

Origins of landmark hymn book identified

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The editors of a tiny 165-year-old pamphlet, believed to be the world's only surviving copy of a Chartist hymn book, have been identified.

Dr Mike Sanders, from The University of Manchester, says the now obscure South Lancashire Delegate Meeting almost certainly compiled the landmark 'National Chartist Hymn Book' he found in Todmorden public library two years ago.

After two years of detective work, the expert in Victorian literature has published an article in the international journal *Victorian Studies* this month detailing what he has learned about the book.

Dr Sanders' research uncovered calls for contributions for a new Chartist hymn book in the Chartist newspaper the *Northern Star*.

One, from January 1845, asked for readers to send ideas for a Chartist hymn book to an address in Manchester. A second item in February stated that West Riding Chartists approved the idea of producing a new hymn book.

Helping confirm the origin of the find, another item was published in September saying the book, containing 16 hymns, was now available.

Dr Sanders said: "The Chartists were Christians, but radical Christians who fought for justice in this life not the next.

"Hard times, they argued, were caused by man's selfishness rather than

the Lord's judgment; quite a different message to that put out by mainstream Christianity.

"There was also an absence of warlike imagery prevalent in so much Victorian Christianity: the sentiments of Onward Christian Soldiers and Fight the Good Fight were just not there."

According to Dr Sanders, an English lecturer, the hymn books were designed in an attempt to produce a standard hymn book for the movement, as a Chartist forerunner of 'Hymns Ancient and Modern'.

While Chartist historians know of two earlier attempts to produce a hymn book for the whole movement - Cooper's 'Shakespearean Chartist Hymn Book' and Hobson's 'Hymns for Worship', before now, there have been no references to the Todmorden collection.

Heavily influenced by dissenting Christians, the hymns are about social justice, 'striking down evil doers' and blessing Chartist enterprises, rather than the conventional themes of crucifixion, heaven and family.

Some hymns protested against the exploitation of child labour and slavery. Another of the hymns proclaimed: Men of wealth and men of power/ Like locusts all thy gifts devour.

"This fragile pamphlet is an amazing find and opens up a whole new understanding of Chartism - which as a movement in many ways shaped the Britain we know today", said the lecturer based at the University's School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.

"As far as we know, this is the only copy that has survived.

"What is so fascinating is that hymn-singing was not the best known feature of Chartism so this attempt to produce an equivalent to Hymns

Ancient and Modern is significant."

More information: The pamphlet can be viewed on-line at [www.calderdale.gov.uk/wtw/sear ... ocId=102253&PageNo=1](http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/wtw/sear...ocId=102253&PageNo=1)

Provided by University of Manchester

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