

Your Letters



Did Lord Balfour have a Christadelphian nanny?

In the February issue (p. 485) I referred to information received that Lord Balfour employed a Christadelphian nanny. I got this slightly wrong; the story is in fact that he was brought up by a Christadelphian nanny. I thank Brother John Ramsden for providing me with the results of his research into this story.—T.B.

For several years there have been rumours of Christadelphian involvement with various parties concerned with the Balfour Declaration. One such persistent rumour is that Arthur James Balfour may have had a ‘nurse and tutor’ in his very young years who was a Christadelphian and who might have influenced him in his attitude to Israel in later life. So we recently decided to research the matter to discover whether there were good reasons for believing that it might be so.

We discovered a letter from a Brother G. M. Lees of Bournemouth which appeared in the January 1950 *Fraternal Visitor* (reproduced below). On the surface it is an attractive idea, but can it be proved to be correct? Our researches took us to various library sources, poring through a number

Correspondence.

SIDE-LIGHT ON THE BALFOUR DECLARATION.

Lately, there have been claims regarding the making up of the Balfour Declaration. As more potent than any of these claims it may be stated that, in our meeting in Edinburgh in 1883, I came to know Bro. and Sister Armstrong, of Haddington, Scotland. They both lived to a good old age, Sister Armstrong to over a hundred years. She had been nurse and tutor to Arthur James Balfour in his early days. She was a staunch Christadelphian. Quite unconsciously, she may have deeply implanted the idea of the future greatness of the nation of Israel into the mind of her young pupil, the coming Lord Balfour.

Yours fraternally,
Bournemouth, G. M. LEES.

of biographies, including that by Lady Blanche Dugdale, Lord Balfour’s niece, searching for any indication that such influence might have been at work. Simultaneously, my sisters made extensive on-the-ground investigations in the East Lothian area of Scotland, examining local archives, census records and local maps.

The Balfour family owned a large 10,000-acre estate about twenty-five miles east of Edinburgh. The family home, Whittingehame House, was designed by Robert Smirke, the architect of the British Museum, and was a very grand affair ([see picture](#)). The Balfours were a religious family, and later in life Arthur Balfour was never slow to admit his belief in God. Bible readings were a feature of the everyday domestic scene, and later Balfour was confirmed in the Church of England and then became a regular communicant in the Church of Scotland.

Searching through articles and intelligence reports appearing in early volumes of the *Christadelphian* and elsewhere revealed that in 1860 brethren in Edinburgh had baptized two people living in the village of Haddington, about five miles from the parish of Whittingehame. They, together with a further four members who were baptized in 1862 (none of whom is named), attended what appears to have been an early fraternal gathering on 14 July 1867 in Edinburgh. By 1875 there was a group of eight brethren and sisters meeting at the home of a Brother Robert Armstrong, who lived in the village Post Office.

Brother Armstrong died in 1892, and the 1851 census indicates that he was born in 1822 and that a Marjorie Armstrong was born in 1821. This indicates that he was only seventy years old when he died, not really “a good old age” as per the letter. We have not established when his wife died, but if indeed she lived to be “over a hundred years old”, as per the letter, then it would have been around 1920. In the admittedly incomplete set of *Fraternal Visitor* magazines available to me for the period 1916-1924 I could find no reference to her death.

The 1851 census confirms that an Armstrong family then lived at the Post Office in Haddington. The same census lists a number of people who are described as “house servants”, about a

The front side of Whittingehame House, which has now been converted into flats.

Picture: Mary Ramsden



dozen such individuals being listed as such in the parish of Whittingehame, which was dominated by the Balfour estate. Alas, amongst those house servants we could find no trace of the name Armstrong, nor indeed of any of the names of those whose baptisms had been reported in the *Christadelphian*.

We know from secular records that Arthur James Balfour was born on 21 July 1848, the oldest of nine children, and in 1859 at the age of eleven went to a private school at Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire before going on to Eton and Cambridge. Assuming therefore that he might have been in need of nursing or tutoring between, say, the ages of 3 and 10 (1851–1858), this would coincide with the then Mrs Armstrong being approximately 30–35 years old, so she could have fulfilled the role.

But what would she have known about the Hope of Israel then? Admittedly, believing in the return of the Jews to Palestine was not an exclu-

sive Christadelphian discovery; others professed that belief long before Brother Thomas made his now famous visit to Glasgow in 1848, which resulted in the writing of *Elpis Israel* in 1849. But would she have known about our beliefs, as encapsulated in *Elpis Israel*, only a few years after they had been publicly promoted and before she was baptized? And would she have been strong enough in her convictions, and the expression of them, to have offset the influence of the Church of Scotland in the Balfour household?

So yes, it is *possible* that in the early 1850s the Armstrongs *may* have been persuaded that God did have purpose in returning the Jews to their land, but convincing evidence that Mrs Armstrong could have “implanted the idea of the future greatness of the nation of Israel” into the mind of Lord Balfour has so far eluded us.

John Ramsden
London (Forest Hill)