



George Reginald Balleine: Historian of Anglican Evangelicalism

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ABSTRACT

A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England (1908) by G.R. Balleine (1873–1966) is the classic narrative history of the Anglican evangelical movement, still enduringly popular more than a century after its publication. It has long outlived its author but is usually read without reference to him. This paper examines Balleine's approach to historical research and demonstrates how his personal theological priorities shaped his *History*. In particular, it highlights his concerns in his parish ministry in Bermondsey, south London, for innovative evangelism, political activism and loyal Anglican churchmanship; his disinterest in doctrinal definitions and his abhorrence of ecclesiastical controversy. The paper argues that Balleine's lively account of Anglican evangelicalism's past in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also an apologia and mandate for the future direction of the movement as it entered the twentieth century. It concludes by pointing to the sharp irony that while the *History* has gained a reputation for impeccable evangelical credentials, the historian was on a divergent trajectory away from his evangelical roots.

KEYWORDS: George Reginald Balleine, Bermondsey, Christian socialism, church parties, Church Pastoral Aid Society, evangelicalism, historiography, pacifism

George Reginald Balleine's *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* is the classic narrative history of the Anglican evangelical movement. First published in 1908, when he was 35 years old, the volume went through multiple editions during the twentieth century. Although written for a popular audience it quickly became established as the standard text on this subject, obligatory reading for

evangelical clergy over the next 60 years or more. In 1933, at the time of the Oxford Movement centenary celebrations, the National Church League turned to Balleine's book to provide a historical counterweight to the many Anglo-Catholic histories pouring forth from the press. *The Churchman* admitted that they were losing the propaganda battle because of the dearth of evangelical historians and Balleine stood almost alone in the field.¹ In 1951 the newly formed Church Society (an amalgamation of the National Church League with the Church Association) republished Balleine's text with the narrative brought up to date by the young historical theologian and Anglican minister, Geoffrey Bromiley (later professor of church history at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena). In these post-war decades, Balleine's *History* still attracted an eager following, welcomed as 'a vindication of the historic Evangelical tradition in the Church of England'.²

In recent years several popular historians have come forward to retell Balleine's narrative in the light of new research and developments, principally Kenneth Hylson-Smith's *Evangelicals in the Church of England* (1988), Roger Steer's *Church on Fire* (1998) and Nigel Scotland's *Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age* (2004).³ These authors explicitly see themselves as following in Balleine's footsteps, but despite their best efforts they have failed to supplant Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* in the enduring affections of its loyal evangelical readership. Although the book may no longer appear on theological college reading lists, senior evangelical incumbents continue to recommend Balleine's *History* to young ministry apprentices and ordinands as the best orientation in Anglican evangelical history and priorities. The Church Society planned a twenty-first century edition of this classic work, keeping Balleine's text intact with the narrative brought up to date for a new generation.⁴ More than a century after *A History of the Evangelical Party*

1. *The Churchman* 47 (October 1933), pp. 232–33. See further, Andrew Atherstone, 'Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement Centenary', *Journal of Religious History* 37 (March 2013), pp. 98–117.

2. Frank Colquhoun, 'Note to New Edition', in G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London: Church Book Room Press, new edn, 1951), p. v.

3. Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734–1984* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Roger Steer, *Church on Fire: The Story of Anglican Evangelicals* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998); Nigel Scotland, *Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age 1789–1901* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

4. Information from Lee Gatiss, director of the Church Society, February 2013. Due to high demand, a new edition had been intended in the mid-1970s,

was first published, its influence endures to a remarkable degree inconceivable in 1908.

Balleine's *History* has long outlived its author, and is usually read without reference to him. Nevertheless it is the contention of this paper that the historian and his book belong together. Therefore it first examines Balleine's approach to history, in particular his motives for historical research and writing, and second examines Balleine's approach to evangelicalism, and the way in which his personal theological priorities shaped the way he wrote about the movement. The paper concludes by pointing to a sharp irony – that while his book has increasingly become the preserve of conservative evangelicals in the Church of England today, yet Balleine himself was on a divergent theological trajectory.

Balleine's Approach to History

Balleine's passion for history was nurtured in his youth. As a pupil at Victoria College in Jersey he won the Queen's History Prize in 1890, which came in the form of a complete set of the works of Lord Macaulay, and the following year he went up to Queen's College, Oxford to study Modern History. After graduation he remained at Queen's for an extra year to read theology (having turned down a scholarship at Wycliffe Hall), before ordination in October 1896 to a curacy at Whitechapel, in London's East End.⁵ There he cut his teeth as an author with a pamphlet history of the parish, which originated as a series of parish magazine articles based on his research in the church registers.⁶ Further curacies followed at Hoxton and Penge, followed by four years as assistant and metropolitan secretary of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, based at their national headquarters in Fleet Street. During this period Balleine made the most of opportunities for historical research as he gathered material for his *History of the Evangelical Party*, often spending a day a week at the

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brought up to date by John Reynolds (1919–2009), author of *The Evangelicals at Oxford* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), but it came to nothing. See correspondence between John Reynolds and Michael Benson (secretary of the Church Society), 9 and 13 July 1973, Church Society Archives, Watford.

5. G.R. Balleine, 'Autobiography' (unpublished typescript, c. 1963), pp. 18–19, Société Jersiaise Archives, St Helier, Jersey; 'University Intelligence', *Times*, 24 June 1895, p. 10.

6. G.R. Balleine, *The Story of St Mary Matfelon, the Parish Church of Whitechapel* (London: Free School Press, Whitechapel, 1898).

British Museum library.⁷ During frequent journeys on the London Underground he read through the entire 75 volumes of the *Christian Observer*, the mouthpiece of the Clapham Sect. He also claimed to have consulted more than a thousand eighteenth-century biographies and pamphlets, and made regular use of the church newspapers, *The Record* and *The Guardian*, as well as the secular press from Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool. Balleine acknowledged his 'heavy debt' to previous historians, especially Luke Tyerman, John Overton and Eugene Stock, but at the same time aimed to base every statement on primary source material. His depth of reading (admittedly in printed primary sources rather than unpublished manuscripts) perhaps helps to explain the surprising endurance of his volume, which although written at a popular level was not merely derivative. Balleine asserted:

it is the work of one who is entirely in sympathy with his subject - and without sympathy no true history can be written - but it is not on that account merely a brief for the defence; every effort has been made to discover the actual facts, and nothing has been consciously inserted or suppressed to give a bias to the story.⁸

The book was widely applauded by reviewers. *The Expository Times* called it 'a model denominational history'.⁹ *The Spectator* thought it 'really excellent'.¹⁰ *The Guardian* believed that as a short handbook on Anglican evangelicalism 'nothing could be better'.¹¹ Amongst the author's own constituency, it was praised by *The Record* as 'very useful and impressive',¹² and by *The Church Family Newspaper* as a volume of 'sterling and rare merit' demonstrating 'remarkable literary skill'.¹³ Just a few weeks after his *History* was published, Balleine was inducted in May 1908 as vicar of St James', Bermondsey in south London, a poverty-stricken parish of 17,000 people, part of the newly created diocese of Southwark. For the next thirty years his energies were absorbed in a hectic parochial ministry which allowed very limited opportunity for any writing beyond magazine articles and pamphlets, let alone any time for serious archival research. His only

7. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 21.

8. G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), pp. vi-vii. Subsequent references are to this first edition, unless stated.

9. *The Expository Times* 19 (August 1908), p. 518.

10. *The Spectator* 100 (20 June 1908), p. 981.

11. *The Guardian*, 1 July 1908, p. 1125.

12. *The Record*, 12 June 1908, p. 572.

13. *The Church Family Newspaper*, 5 June 1908, p. 484.

book during those decades was *The Layman's History of the Church of England* (1913), tracing the story of a typical Anglican parish from the Roman invasion to the twentieth century.¹⁴

Despite lack of opportunity as a busy minister, Balleine's hunger for historical research was not dampened. In 1938, aged 65, he retired from the slums of Southwark to the beach paradise of St Brelade's Bay in Jersey. Immediately he threw himself again into historical pursuits. From January 1939 to January 1955, he served as honorary librarian of the Société Jersiaise, the island's historical and archaeological society, and began publishing groundbreaking research papers, such as 'Witch Trials in Jersey' (1939) based on detailed examination of the records of the Royal Court.¹⁵ During the German Occupation of the Channel Islands there were not many visitors to the Société's library, so he redeemed the time by cataloguing its extensive manuscript collection.¹⁶ As a result Balleine emerged from the Second World War with an unparalleled knowledge of Jersey archives, and soon published *A Biographical Dictionary of Jersey* (1948), modelled on the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and *A History of the Island of Jersey* (1950), which both remain standard works.¹⁷ His local research was enhanced by biannual visits to England, where he divided his time between relatives and metropolitan libraries, especially the British Museum, the London Library and the Dr Williams's Library.¹⁸ He also published a historical guide to the island, *The Bailwick of Jersey* (1951), and when he died in January 1966, aged 92, he left behind manuscript biographies of two Jersey personalities, Sir George Carteret and Philippe d'Auvergne, which were posthumously published.¹⁹

14. G.R. Balleine, *The Layman's History of the Church of England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913).

15. G.R. Balleine, 'Witch Trials in Jersey', *Bulletin of the Société Jersiaise* 13 (1939), pp. 379–98.

16. Balleine, 'Autobiography', pp. 44. See also Andrew Atherstone (ed.), 'G.R. Balleine and the Invasion of Jersey: Wartime Letters to his Daughter', *Société Jersiaise Annual Bulletin* (forthcoming, 2013).

17. G.R. Balleine, 'A Dictionary of Jersey Biography', *Bulletin of the Société Jersiaise* 14 (1940), pp. 49–52; idem, *A Biographical Dictionary of Jersey* (London: Staples Press, 1948), now supplemented by Francis L.M. Corbet *et al.*, *A Biographical Dictionary of Jersey*, vol. 2 (St Helier: Société Jersiaise, 1998). G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Island of Jersey from the Cave Men to the German Occupation and After* (London: Staples Press, 1950), now enlarged by Marguerite Syvret and Joan Stevens as *Balleine's History of Jersey* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1981, new edn 1998).

18. Balleine, 'Autobiography', pp. 45, 49.

19. G.R. Balleine, *The Bailwick of Jersey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951); idem, 'Sir George Carteret', *Bulletin of the Société Jersiaise* 17 (1957), pp. 53–64;

This later flowering of Balleine's career as a historian, many years after his *History of the Evangelical Party*, demonstrates both his ability and his priorities in serious archival work when given the opportunity. As he wrote in an article on the Jersey archives: 'Every Historian worth his salt tries to get back to original documents. He knows the danger of trusting the statements of earlier writers. Being only human, they often erred, and he must take care not to perpetuate their mistakes.'²⁰ He was well known in Jersey for his willingness to debunk the Christian legends which had grown up around the island's saints. For example, he declared to the Jersey Society in London, in December 1945 in a paper on 'Falsehoods which Pass as Facts', that it was necessary 'to scrawl "Bosh"' across parts of the standard Jersey narrative, though in so doing 'he felt like a wicked uncle plotting to persuade his nephews and nieces that there isn't any Santa Claus'.²¹ In his *Biographical Dictionary*, Balleine wrote:

The Strip-Jack-Naked School of Biography is detestable, but tombstone eulogy is not biography at all. A true portrait cannot be painted either in tar or whitewash. ... It is impossible to write a Life of Coleridge and ignore the opium, of Bacon and suppress the bribes, of Parnell and say nothing about Mrs O'Shea.²²

He quoted, approving Professor Charles Oman's dictum from *On the Writing of History* (1939), that the conscientious historian 'must not suppress evidence, even when he thinks it a pity that it should have come to light'.²³ Nevertheless, although Balleine may have followed these rules for his *Biographical Dictionary*, it is not clear that he adhered to them when writing about favoured evangelical heroes in his *History of the Evangelical Party*. On the contrary, his biographical pen-portraits in this earlier work had a eulogistic flavour. For example, John Fletcher of Madeley was a man of 'unflinching courage' and Thomas

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idem, 'The Philippe Dauvergne Tragedy', *Bulletin of the Société Jersiaise* 17 (1959), pp. 233–42; idem, *The Tragedy of Philippe d'Auvergne: Vice-Admiral in the Royal Navy and Last Duke of Bouillon* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1973); idem, *All for the King: The Life of Sir George Carteret (1609–1680)* (St Helier: Société Jersiaise, 1976).

20. G.R. Balleine, 'The Archives of Jersey', *Bulletin of the Société Jersiaise* 16 (1955), p. 285.

21. G.R. Balleine, 'Falsehoods which Pass as Facts of Jersey History', *Bulletin of the Jersey Society in London* (January 1946), p. 4.

22. Balleine, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 7.

23. Balleine, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 7, quoting Charles Oman, *On the Writing of History* (London: Methuen, 1939), p. 72.

Scott was a 'rough diamond'. William Champneys was 'an indefatigable worker, who by the charm of his gentle goodness broke down all opposition'. Balleine spoke of the 'brains and brilliancy' of the Clapham Sect, the 'fervent piety and infectious faith' of Bishop Thorold and the 'simple and transparent saintliness' of Bishop Bickersteth.²⁴ The portraits were by no means 'warts and all'. Only occasionally did Balleine allude to events which might be an embarrassment to the evangelical movement, like the charismatic phenomena associated with the preaching of John Berridge of Everton where the congregation succumbed week after week to 'hysterical seizures' and were 'transformed into a company of howling maniacs'.²⁵ Likewise, he addressed the mental illness of William Cowper and the connection of the early Keswick movement to the heterodox Pearsall Smiths, but these were rare admissions of weakness.²⁶ Instead the keynote of Balleine's *History* is the triumphal procession of Anglican evangelicalism amidst much opposition.

Similarly, Balleine was reluctant to point to areas of disagreement or divergence within the evangelical movement itself. He did recount the controversy between Wesleyans and Calvinists in the 1770s over the doctrine of election, and disputes at the British and Foreign Bible Society over the Apocrypha and the inclusion of Unitarians,²⁷ but in general the movement is portrayed as harmonious and homogeneous. Its monolithic nature is reflected in Balleine's choice of title – the evangelical 'party'.²⁸ He observed that 'The *odium theologicum* is the most exasperating and noisy thing in the world',²⁹ and deliberately sought to distance the movement from its reputation for theological controversy, sometimes by sleight of hand by excluding controversialists from the mainstream. Balleine claimed, for example, that the evangelical pugilist Alexander Haldane (editor of *The Record* newspaper) was 'never a typical Evangelical: his dour tone and

24. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 86, 113, 147, 237–38, 281–82.

25. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 100.

26. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 107, 299–305.

27. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 170–71.

28. For reflection on the language of church party, see Arthur Burns (ed.), 'W.J. Conybeare: "Church Parties"', in Stephen Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson: A Church of England Miscellany* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 213–385; Andrew Atherstone, 'Identities and Parties', in Mark Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke and Martyn Percy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2014).

29. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 41.

unceasing controversy were deeply distasteful to many'.³⁰ By casting a veil over internal divisions, Balleine was perhaps consciously modelling himself on the evangelical historian Joseph Milner, whose multi-volume *History of the Church of Christ* (1794–1809) he praised as one of the greatest books the movement had produced. In his own *History*, Balleine noted:

The Church historian as a rule devotes so much of his space to schisms and heresies and more or less unedifying squabbles, that the general impression left on the mind is that the Christians must have been most unpleasant and unreasonable people. Milner determined to write a history of the good which Christianity had accomplished ...³¹

In the same way, Balleine's *History* was a celebration of Anglican evangelical achievements, eschewing possible alternative narratives of division and decline.

Balleine was convinced of the inherent value of historical knowledge for the contemporary world. As he wrote late in life, 'we cannot understand the Present until we understand the Past'.³² He was also determined to use history to serve didactic purposes. The motto on the front-page of his *History of the Evangelical Party* is from the Book of Psalms, 'The Lord hath so done his marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance' (Ps. 111), pointing to the value of historical scholarship as a theological endeavour and an act of Christian discipleship. Each chapter of the book is headed with a verse from the Bible, a method he also adopted for his parish history of Whitechapel but later dropped for his other writings. Balleine was clear about the three-fold purpose of his *History*, which aimed

to arouse interest in a much neglected piece of Church history, to clear away a few of the misconceptions that prevail about the Evangelicals, and to stir some readers to greater earnestness in the service of God, through the example of the good men whose lives are recorded here ...³³

In his wider Christian ministry, Balleine made frequent use of the didactic potential of historical narrative. He published 14 books for Sunday School teachers, each containing a year's lesson plans,

30. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 206.

31. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 76–77.

32. 'From the Editor's Chair', *The Pilot* 4 (May 1950), p. 220. Balleine was the founding editor 1946–50 of *The Pilot*, a monthly magazine for the parishes of Jersey.

33. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. viii.

sometimes pillaging Christian history to convey spiritual truth. For example, *God's Heroes* (1930) included lessons on famous personalities, each with a clear didactic aim – William Lloyd Garrison (aim: 'To show that God still calls us to a brave unpopularity and persecution on behalf of the oppressed'); the Mayflower Pilgrims ('To shame modern slackness and indifference by the story of how the *Mayflower* pilgrims sacrificed everything for their religion'); David Livingstone ('To use the story of Livingstone to arouse interest in Africa and admiration for his dogged perseverance in a difficult task'); Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador ('To show that in the service of Christ all boys and girls can satisfy their passion for adventure').³⁴ With adults, Balleine used a similar strategy, seeking to connect with his parishioners' natural interest in history to draw them towards the Christian church. His parish magazine in Bermondsey was filled with articles on local history and he frequently preached on historical subjects. For example, during Lent 1934 his Sunday evening sermons focused on Christian celebrities with Bermondsey connections, including Robert Browne ('Father of Congregationalism'), James Janeway (puritan author), Joanna Southcott (eighteenth-century prophetess) and Garland Phillips (Victorian missionary martyr).³⁵ In June 1934 there were sermons marking the centenary of the birth of Charles Haddon Spurgeon; and of the courage of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, those 'humble Christian heroes' who 'suffered for righteousness sake', a talk which Balleine also delivered to party activists at the Bermondsey Labour Institute.³⁶ In September 1936 the sermon series was on 'Great Modern Christians' – C.T. Studd, Keir Hardie, Stewart Headlam and William Stead.³⁷ In May 1938, Balleine preached on John Wesley, to mark the bicentenary of his Aldersgate Street conversion.³⁸ That year the National Church League approached Balleine to write a new book on lessons from the Evangelical Revival for the contemporary church, as a companion volume to his *History of the Evangelical Party* from three decades earlier, but he politely

34. G.R. Balleine, *God's Heroes: A Course of 52 Lessons* (London: Home Words, 1930), pp. 39, 91, 107, 207.

35. *Cheerio* 1 (February 1934), p. 3. There is a complete run of *Cheerio* 1934–38 at Southwark Local History Library.

36. *Cheerio* 1 (June 1934), p. 3; *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* 117 (May 1934), p. 9.

37. *Cheerio* 3 (September 1936), p. 3.

38. *Cheerio* 5 (May 1938), pp. 4–5. For Balleine's view of Aldersgate Street as a 'conversion' experience, see *Evangelical Party*, pp. 23–24.

declined the invitation with the excuse that he had not sufficiently kept up his reading.³⁹

Balleine's Approach to Evangelicalism

Balleine's personal evangelical convictions began as an undergraduate at Oxford. During his time as a student he heard many prominent speakers, including William Gladstone and an array of Nonconformist dignitaries in Mansfield College Chapel, but the man who impressed him the most was D.L. Moody of whom he later penned an affectionate portrait in his *History of the Evangelical Party*, hailing him as 'the greatest Evangelist since Whitefield'.⁴⁰ It was Moody, Balleine recalled in his autobiography, who 'made Religion very real to me'.⁴¹ During Moody's third and final preaching tour of Britain, he led a mission in Oxford in November 1892, as Balleine testified:

I saw him holding spell-bound thousands of students in the Corn Exchange. As I left the Hall, he laid his hand on my shoulder and asked, 'Are you a Christian?' Rather indignantly I replied, 'My father is a clergyman'. 'I did not ask about your father's religion', he said, 'I asked about yours'. He was wise enough to leave it at that. He turned away to speak to somebody else. If he had started arguing, I with school-boy bumptiousness would probably have argued back, and all the impression of the meeting would have evaporated. As it was, his one question sent me away very thoughtful.⁴²

Balleine soon adopted a typically Protestant and evangelical framework for interpreting the history of the Church of England, with the high points of divine blessing being the sixteenth-century Reformation and the eighteenth-century Revival.

In his history of Whitechapel, Balleine (as a young curate) was especially eager to teach his congregation that evangelicalism had rescued their parish. He portrayed the eighteenth century as 'the darkest, dullest, dreariest period in the history of the Protestant Church', when there was a succession of Latitudinarian rectors who were 'all head and no heart, intellectually alive but spiritually dead'. Like the prophet Ezekiel, he asked rhetorically, 'Could these dry bones live?'⁴³ The great turning point in Balleine's narrative was the arrival

39. National Church League Literature Committee Minutes (1916–47), 8 March 1938, Lambeth Palace Library, Church Society Papers, CS 67.

40. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 251.

41. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 19.

42. *Cheerio* 4 (February 1937), p. 5.

43. Balleine, *Story of St Mary Matfelon*, pp. 28–29, 33.

of William Champneys in 1837 as the first evangelical rector of Whitechapel who transformed the parish into a model of vibrant worship, missionary enthusiasm, and social and pastoral concern. Balleine told the same story elsewhere on a broader canvas. In his *Layman's History*, the chapter on the eighteenth century is entitled, 'How the Church Went to Sleep', described as 'the dullest and least fruitful' period of Anglican history.⁴⁴ Likewise in his *History of the Evangelical Party* he portrayed Hanoverian England as a den of vice, a land of immorality, cruelty and criminality, with a national church which had lost its way:

Alas! it was the Glacial Epoch in our Church History. Puritan enthusiasm had been driven out at the Restoration, and High Church enthusiasm had departed with the Nonjurors; only the cautious and the colourless remained, Laodiceans, whose ideal Church was neither hot nor cold. ... If we would understand the work of the Great Revival, this dark side of the picture must be constantly kept in mind - a people coarse, brutal, ignorant, and a Church that had forgotten its mission, unspiritual, discredited, useless.⁴⁵

He reiterated: 'morally, spiritually England was perishing, and no man could find the remedy, until the Evangelical teaching swept through the land'.⁴⁶ The most critical review came from *The English Churchman*, a conservative evangelical newspaper published by Anglican Calvinists, which objected especially to Balleine's suggestion that evangelicalism was born in the eighteenth-century Revival. In an echo of debates a century later, in 2008, amongst evangelical historians about the movement's origins, the newspaper maintained emphatically that the roots of evangelicalism stretched back to the sixteenth-century Reformation. Therefore it was false for Balleine to portray evangelicals as 'a mere "Party"', a section amongst sections' in the Church of England, since from a Reformed perspective they had been the only legitimate churchmen since the 1550s.⁴⁷

Balleine's portrayal of Anglican evangelical history was inevitably shaped not only by his understanding of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also by his personal priorities and ambitions for the movement in the early twentieth century. It was not only a

44. Balleine, *Layman's History*, pp. 180, 183.

45. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 16, 21.

46. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 75.

47. *The English Churchman*, 4 June 1908, p. 373. For comparison with recent debates, see Michael A.G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008).

narrative of the evangelical past, but an apologia and mandate for the evangelical future. This is seen in particular by what he says about evangelism, innovation, political activism and loyal Anglican churchmanship.

Evangelism

In his *History of the Evangelical Party*, Balleine asserted that their distinctive contribution to the life of the Church of England was that 'they have taught their brethren to recognise the need of evangelization, the primary importance of home and foreign missions, and the fact that the first duty of a Church is to seek and save the lost'.⁴⁸ His account was dominated by tales of itinerant preaching and missionary endeavour, from Wesley and Whitefield through to Henry Venn and Bishop Hannington. He described the great evangelistic societies of the Victorian age, like the Church Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Colonial and Continental Church Society as 'the peculiar glory of the Evangelical Party'.⁴⁹ His ideal model for evangelism in Britain was, of course, his own society, the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS), of whom he wrote: 'Churchmen gradually awoke to the fact that the grimy alleys of Lancashire needed missionaries just as much as the sunlit isles of the Pacific. As usual, the Evangelicals made the first move.'⁵⁰ Evangelism was a personal priority for Balleine. On his first Sunday as vicar of St James', Bermondsey in May 1908 he preached on the parable of the lost sheep (Lk. 15), exhorting his congregation to work together 'to bring back the lost: the Master is looking to us to do it'.⁵¹ He described south London as home to 'two million souls whom the devil is daily trying to drag down to perdition' and who must be won for Christ by those who 'know the meaning of the Cross and can witness to its power'.⁵²

Balleine viewed the CPAS as the most constructive way to promote the gospel in the Church of England by funding lay evangelists and Bible teachers in some of the poorest districts, and his own parish was heavily subsidized by the society.⁵³ In his *History*, he contrasted its work

48. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 314.

49. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 159.

50. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 176.

51. *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder*, 23 May 1908, p. 5.

52. G.R. Balleine, 'The Story of South London', *Church and People* 18 (November 1906), pp. 176, 180.

53. 'A Visit to St James', Bermondsey', *Church and People* 20 (March 1909), pp. 270-74.

favourably with that of the militant and litigious Church Association, of whom he was especially critical. While the Church Association fought ritualism in the courts, the CPAS, according to Balleine, had a wiser policy of 'doing good, rather than preventing evil'.⁵⁴ He was at pains to convince his Edwardian readers that the violent anti-Catholicism of the Church Association was not typical of the evangelical movement. Indeed, he argued that a proper reading of history showed that Anglican evangelicals 'far from being narrow-minded bigots ... were often unexpectedly broadminded'. When 'the Protestant drum was beating wildly' against Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s, Balleine's chosen evangelicals voted in favour.⁵⁵ When there was a furore against the Oxford Movement and especially Newman's *Tract 90* in the 1840s, Balleine tried to show that evangelicals had very little to do with the outcry, which was led instead by 'High Churchmen' like Charles Golightly and 'Broad Churchmen' like A.C. Tait.⁵⁶ He also emphasized that it was the ritualists who first took evangelicals to court, not *vice versa*, and that evangelicals spent much of the Victorian period on the defensive (as in the Gorham Case) not attacking others.⁵⁷

Balleine's protestations in his *History* could not hide his obvious embarrassment that Anglican evangelicalism by the early twentieth century had a reputation more for destructive theological combat than sacrificial missionary enterprise. At the golden jubilee celebrations of the London College of Divinity in 1913, speaking on 'The Future of the Evangelical Party', he struck out at what he called 'a mere negative Protestantism':

We are proud of the name Protestant. We are never going to abandon it. But yet we recognise the fact that there are many types of Protestant with whom we should not like to be identified. When we look at the great continental Protestant Churches, and see how cold and arid and powerless their Protestantism has become, we realise that Protestantism divorced from Evangelicalism is a very unattractive thing.⁵⁸

Balleine's *History* sought to redress the balance in public perceptions. He reiterated that although anti-Catholicism and anti-ritualism occupied

54. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 299, quoting *The Record*, 12 August 1892.

55. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 210.

56. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 218.

57. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 219, 229.

58. G.R. Balleine, 'The Future of the Evangelical Party', *The Johnian* no. 20 (January 1914), p. 13; copy at St John's College Archives, University of Birmingham Special Collections, SJC 1/1/2/2/2. I am grateful to Alan Munden for drawing this important article to my attention.

considerable space in the newspapers, it was not prominent in the thoughts of most evangelicals for whom evangelism remained the single top priority: 'Their chief controversy was still the old one with indifference and sin. For every hour they might spend in discussing rites and rubrics, they spent weeks in earnest efforts to win the souls of men.'⁵⁹ The postscript to the 1911 edition of his *History* again censured the Church Association for its 'fruitless policy' of fighting ritualism through parliament and derided the anti-Catholic campaigns of John Kensit, 'a Protestant agitator of the most violent and extreme type'. Instead Balleine celebrated the formation in 1906 of the National Church League as a sign of hope for the future because it encouraged Anglican evangelicals to be 'constructive and educational, rather than controversial'.⁶⁰

Balleine's evangelistic priorities and his abhorrence of theological polemic shaped his ministry in Bermondsey. In his magazine history of the parish, he spoke with disgust of the 'terrific fights' between evangelicals and ritualists in the 1870s. He contrasted the ministries of his two immediate predecessors: the pugnacious Protestantism of William Allan (vicar 1874–93) and the quiet conciliation of Ernest Coulthard (vicar 1893–1908). While Allan favoured the Church Association and the Protestant Reformation Society, Coulthard was 'an Evangelical of a more modern type', who, like Balleine, had once been metropolitan secretary of the CPAS.⁶¹ Balleine's concern was to reach every parishioner, regardless of ecclesiastical tastes. He explained that his church welcomed everyone and was committed to no peculiar doctrines:

St James' is neither 'High' nor 'Low' Church. We ignore squabbles, which were out of date before Victoria died. While proud to be part of the Church of England, we feel nothing but friendliness for all who prefer to belong to other groups. Our Prayer Book teaches that the Church is confined to no one sect, but is 'the blessed company of ALL faithful people.' We stress no disputable dogmas.⁶²

Later he wrote: 'I loathe religious controversy. I have knelt at High Mass in Spanish cathedrals and in Breton fishing-villages, and I have

59. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 236.

60. G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., cheap edn 1911), pp. 208, 211.

61. 'A History of our Parish: The Redoubtable Dr Allan', *Cheerio* 3 (June 1936), pp. 9–12; (July 1936), pp. 7–10; 'A History of our Parish: Pulling Against the Tide', *Cheerio* 3 (September 1936), pp. 9–13.

62. *Cheerio* 1 (January 1934), p. 1.

sung Sankey and Moody in undenominational Mission Halls; and I have never yet found any form of sincere Religious Service that I could not enjoy and profit by.⁶³ Like the heroes of his *History*, Balleine preferred conciliation to doctrinal combat because evangelism was his overarching priority.

Innovation

In his *History of the Evangelical Party*, as in his history of Whitechapel parish, Balleine emphasized the high degree of originality and innovation in the evangelistic methods and parochial organisation of the evangelical movement.⁶⁴ It was a subject close to his heart. At the London College of Divinity jubilee he warned the gathered clergy especially against an attitude of ‘conservatism’:

Have you noticed how in the early days the Evangelical Party was always the party of daring and startling innovations? Hymn singing! ... Evening Services! ... Open-air preaching, lay preaching, deaconesses and Bible women, what an outcry there was against them! ... Bold, courageous pioneering work is the Evangelical tradition. If any party becomes identified merely with the preservation of the *status quo*, merely with the making of carping criticisms against those who are trying new methods for the salvation of souls, that party will attract a certain number of suburban spinsters and retired colonels, but it will lose the young life on which the future depends. Let us not be forgetful to entertain strangers – unfamiliar thoughts, unfamiliar methods, unfamiliar ideals – ‘for thereby some have entertained angels unawares’.⁶⁵

In his own ministry, Balleine was a champion of experimentation and innovation. In 1907 he persuaded the CPAS committee to invest in a cinematograph, newly invented technology, and began to make films to illustrate the society’s work.⁶⁶ In Bermondsey he was always eager ‘to try new experiments’ in order to attract people to church.⁶⁷ He pioneered ‘lantern services’ and ‘gramophone sermons’, using illustration and music to bring variety and creativity to public worship. Balleine had a special arrangement with Newton & Co., lantern-slide manufacturers in Covent Garden – he was allowed to borrow slides free of charge from their stock, and in return Newton & Co. sent a stenographer to record Balleine’s talks, which were then

63. ‘Ourselves’, *Cheerio* 5 (January 1938), p. 18.

64. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 240–50.

65. Balleine, ‘Future of the Evangelical Party’, pp. 12–13.

66. Balleine, ‘Autobiography’, p. 23.

67. ‘A History of our Parish: Our Own Times’, *Cheerio* 3 (October 1936), p. 14.

published and sold as a package to other ministers across the country, running eventually to ten volumes. He also experimented with other visual aids. One of his lay-readers built a full-size model of the Mosaic Tabernacle in the chancel of St James' Church, from which the vicar drew lessons for the congregation.⁶⁸

Liturgically, Balleine was an innovator. He was glad when the revised *Book of Common Prayer* was rejected by the House of Commons in 1927 because he feared the bishops might have attempted to dragoon the church into 'a rigid and wooden uniformity' when what Anglicans most needed was 'at least twenty years of bold experiment and infinite variety'.⁶⁹ When he asked on one occasion for ideas to make his evening services more appealing, the most popular suggestion was for a gallery or the back pews to be reserved for men to smoke their pipes, while others wanted sermons on economics, ethics and philosophy, and the Old Testament lesson to be dropped in favour of something from Carlyle or Ruskin.⁷⁰ His Sunday evening sermons were especially innovative. On regular Question Sundays the vicar aimed to answer from the pulpit questions sent in by the congregation. Sometimes he preached on Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or sketched the imaginary adventures of a Bermondsey man who tried to obey the Sermon on the Mount.⁷¹ On one occasion the whole service was given to a dramatic reading of the book of Job, with the leading part taken by a member of the Bermondsey Repertory Company.⁷² In 1935 he read a serial story imagining what Bermondsey would be like in the year 2035 if current trends went unchecked.⁷³ In February 1938 he dedicated the evening services to a discussion of the recently published report, *Doctrine in the Church of England*.⁷⁴

Balleine's parish magazine played a central role in his attempts to make the church more attractive. In 1934 he abandoned the typically

68. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 29.

69. *St James' Bermondsey Parish Magazine* (January 1928), London Metropolitan Archives, St James' Bermondsey Papers, uncatalogued, accession reference B08/175 (2008).

70. 'Smoking in Church: Startling Ideas for More Popular Services', *Daily News*, 15 April 1919, p. 5. For a similar parochial questionnaire, see 'What Do You Want?', *Cheerio* 1 (May 1934), p. 3; 'Last Month's Question Paper', *Cheerio* 1 (June 1934), pp. 4–6; 'Teaching the Parson his Job', *Cheerio* 1 (July 1934), pp. 3–4.

71. *Cheerio* 1 (August 1934), p. 3; *Cheerio* 2 (March 1935), pp. 3–4.

72. *Cheerio* 4 (September 1937), pp. 4–5.

73. *Cheerio* 2 (May 1935), p. 3; (June 1935), pp. 3–4; 'The Sleeper Awakes', *Cheerio* 2 (May–October 1935).

74. 'What C. of E. Stands For', *Cheerio* 5 (February 1938), pp. 16–18.

dull news-sheet and launched *Cheerio*, delivered monthly, *gratis*, to every home in the parish by a team of 40 volunteers.⁷⁵ It soon grew to 26 pages, within coloured covers, with most of the matter provided by the vicar himself giving full rein to his gifts as a humorist and raconteur. It contained quizzes, brain teasers, witty proverbs and poems. Balleine reviewed religious programmes on the wireless, films at the local cinema, and new books in the Bermondsey public library. He wrote dozens of articles on subjects of local interest, such as Bermondsey history, surnames, street names, former celebrities and prominent residents.⁷⁶ His series on popular superstitions was republished as a booklet by the Church Assembly.⁷⁷ His serial story of Joanna Southcott, 'our dumpy little Bermondsey Prophetess',⁷⁸ later formed the basis of one of Balleine's final books, *Past Finding Out: The Tragic Story of Joanna Southcott and her Successors* (1956).⁷⁹ *Cheerio* was reckoned by the *Southwark Diocesan Gazette* to be the best parish magazine in the diocese and it was often quoted in the secular press, making Balleine something of a local celebrity in his own right.⁸⁰

Between 1933 and 1938 Balleine experimented with plays at Christmas and Easter as an evangelistic initiative, written and directed by himself, and performed by the congregation. They were impressive productions which drew crowds from all parts of London and attracted considerable press attention. Although St James' Church seated 1,600 people, they had to turn hundreds away each night.⁸¹ The Nativity Play of January 1934 involved a cast of two hundred from old age pensioners to young children.⁸² Yet dramatic portrayals of gospel narrative were not without controversy, as Dorothy Sayers was to discover in 1942 when the BBC broadcast of *The Man Born to Be*

75. *Cheerio* 1 (December 1934), p. 3; 'Ourselves', *Cheerio* 5 (January 1938), pp. 17–19.

76. For example, 'Our Fellow Parishioners', *Cheerio* 1 (February–April 1934).

77. 'Are You Superstitious?', *Cheerio* 4 (January–April 1937), republished as G.R. Balleine, *What Is Superstition? A Trail of Unhappiness* (London: Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly, 1939).

78. 'Religious Imposters', *Cheerio* 4 (December 1937), p. 14.

79. 'Mother of Shiloh: A True Story', *Cheerio* 5 (February–December 1938). For Balleine's contribution to Southcottian historiography, see Philip Lockley, 'Histories of Heterodoxy: Shifting Approaches to a Millenarian Tradition in Modern Church History', in Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (eds.), *The Church on its Past*, Studies in Church History 49 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), pp. 377–88.

80. *Southwark Diocesan Gazette* 18 (September 1937), p. 140.

81. *Cheerio* 1 (January 1934), p. 3.

82. *Cheerio* 1 (February 1934), p. 4.

King caused a furore because of its regional accents and departure from the Authorised Version.⁸³ Balleine's Easter Play for 1936, *The Empty Tomb*, was permitted by the Southwark diocesan censors, but his Passion Play for 1937, *At the Foot of the Cross*, was forbidden as inappropriate to be performed in church and never saw the light of day. He thought this censorship a mistake, since no Holy Week service was likely to attract half as many people to hear the story of the cross.⁸⁴

Towards the end of his time at Bermondsey, Balleine experimented with 'healing services' led by John Maillard of Milton Abbey in Dorset, an Anglican pioneer of 'healing missions', author of *Healing in the Name of Jesus* (1936) and *Miracles of Faith* (1938). There were seven services between October and December 1937, and a further three in Lent 1938. St James' Church was filled to overflowing and long processions of sick people approached the communion rail where Maillard laid hands on each one and prayed for them. At one service he ministered to over four hundred, praying for the first at 8.20 pm and the last at 10.45 pm. There were testimonies of healing from illnesses such as curvature of the spine, haemorrhage, failing eye sight and depression, though Balleine himself remained circumspect about whether miracles had occurred. He was, however, clear that healing services were 'wonderfully successful in reaching non-churchgoers', some of whom had never attended church or not for many years.⁸⁵ He reflected: 'New methods had to be found, if the parish was to grow interested. ... We had to go on trying to find how to get working folk interested enough in the Christian message to become regular church-goers.'⁸⁶

Political Activism

A third prominent emphasis in Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* was the engaged political activism of the Anglican evangelical movement. William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury figure prominently in the

83. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ* (London: Gollancz, 1943).

84. *Cheerio* 4 (February 1937), pp. 5–6. The original typescripts of Balleine's plays were given by his son-in-law to St James', Bermondsey in 1968 but are now lost.

85. 'Spiritual Healing', *Cheerio* 4 (October 1937), pp. 11–13; *Cheerio* 4 (November 1937), pp. 3–4; 'Our Healing Services', *Cheerio* 4 (December 1937), pp. 9–12; *Cheerio* 5 (February 1938), p. 4; *Cheerio* 5 (March 1938), p. 4.

86. Balleine, 'Autobiography', pp. 28, 34.

narrative as models to follow. In particular, Balleine celebrated that the Clapham Sect had rescued evangelicalism from 'a weak and selfish pietism' by its campaigns for 'strong, enduring, masculine results' in social transformation.⁸⁷ Again, this portrayal of evangelical history mirrored Balleine's personal priorities. At the London College of Divinity in 1913 he spoke against 'feeble and unpractical pietism':

There are too many Churchmen today, who hold the heresy of Plymouth [Brethren], that Christian men ought to have nothing at all to do with politics. Our Evangelical fathers did not believe that. They were not content to nurse their own personal spiritual life in prayer meetings and Bible readings. But in the strength gained by communion with God in these ways they advanced to grapple with great public questions, great political questions, the prohibition of the slave trade, the abolition of slavery, the passing of the factory acts, and they never rested until they had compelled reluctant governments to act righteously. Men spoke of the 'bray of Exeter Hall', but though they sneered at it, they feared it. I would to God that we could hear more of that bray today.⁸⁸

Balleine himself was deeply engaged politically. In his own words, he was an 'avowed Socialist', a rare breed amongst the ranks of the evangelical clergy in the early twentieth century.⁸⁹ As an Oxford undergraduate he joined the local branch of Scott Holland's Christian Social Union.⁹⁰ He organized meetings for Keir Hardie in several colleges and drove him around Oxfordshire in a sweep's cart to speak on village greens.⁹¹ As a curate in Whitechapel Balleine joined Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and at election time put a card in the window of the Clergy House which read, 'Vote Socialist', to the consternation of his colleagues. A shocked fellow evangelical curate complained to the rector and had it removed, and it was probably because of his political convictions that Balleine was asked to leave the parish in 1898 when there was a change of incumbent.⁹²

A quarter of a century later, Balleine was a founder member of the Society of Socialist Christians (SSC), launched in February 1924 and affiliated to the Labour Party. Its aim was to establish 'the Kingdom of

87. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 146.

88. Balleine, 'Future of the Evangelical Party', p. 13.

89. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 20.

90. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 19.

91. 'Our New Aldermen', *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* 123 (December 1934), p. 4.

92. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 20.

God on Earth' by the 'spiritual and economic emancipation' of Christ's people. It rejected capitalism as 'fundamentally anti-Christian' and looked for the creation of 'an International Socialist order' which would bring an end to industrial exploitation and class struggle.⁹³ Balleine served on the SSC's central committee for the eight years of its existence, alongside political activists from diverse denominational backgrounds, including Albert Belden and Somerville Hastings (Congregationalists), Theodore Harris (Quaker) and Reginald Sorensen (Unitarian). In the society's journal, *The Crusader*, Balleine spoke of 'the Antichrist of Capitalism' and denounced the 'smug self-satisfied bourgeois organisations which call themselves "the Churches"', some of which he believed had forfeited the right to be known as Christians. He saw it as the primary social function of the church 'to tackle boldly every form of hunger, ill-health and oppression'.⁹⁴ He acknowledged that the theological opinions of the Bolsheviks were 'deplorable', but according to the New Testament test, 'By their fruits ye shall know them', he suggested in 1925 that 'the most Christian Government in the world today is that of Soviet Russia'.⁹⁵ When the SSC merged in September 1932 with the Christian Socialist Crusade to form the Socialist Christian League, Balleine again served on its inaugural council, under the presidency of George Lansbury (leader of the Labour Party).⁹⁶

Balleine's immediate predecessor at St James', Bermondsey, Ernest Coulthard, had been elected to the borough council in 1903 as an Independent candidate. In theory, Balleine admitted, there were good reasons for a clergyman to keep free from party ties, but in practice it was almost impossible for Independents to make an impact in modern politics. Coulthard himself confessed that he had 'accomplished little'.⁹⁷ Therefore Balleine's strategy was to identify himself fully with

93. 'The Society of Socialist Christians', *The Crusader* 6 (15 February 1924), p. 15; 'The Society of Socialist Christians', *The Crusader* 6 (18 April 1924), p. 16.

94. G.R. Balleine, 'Studies in the Copec Reports: Social Function of the Church', *The Crusader* 6 (18 July 1924), pp. 4–5.

95. G.R. Balleine, 'What Red Russia Has Done for Women', *The Crusader* 7 (25 September 1925), p. 611. For Balleine's later criticism of the Communist Party's atheism, see 'The New Non-Christian Religions: Communism', *Cheerio* 4 (May 1937), pp. 19–22; 'What Is Communism?', *The Pilot* 2 (April 1948), pp. 233–34; 'From the Editor's Chair', *The Pilot* 2 (May 1948), pp. 247–48.

96. 'The Socialist Christian League Conference', *The Socialist Christian* 3 (November 1932), pp. 167–68.

97. 'A History of our Parish: Pulling against the Tide', *Cheerio* 3 (September 1936), p. 13.

the Labour Party, which was increasingly dominant in Bermondsey after the First World War. He stood as a Labour candidate for the borough council in 1909 and for London County Council in 1922, both times unsuccessfully, but was elected by the borough council in 1934 as an alderman.⁹⁸ He threw himself into committee work, helping to oversee schools, libraries, maternity and child welfare, the beautification of the local neighbourhood, road safety, employment advice and public health.⁹⁹ Balleine hosted an annual Trade Union service each Industrial Sunday when the local Unions marched to St James' Church behind their banners. He also contributed regular articles to the local Labour Party magazines on subjects like 'Proletarian Virtues' and 'What Socialism Means to Me'.¹⁰⁰

Balleine insisted that his political activism was 'all work quite consistent with that of a parson',¹⁰¹ indeed his Christian duty. He believed it was the church's obligation 'to try to make the world happier', so it was fitting for a clergyman to serve as a Labour Party alderman.¹⁰² Yet not all his parishioners agreed. Some were offended when Balleine backed Bermondsey borough council's refusal to contribute in May 1935 towards King George V's silver jubilee celebrations.¹⁰³ One angrily told him to keep *Cheerio* 'free of party propaganda' and reminded him that 'No man can serve two masters'; but the vicar was unrepentant, arguing that 'religion covers every department of human life'.¹⁰⁴ He was eager to teach his congregation that Christian convictions have political implications. His parish magazine urged readers to the polls at election time to vote for candidates most likely to help children, the sick and the poor; and he instructed them that 'You are a rotten citizen, if you do not vote'.¹⁰⁵

98. 'Rotherhithe L.C.C. Candidates', *The Bermondsey Labour News* 21 (December 1921); 'Our New Aldermen', *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* 123 (December 1934), p. 4.

99. *Cheerio* 1 (December 1934), p. 4; *Cheerio* 3 (September 1936), p. 5; 'In the Council Chamber', *Cheerio* 3 (October 1936), pp. 5-6; *Cheerio* 4 (December 1937), p. 5.

100. G.R. Balleine, 'Some Proletarian Virtues', *Rotherhithe Labour Magazine* 1 (March-July 1934); idem, 'What Socialism Means to Me', *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* 137 (March 1936), pp. 12-13.

101. Balleine, 'Autobiography', p. 36.

102. *Cheerio* 1 (December 1934), p. 4.

103. *Cheerio* 2 (June 1935), p. 4.

104. 'Should a Vicar Keep Out of Politics?', *South London Press*, 31 May 1935, p. 2.

105. *Cheerio* 1 (March 1934), p. 4; (November 1934), p. 3; *Cheerio* 4 (March 1937), p. 4.

Again he turned to Christian history to teach the lesson. For example, the church play of summer 1934 was entitled *A Tree Is Known by its Fruits*, seeking to answer the question, 'Is Christianity any Good?' Performed over six evenings in the open-air on the steps of St James' Church, in front of a crowd sometimes numbering three thousand adults and their numerous children, the play illustrated the ways in which the Christian gospel had transformed British society through the abolition of human sacrifice and slavery, better conditions for climbing boys and children in the mines and mills, and the foundation of schools and hospitals. Nineteenth-century evangelical philanthropy played a prominent part in the narrative, and Balleine's energetic young curate, A.H. Gosney, performed the star role as William Wilberforce.¹⁰⁶

One specific outworking of Balleine's Christian social conscience was his pacifism, which took firmer shape after he went as an SSC delegate to the War Danger Conference of the No More War Movement in 1927.¹⁰⁷ In the nationwide Peace Ballot of 1934–35, Balleine gave his parishioners advice on how to vote. He uttered 'an emphatic NO' to the question of whether military sanctions should be employed to stop one nation attacking another: 'The method of War is in itself wrong. To make War in order to stop War is surely calling in Satan to cast out Satan. To anyone who accepts the teaching of Christ military measures of any kind are absolutely forbidden.'¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere he wrote, 'War does not cease to be sin, because you rename it Sanctions.'¹⁰⁹ After the Italian invasion of Abyssinia he likened Mussolini to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8), with the League of Nations and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in the guise of

106. *Cheerio* 1 (May 1934), p. 4; (July 1934), p. 4. See also the programme for the Open Air Play, with details of the cast, bound with copies of *Cheerio* in the London Metropolitan Archives.

107. G.R. Balleine, 'Two Days with the War Resisters: A Personal Impression', *The Crusader* 9 (2 December 1927), pp. 767–68; idem, 'Some Perplexities of a Would-be Pacifist', *The Crusader* 9 (16 December 1927), pp. 786–87. On the background, see Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Clive Barrett, 'Pacifism in the Church of England 1930–1937' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1997).

108. 'The Peace Ballot', *Cheerio* 2 (February 1935), p. 9; reprinted as 'Your Duty to Save England from War', *Rotherhithe Labour Magazine* 2 (February 1935), p. 6; *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* 125 (February 1935), pp. 11. See further, Martin Ceadel, 'The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934–5', *English Historical Review* 95 (July 1980), pp. 810–39.

109. *Cheerio* 2 (October 1935), p. 4.

the scribes and Pharisees demanding the sinner's punishment. He believed Jesus' words to the beleaguered Ethiopian would be: 'Resist not him that is evil. If any man will take away thy copper mines, let him have thy oil fields too.'¹¹⁰ Balleine reiterated: 'no one who has read the Gospels can doubt that our Lord was a Pacifist. ... It is equally clear that He commanded His disciples to practise Pacifism in its extremist form.' He believed the doctrine of a 'just war' was 'a gross act of Apostacy', which must be utterly repudiated by the churches, and that the existence of army chaplains made a mockery of the gospel. He warned young men in his parish that 'to join the army is to renounce Christianity, to act in open defiance of the teaching of Christ'.¹¹¹ On Remembrance Sunday 1936, St James', Bermondsey held its annual memorial service for members of the Young Men's Bible Class who fell during the Great War. That evening Balleine arranged a 'No More War Service', when he spoke on lessons from the Spanish civil war and men in the congregation were invited to sign Dick Sheppard's Peace Pledge.¹¹² He was part of a small delegation, alongside Sheppard, who went to Lambeth Palace to engage the archbishop on the question.¹¹³ St James' Church was affiliated to the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Peace Council, and Balleine encouraged his parishioners to attend local peace rallies and conventions.¹¹⁴ He was clear that should London be blitzed by the Luftwaffe, it was wrong for Christians to operate anti-aircraft guns or search lights, because the Bible's command 'Thou shalt not kill' was 'absolutely binding'.¹¹⁵ He retired from Bermondsey in November 1938 confident that safety had been secured by the Munich Agreement,¹¹⁶ but his parish was decimated in the wartime bombardment and the next vicar and his wife narrowly survived when one of Hitler's doodle-bugs destroyed the vicarage in June 1944.¹¹⁷

In his *History of the Evangelical Party*, Balleine championed the impressive record of the Anglican evangelical movement in the

110. 'Christ and Mussolini', *Cheerio* 3 (February 1936), p. 9.

111. 'Are We Heretics?', *Cheerio* 3 (May 1936), pp. 9–10.

112. *Cheerio* 3 (November 1936), p. 4.

113. 'Bearding the Archbishop', *Cheerio* 4 (January 1937), pp. 7–8.

114. *Cheerio* 4 (September 1937), p. 4; *Cheerio* 5 (April 1938), p. 3; (May 1938), p. 3.

115. *Cheerio* 5 (April 1938), p. 5.

116. 'War or Peace?', *Cheerio* 5 (October 1938), p. 7.

117. Unpublished letter from W.R. Buckett (vicar of St James', Bermondsey 1939–44) to *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 1964, London Metropolitan Archives, St James' Bermondsey Papers, uncatalogued, accession reference B08/175 (2008).

political realm: 'though Churchmen of other schools have done much for social improvement, there is no party that can show such a splendid record of Christian Socialism as that which boasts the three names of Wilberforce, Buxton, Shaftesbury'.¹¹⁸ Whether these three philanthropists would have welcomed being labelled as Christian Socialists is doubtful, to say the least! Balleine drew a veil over Shaftesbury's opinion that Socialism and Chartism were the 'two great demons in morals and politics ... stalking through the land'.¹¹⁹ He offered no criticism of their Tory paternalism, as heard in the nineteenth century from anti-evangelical radicals like William Cobbett and Sydney Smith and in the twentieth century from historians like Charles Raven and Ford K. Brown.¹²⁰ Balleine had nothing but praise for these evangelical politicians and resolved the dilemma in his own mind by concluding that his hero Shaftesbury was not a typical Tory: 'By birth an aristocrat to his finger-tips ... by training a Tory of the straitest school, he spent his life fighting for causes which his party and his class despised'.¹²¹

Anglican Churchmanship

Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* focused exclusively upon the Church of England, and he was at pains to point out the loyalty of the evangelical movement to the national church. It was written with a view not only to an evangelical readership, but also their Anglican critics. For example, the early Methodists, according to Balleine, were remarkably devoted to the Church of England and Wesley's meeting houses were 'never intended to be rivals of the parish church'. Likewise William Grimshaw of Haworth, though an itinerant preacher who transgressed parish boundaries, was 'a strong Churchman'.¹²² In a rare criticism of the movement, Balleine argued that late-Victorian evangelicals were badly mistaken in refusing to attend the annual Church Congresses in preference for their own Clerical and Lay Associations, which were 'poor substitutes for the bolder policy of regularly taking part in all ruridecanal and diocesan

118. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 192.

119. [Lord Shaftesbury], 'Infant Labour', *Quarterly Review* 67 (December 1840), p. 180.

120. See, for example, Charles Raven, *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854* (London: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 7-15; Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 111-13.

121. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 190.

122. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 42, 46, 71.

and general Church gatherings'. Nevertheless he applauded the fact that even when faced by ritualism rampant, the Anglican evangelicals 'never dreamed of deserting the ship, even when she seemed to be driving straight upon the rocks'.¹²³ Unlike the hundreds of Tractarian clergy who joined the Church of Rome in the last half of the nineteenth century, Balleine could think of only two notable evangelical seceders, a polemical contrast now more difficult to sustain since the recent research of Grayson Carter.¹²⁴

Once again, this historical portrait was a reflection of Balleine's own ecclesiological priorities. In 1913 he warned the clergy of the London College of Divinity that although Anglican evangelicalism had once been particularly strong in Yorkshire during the early days of the Revival, it was now almost non-existent in that region because they had failed to invest sufficiently in the Church of England. He continued:

Some of the Evangelicals of the past, with all their splendid earnestness in making people Christians, made them Christians of such a vague, indefinite, undenominational type, that whole congregations of them were lost to the Church altogether, and the harvest of much of that noble work has been reaped by other denominations. Is that not a danger that we see still? If we want Evangelicalism to be a power in our own Church in the future, we must make not only Evangelical Christians, but Evangelical Churchmen. We must leave undenominational missions to Undenominationalists. We must give our work, our money, our influence to the work of our own Church.¹²⁵

Balleine himself was personally committed to the future of the Church of England. He was a firm believer in the parish system, insisting that all who lived within the parish boundaries 'have the right to claim St James' as their own, and we claim the privilege of being allowed to minister to them'.¹²⁶ He also invested his energies in wider ecclesiastical affairs and in 1923 the Bishop of Southwark appointed him as rural dean of Bermondsey. Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* was explicitly a denominational history, from which Nonconformity was almost entirely excluded. It was intended not only as a survey of the past, but also as an eirenic contribution to contemporary debates in the early twentieth century about Anglicanism's identity and future.

123. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 233, 273.

124. Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c.1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

125. Balleine, 'Future of the Evangelical Party', p. 14.

126. *Cheerio* 2 (January 1935), p. 1.

Balleine's Theological Trajectory

Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* is strongly narrative-driven, with lively story-telling and numerous potted biographies, but little sustained analysis. He focused on evangelical personalities, but not on their publications nor on their doctrinal positions. His key concern was to illustrate evangelicalism's historic passion for evangelism and social engagement, not to expound their dogmas. By comparison with the Bebbington Quadrilateral, for example, Balleine says a great deal about conversionism and activism, but almost nothing about biblicism and crucicentrism.¹²⁷ He summarized the evangelical message concerning the Bible and the Atonement in the book's last three pages, out of a total of more than three hundred, but barely touched the topic in his historical survey. Even this summary is cast in the broadest terms:

Their plea has been that Christian teaching must be tested by the New Testament, not by any nebulous formula known as 'Catholic truth'; nor have they attributed to German Professors an infallibility which they have declined to acknowledge in the Pope. They have never allowed men to lose sight of the inspired Scriptures through interest in the speculations of later Christian ages.¹²⁸

Christianity is a religion of Redemption ... the Atonement is the very foundation doctrine of the faith ... Calvary is the only spot from which a true view of Sinai and Bethlehem and Olivet can be obtained. 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus' - this is the Evangel, the Good News from which they obtained their name.¹²⁹

Balleine gave no further detail concerning evangelical teaching on the inspiration of Scripture or the mechanism of the Atonement. This was in part an inevitable result of his policy not to examine intra-evangelical controversies. Yet it also enabled his book to win a wide readership throughout the diverse Anglican evangelical constituency. He had the good fortune to be writing before the polarizing splits between conservative and liberal evangelicals in the 1920s, and therefore was not forced to reveal his personal theological allegiances. By contrast, Leonard Elliott-Binns' *The Evangelical Movement in the English Church* (1928), two decades after Balleine, more explicitly

127. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 1-17.

128. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, pp. 314-15.

129. Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, p. 315.

favoured the liberal evangelical position which limited the book's circulation.¹³⁰

Balleine's theological position is difficult to pin down with accuracy, perhaps because of a deliberate caution or ambiguity in his writing. It is evident, however, that he was on a trajectory away from his evangelical roots and by the end of his life had come to abandon the evangelical position altogether. At the London College of Divinity in 1913 he warned of the danger that evangelicals might identify themselves with the Broad Church Party, on a common Protestant platform, in opposition to ritualism:

I believe that Evangelicals by all their traditions are as absolutely distinct from the Broad Church Party as they are from the extremist Ritualist. And if I have to join hands with any body, I feel much more at home with a Ritualist, full of devotion to our Lord and the historic Creed of Christendom, than with an Arian or semi-Socinian, who denies the Virgin Birth and the Bodily Resurrection, even though he takes the North End position at the Holy Communion.¹³¹

Yet towards the end of his long life, Balleine himself publicly denied the bodily resurrection of Christ.

His rejection of evangelical orthodoxies was increasingly apparent as he sought to reach out to modern sceptics in Bermondsey. For example, at the launch of *Cheerio* he declared on the front page: 'We know that much that our grandfathers believed is no longer credible. The Spirit of Truth is revealing new truths and duties, and helping us to outgrow many old mistakes.'¹³² The *South London Press* sent a reporter to the vicarage to enquire which old doctrines should be discarded and quoted Balleine as saying that 'no sane man of today' believed in heaven and hell, and that he could not picture himself 'trotting around heaven with a halo and a golden harp'.¹³³ Balleine complained that he had been misquoted, and that all he meant to say was that heaven and hell needed reinterpretation for the twentieth century: 'To men of Spurgeon's generation Hell was a place of physical fire, in which bodies were tortured, and Heaven was largely associated with psalm-singing and harps. Today every Christian has much more inspiring hopes

130. For criticism of Elliott-Binns see, for example, *The Churchman* 42 (October 1928), pp. 320–22.

131. Balleine, 'Future of the Evangelical Party', pp. 13–14.

132. *Cheerio* 1 (January 1934), p. 1.

133. 'Vicar Says There Is No "Hell Fire"', *South London Press*, 12 January 1934, p. 11.

about Life Everlasting.¹³⁴ Two years later he began a mid-week Bible School for his parishioners, to study the Scriptures 'in the light of the latest knowledge', with the admission that 'many of the old ideas ... are no longer tenable'.¹³⁵ In a series of articles in 1937 on outmoded religious ideas he rejected the Old Testament image of God sending plagues and pestilence on the Israelites:

The Church does progress in its understanding of the truth, and age by age leave many a barbaric notion behind. ... For an open mind, not a closed mind, is the mark of a true Christian. If we are really learning the lessons that the Spirit of Truth is trying to reveal, it ought to be possible to say of each of us:

As wider skies broke on his view,
God greatedened in his growing mind;
Each year he dreamed his God anew,
And left his older God behind.¹³⁶

This stanza, from Sam Walter Foss's *Songs of the Average Man* (1907), encapsulated Balleine's desire to move beyond the Victorian evangelicalism of his youth in an attempt to reach the next generation with a modern Christian message.

Balleine's last book, published in 1958 when he was 85 years old, was a biography of the Apostle Peter. The early chapters had been sketched out in *Cheerio* twenty years before,¹³⁷ but in retirement Balleine grew bolder in his criticism of Scripture. He was glad that the church in the twentieth century had been 'delivered from the burden of an Infallible Book', so the historian was now at liberty to question the reliability of the New Testament documents.¹³⁸ He pointed to mistakes and misunderstandings in the gospel accounts and offered an alternative story entirely shorn of the miraculous. Previously he had told the parishioners of Jersey that Bible 'miracles' were merely unexplained events, not necessarily supernatural, much as television

134. *Cheerio* 1 (February 1934), p. 5. See also, 'Things We Have Outgrow: Pie in the Sky', *Cheerio* 4 (August 1937), pp. 7–11; 'How Do You Picture Heaven?', *The Pilot* 2 (May 1948), pp. 243–44.

135. *Cheerio* 3 (September 1936), p. 3. See also, 'The Bible as Literature', *The Pilot* 2 (September–November 1947).

136. 'Things We Have Outgrown: Mistaking God for a Policeman', *Cheerio* 4 (July 1937), p. 9.

137. 'Simon Surnamed Peter', *Cheerio* 5 (February–April 1938) and 'Simon Who Was Called the Rock', *Cheerio* 5 (May–December 1938).

138. G.R. Balleine, *Simon Whom He Surnamed Peter: A Study of his Life* (London: Skeffington, 1958), p. 187.

and wireless would seem miraculous to a previous generation.¹³⁹ In his biography, Balleine stated that Peter walking on water was a parable not a historic event; the fish caught with a coin in its mouth was 'an old folk-tale'; the healing of the woman with menstrual haemorrhage was 'auto-suggestion'; Peter's escape from prison was by human aid not angelic; and Jairus's daughter and Dorcas were not raised from the dead but roused from coma or catalepsy.¹⁴⁰ Balleine's portrait was also of a fallible Christ who read the Old Testament 'as our grandfathers used to do, with no thought of critical problems', and whose conception of disease was the limited view of a first-century Palestinian Jew, not 'a modern psychotherapist'. He explained that Jesus was distressed in the Garden of Gethsemane because he realized he had 'failed' in his messianic mission to establish God's kingdom on earth.¹⁴¹ Most radical was Balleine's interpretation of the resurrection. In 1948 he had defended the historicity of the Easter narrative, dismissing naturalistic explanations,¹⁴² but in this final book he explained away the empty tomb by suggesting that the disciples went to the wrong place or Joseph of Arimathea moved the body. Balleine no longer believed that the bodily resurrection was a doctrinal essential and affirmed that the Christian message would still be true even 'if the bones of Jesus crumbled into dust in some unknown tomb'.¹⁴³

Ironically, Balleine's subsequent reputation for impeccable evangelical credentials belies his theological trajectory. This is demonstrated by the attitude of *The English Churchman*, a staunch defender of conservative evangelical orthodoxy. When Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* was first published in 1908, the newspaper said it would disappoint everyone except those sympathetic to 'so-called Neo-Evangelicalism'.¹⁴⁴ Yet these qualms were soon forgotten, as the book gained a golden reputation amongst generations of readers. Balleine's death in 1966 was front page news in *The English Churchman*, with no hint of concern about his theological or historical perspective.¹⁴⁵ Ten years later the Church

139. 'From the Editor's Chair', *The Pilot* 2 (February 1948), pp. 170–71.

140. Balleine, *Simon*, pp. 47–48, 68, 115–17, 128, 142–43.

141. Balleine, *Simon*, pp. 44, 73, 82.

142. G.R. Balleine, 'Is the Easter Story a Myth?', *The Pilot* 2 (March 1948), pp. 194–95.

143. Balleine, *Simon*, p. 90.

144. *The English Churchman*, 4 June 1908, p. 373.

145. 'G.R. Balleine Dies Aged 92', *The English Churchman*, 14 January 1966, p. 1.

Society republished Balleine's *Layman's History*, re-titled *A Popular History of the Church of England*, brought up to date by Canon Colliss Davies, an evangelical clergyman and former professor of ecclesiastical history at Trinity College, Dublin.¹⁴⁶ Davies' contribution was berated by *The English Churchman* because it gave the impression to the unwary reader 'that Evangelicals of any backbone at all had ceased altogether in the C of E after world war I' and 'virtually ignores the genuine historic Evangelical view'. For example, he had failed to mention the founding of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society in the 1920s, a conservative breakaway from the Church Missionary Society, nor recent evangelical opposition to the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the legalization of mass vestments, and the ecumenical ambiguities of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Scheme. Nevertheless, the newspaper was willing to serialize Balleine's older chapters because, unlike Davies, his historical perspective was reckoned to be beyond reproach.¹⁴⁷

In Anglican evangelical circles today, especially those most conservative theologically, Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* remains enduringly popular. This classic volume has long outlived its author and taken on a life of its own, helping to define the Anglican evangelical narrative for generations of readers. Yet as this paper has sought to show, the *History* and its historian belong together. The book is best understood in the light of the ministerial priorities of its creator, especially Balleine's concern for innovative evangelism, political action and loyal Anglican churchmanship, while downplaying doctrinal definitions. His lively account of Anglican evangelicalism's past in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also an apologia for the future direction of the movement as it entered the twentieth century.

146. G.R. Balleine and G.C.B. Davies, *A Popular History of the Church of England* (London: Vine Books, 1976). See further John Reynolds, 'George Colliss Boardman Davies, 1912-1982', *Churchman* 96 (1982), pp. 199-200.

147. D.R. Hill (secretary to the trustees of *The English Churchman*) to John Smailes (manager of Vine Books), 13 October 1977, Church Society Archives, Watford.