholden to Mr David Napier for saving me from a false conjecture in the matter of the date of her death. At present we are ignorant of the identity of the deceased person remembered in J.J. Penstone, *The dustless tomb. (Fragmentary remarks made at the burial of a beloved one, whose remains, in Arno [sic] Vale, await the resurrection.)* (London 1888), but it was not his second wife, who, in 1888 was still living.

8. J.J. Penstone, 'Was Addison a plagiarist?', *Notes and Queries* [hereafter *NQ*] series 2. ii.29 (July 1856), p.49; 'Pictures of Raffaele in England, and in what collections?', *NQ* series 2. ii.33 (Aug 1856), p.130; 'Forged Assignats', *NQ* series 2. vi. 137 (Aug 1858), pp.134-5).

9. There are many other contributions to *NQ*, in later years, that are signed 'JJP' and which show a familiarity with jurisprudence but we cannot be sure that they are the work of our subject.



Fig. 1 John Jewell Penstone, *Love is strong as death*. Reproduced by permission of Peter Nahum, Leicester Galleries, London

church of Stanford in the vale, whilst undergoing restoration.¹⁰ This was not the only help JJP gave to Dunkin who acknowledged in one of his reports for the British Archaeological Association in 1848 that JJP had provided him with not only etchings of Sudeley Castle but also with information about the opening of King John's tomb in Worcester Cathedral in 1797.¹¹

If such scholarly interests conflict with any stereotype we may have formed of the early Brethren, John Jewell Penstone gives us further reasons for abandoning it. In the census of 1851 JJP described himself as an artist and although the work of his son, Edward, is better known, JJP's work was not insignificant. As early as 1838 he exhibited *The Saxon Bride* at the Royal Academy where some of his paintings were shown in the 1840s and as late as 1895.¹² Inevitably his religious interests combined with his style for him to be classified as a Pre-Raphaelite. One of his characteristically Pre-Raphaelite works is *Love is strong as death* (1894), a title taken from Song of Solomon 8: 6, which he presented to Edith Churchill, possibly on the occasion of her marriage when he was living at Stamford Hill in London. Unfortunately the greyscale reproduction (see Fig.1) does not do justice to the gold ground against which the figures are picked out and the typically Pre-Raphaelite use of bright colours, but it does give an adequate sense of the simple poses and the intricate floral

10. A.J. Dunkin (ed.) *Monumenta Anglicana. Coggeshall, Stanford in the Vale, Dartford* (Dartford 1852). For a less than flattering account of Dunkin, see *DNB*.

11. A.J. Dunkin [ed], *A Report of the proceedings of the British Archaeological Association, at the fifth general meeting, holden in Worcester...August 1848* (London 1851). JJP also provided the engraving of Dunkin's portrait. He had earlier produced an engraving of Dunkin's father, the topographer, for the frontispiece in J.Dunkin, *The History and Antiquities of Dartford with Topographical Notices of the Neighbourhood* (London 1844).

12. A. Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 8 volumes (London [Graves, Bell] 1906) vi.104.

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Fig. 2 Edward Penston, John Nelson Darby, etching and aquatint © National Portrait Gallery, London.

design favoured by the movement.¹³

However, in his day he was probably best known for his work as an engraver. The entry for Edward Pusey's older brother Philip (1799-1855) in the *Dictionary of National Biography* discusses his iconography and explains that 'the engraving of 1851 was by a local artist J. Fewell [*sic*] Penstone, Stanford, Berkshire',¹⁴ but JJP's engravings can be located further afield. The National Portrait Gallery has his stipple engraving of Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, Lady Lytton (1802-82) based on a portrait by Alfred Edward Chalon (1780-1860), as well as his stipple engraving (1852) of the daughter of Sir Robert Peel, Julia, Countess of Jersey (1821-93).¹⁵ Indeed, in an article seeking more information about JJP's work as an engraver, W.H. Quarrell observed in *Notes and Queries* (1944) that the old British Museum Catalogue described Penstone as 'Painter and Engraver for Julia, Countess of Jersey'.¹⁶ Another engraving, *Enamoured Days*, was based on a work by his contemporary Edward Corbould (1815-1906) and appeared in the 1848 edition of Fisher's *Drawing Room Scrap Book*, being one of the works singled out in the *Eclectic Review* as having 'afforded us much gratification'.¹⁷ JJP's gifts in this field would explain why Sir Edward Denny (1796-1889) valued his help in the preparation of the charts in which he outlined his views of prophecy.¹⁸

13. *Love is strong as death* was sold by Peter Nahum at the Leicester Galleries, Ryder Street, London, and the full colour version can be viewed at <http://www.leicestergalleries.co.uk/provenart/dealer_stock_details.cgi?d_id=253&aid=13522>

14. This error is perpetuated in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) [hereafter *ODNB*].

15. National Portrait Gallery [hereafter NPG] D14533; NPG D7536. See <<http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/person.asp?linkID=mp01185>> [accessed August 2007] The engraving of Lady Lytton is reproduced in the *ODNB*

16. W.H. Quarrell, 'Penstone' in *Notes and Queries*, 187 (3) (July 1944), p.58.

17. *Eclectic Review* NS xxiv (Dec 1848), p.766. For a coloured reproduction of this very romantic Victorian item see <<http://www.antique-prints.de/shop/catalog.php?list=KAT74>> [accessed August 2007].

18. E.E. Cornwall, *Songs of Pilgrimage and Glory: Notes on the hymns of certain hymn writers*, (London [Central Bible Truth Depot] 1932) p.26.

Both of JJP's sons seem to have followed in their father's artistic footsteps. His older son William was the architect who supervised the building of Stanford in the Vale Primary School¹⁹ and the younger son, Edward, is described in the 1881 Census as an unmarried painter living in London. Edward like his father exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1877, 1894 and 1896²⁰ and he himself presented a copy of his 'etching and aquatint' of John Nelson Darby to the National Portrait Gallery, London, in 1903 (Fig.2). The Gallery's more recent acquisition (1972), the one formerly owned by Mr Howard, is listed as a 'watercolour over photograph after Edward Penstone'.²¹ Although JJP, like many Friends, came to be associated with the Brethren, his Quaker connections are a recurrent element in his life from his maternal grandfather's experience, through his early friendship with the Howard family and later in his second marriage. There is in the Newport Museum and Art Gallery, a watercolor by JJP of Swarthmoor Hall, in Cumbria, the home of Margaret Fell whom George Fox, the founder of the Quakers married in 1669.²² Swarthmore Hall (as it used to be spelt) was for many years an important centre of Quaker activity and we may safely assume that the two principal figures in the group of Friends in the fore-ground of his painting are Margaret Fell and George Fox. We have no date for this work but clearly JJP was sympathetic to much of the Quaker ethos. In the late 1830s, his friend, John Eliot Howard edited a magazine, *The Inquirer*, which was primarily addressed to uncertain members of the Society of Friends encouraging them to leave the Quakers and to observe the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the manner of the Brethren.²³ An interesting allusion to JJP's ecclesiastical experiences can be found written in the copy of *The Inquirer* that John Howard gave to Elizabeth Wright forty years

19. See T Cuff and J Brooks, 'An Outline History of Stanford in the Vale' at http://www.stanford-in-the-vale.co.uk/history_schoollib.shtml [accessed 15.8.'07]

20. A. Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, vi.p.104.

21. NPG D11119, NPG 4870, see above n.15.

22. The picture can be bought as a print from <<http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com/a/penstone-john-jewell/swarthmore-hall.html>> [accessed July 2008].

23. See my *Early Brethren and the Society of Friends* (Pinner 1970) 18-19.

before her marriage to JJP.²⁴ In the front of this copy there are two inscriptions. First: ‘Elizth Wright, with J.E. Howard’s kind Christian love March 1841.’ Secondly, in J.J. Penstone’s hand: ‘Afterwards it passed to me. I value these volumes much—but their perusal now awakens many a recollection of sorrowful regret that a movement which was undoubtedly of God should have been taken hold of by men for their own purposes and selfish ends—hence the “Brethren” [*sic*] decay. John Jewell Penstone.’ It seems reasonable to assume that these words were written after the death of JJP’s second wife in the late 1880s or early 1890s. For many years previously he had taken part, albeit with a subdued disappointment,²⁵ in Brethren controversies but the note of disillusion in this later inscription is palpable. Being that little bit younger than the very first Brethren and having sided with Darby in the earliest division he lived to see what he felt was the disintegration of the movement.

Apart from a little pamphlet *Village teachings concerning the Lord Jesus*²⁶ JJP’s non-controversial religious writing was his poetry and with that aspect of the artist we shall conclude this paper. The writer in *Chief Men among the Brethren*, who described JJP as a ‘Christian poet’ believed that his poem ‘The Servant’s Path in a Day of Rejection’ had been ‘of spiritual help to believers in all parts of the world.’ There are two published editions of this poem, but they are only to be found in the Christian Brethren Archive. With such a

24. *The Inquirer* ii (1839). This copy was originally in the library of the late Mr. W.R. Lewis, a former editor of *Echoes of Service*. It is now in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester (Christian Brethren Archive, periodicals)

25. The following items are all (uniquely, I believe) in the CBA, Manchester: [1] *Occasional reflections: chiefly suggested by reading recent bitter and ministerial attacks upon the Brethren* (London [Morrish] 1870) 39pp. CBA 5608 (9); [2] *Notes on passing events (1862-1871)*. [Signed "P"] Reprinted with a few additions. (Manchester [W. Darling] 1871) 32pp. CBA 6102 (23); [3] *Inductive theories of baptism, considered, chiefly in their injury to the present testimony of God* (Stanford-in-the-Vale 1872) 52pp. CBA 1308; [4] *To brethren in Christ* (Stanford-in-the-Vale [Penstone] 1879) 2pp. CBA 230

26. J.J. Penstone, *Village teachings concerning the Lord Jesus* (London, [Morrish] 1874). This is one of the only two pamphlets by Penstone to be found in the British Library.

dearth of surviving copies one wonders, at first, how a poem of this sort can have circulated. It is a very personal poem two (random) verses of which will be sufficient to explain why it was unlikely to find its way into any congregational hymnal—let alone one used by Brethren:

SERVANT of Christ, stand fast amid the scorn
Of men who little know or love thy Lord;
Turn not aside from toil: cease not to warn,
Comfort and teach, trust Him for thy reward;
A few more moments' suffering, and then
Cometh sweet rest from all thy heart's deep pain.

Cleave to the poor, Christ's image in them is.
Count it great honor if they love thee well;
Nought can repay thee after losing this,
Tho' with the wise and wealthy thou shouldst dwell.
Thy Master oftentimes would pass thy door
To hold communion with His much-loved poor.

Even before the advent of photocopying machines, this genre of poem appeared in numerous journals and magazines and probably was repeatedly copied into commonplace books and personal anthologies. Ironically the fullest version to be found on the internet (see Appendix) is on a website associated with the Bible Students'



Fig. 3. John Jewell Penstone, Reading the Word of God, etching.

Association which originated in the work of Charles Taze Russell many of whose followers are known as Jehovah's Witnesses.²⁷ The most important book of poems written and illustrated by John Jewell Penstone is his *Songs of Salvation and Records of Christian Life*.²⁸ It is of interest to readers of this journal for several reasons. One is a little poem entitled 'Neutrality' describing the last interview between George Müller and J.N. Darby in which the former said that he was not prepared to discuss Darby's point of view because of the bad

27. See <<http://www.agsconsulting.com/volumes/htdb0192.htm>> p. 148 [accessed Aug 2007]. Five of the nine verses are available at the website of the Free Church Defence Association, an association defending the separate existence of the Free Church of Scotland, <<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/theword/foundations/foundations7.html>> [accessed Aug 2008]

28. John Jewell Penstone, *Songs of Salvation and Records of Christian Life, illustrated with Etchings on steel by the Author* (Oxford [Shrimpton] 1876).

behaviour of those taking an exclusive position. Penstone's poem appears to accept the tradition that Darby accepted Müller's criticism as valid.

Of rather greater interest is the fact that one of the etchings (see Fig.3) by the author is a picture entitled *Reading the word of God A.D. 1838*. In the picture one can identify J.N. Darby, S.P. Tregelles, Lady Powerscourt and others. This is often assumed to have been a meeting of one of the Powerscourt conferences, but the owners of Powerscourt House in the late 1960s (before Powerscourt was gutted by fire in 1974) assured me that there was no window in the House like the one in the etching.²⁹ The fact that the picture is dated 1838 suggests that the meeting was one of the conferences that took place in a Dublin hotel after 1833. In fact, Lady Powerscourt died in December 1836, so the picture is probably more imaginative than is often supposed. However, the fact that it is the work of John Jewell Penstone gives an added piquancy to the fact that his son produced the only portrait known to us of John Nelson Darby.

Appendix
Servant of Christ
John Jewell Penstone

SERVANT of Christ, stand fast amid the scorn
Of men who little know or love thy Lord;
Turn not aside from toil: cease not to warn,
Comfort and teach, trust Him for thy reward;
A few more moments' suffering, and then
Cometh sweet rest from all thy heart's deep pain.
For grace pray much, for much thou needest grace.
If men thy work deride—what can they more?
Christ's weary foot thy path on earth doth trace;
If thorns wound thee, they pierced Him before;

29. My reference is to the late Mrs Gwen Slazenger who showed me round Powerscourt in the summer of 1968.

Press on, look, tho' clouds may gather round,
Thy place of service He makes hallowed ground.

Have friends forsaken thee, and cast thy name
Out as a worthless thing? Take courage then:
Go tell thy Master, for they did the same
To Him, who once in patience toiled for them;
Yet He was perfect in all service here;
Thou oft hast failed: this maketh Him more dear.

Self-vindication shun; if in the right
What gainest thou by taking from God's hand
Thy cause? If wrong, what dost thou but invite
Satan himself thy friend in need to stand?
Leave all with God; if right, He'll prove thee so;
If not, He'll pardon; therefore to Him go.

Be not men's servant: think what costly price
Was paid that thou might'st His own bondsman be,
Whose service perfect freedom is.
Let this Hold fast thy heart. His claim is great to thee.
None should thy soul enthrall to whom 'tis given
To serve on earth, with liberty of Heaven.

All His are thine to serve: Christ's brethren here
Are needing aid, in them thou servest Him.
The least of all is still His member dear,
The weakest cost His life-blood to redeem.
Yield to no "party" what He rightly claims,
Who on His heart bears all His people's names.

Be wise, be watchful, wily men surround
Thy path. Be careful, for they seek with care
To trip thee up; see that no plea be found
In thee thy Master to reproach. The snare
They set for thee will then themselves enclose
And God His righteous judgment thus disclose.

Cleave to the poor, Christ's image in them is;

Count it great honor if they love thee well;
Nought can repay thee after losing this,
Tho' with the wise and wealthy thou shouldst dwell.
Thy Master oftentimes would pass thy door
To hold communion with His much-loved poor.

The time is short, seek little here below:
Earth's goods would cumber thee and drag thee down.
Let daily food suffice; care not to know
Thought for tomorrow: it may never come.
Thou canst not perish, for Thy Lord is nigh,
And His own care will all thy need supply.

Source: <http://www.agsconsulting.com/volumes/htdb0192.htm>