The President of the Baptist Historical Society, Professor John Briggs, contributes a guest editorial.

The Revd Dr Ian Randall

Age produces a number of biographical milestones, and a 65th birthday presents one such turning point. In this editorial I want to express the Society’s deepest thanks to Ian Randall as he retires from the editorship of this journal, a post he has held with great distinction for the last five years – we are most grateful to Ian for the service he has unstintingly given in shaping and disciplining articles for the Quarterly, for his maintenance of high scholarly standards, and the encouragement of the writing of Baptist history especially by emerging authors. We thank Ian for all his labours and Janice for releasing him for this service.

The Society is also pleased to have been involved in the production of a festschrift to celebrate this occasion. Grounded in Grace: Essays to Honour Ian M Randall [Spurgeon’s College and BHS, 2013, 329pp, £20], edited by Pieter J. Lalleman, Peter J. Morden and Anthony R. Cross, is a book to start reading from the back, where eight pages detail Ian’s quite remarkable list of publications over the last twenty years, including no less than eight articles in this periodical. The achievement is all the remarkable when you realise that Ian did not start writing until he was forty-five. The whole collection of essays is prefaced by an eight-page biographical study which some of us would have liked to be longer. In a Preface, David Bebbingon contrasts a hypocritical portrait of Evangelicalism in the 1860s with the rich diversity brought out in the essays on this volume, written by former graduate students and colleagues, following as they do on much of Ian’s pioneering scholarship. The quality and usefulness of their contributions is indeed a tribute to the one being honoured.
An exploration of the theological relationships between Luther and Jan Hus, an appropriate recognition of Ian’s years in Prague, is followed by a study of the intellectual curiosity yet eirenic temper of seventeenth-century Baptists as revealed in their confessions, both Particular and General. Instead of rival claims from Baptists and Congregationalists upon the life and ministry of John Bunyan, here his claims to be a proto-evangelical are explored. By contrast, there can be no doubt as to Abraham Booth’s denominational loyalties, for Andrew Fuller spoke of him as ‘the first counsellor of our denomination’, a concept rejected by those who, in pursuing undenominationalism rejected the whole idea of religious connexionalism, a position often neglected but here usefully surveyed. A study of evangelical female activism reveals a different phenomena: the working together in common cause of those secure in their own denominational bases.

As befits the author of the twentieth-century volume in the society’s series on the English Baptists, there are significant essays on Baptist life in the last century. Whilst Baptists may not have been in the vanguard of the move from missionary endeavour to establishing a relationship of equality with the younger churches, they were responsible for six of the twenty delegates from the developing world present at the World Missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910. Denominational promotion of the unpredictable forces of revival make for an interesting study of the relationship between the ‘dynamics’ and ‘mechanics’ of spiritual renewal in church life, a reflection of Spirit Versus Structure, the title of Jaroslav Pelikan’s foundational reformation study, published almost fifty years ago. The records of Mainstream provide the basis for a lively assessment of its contribution to evangelical involvement in the life of the Baptist Union.

Reflecting Ian’s years of devoted teaching in Prague and his virtual creation of a school of historiography in East European and Central Asian Baptist studies, three essays make important contributions to this history: the exploitation of EBF records to show the remarkable assistance offered by the Federation to the newly emerging Baptist Unions on the collapse of the Soviet Union in the years 1989-92, a helpful overview of Czech Baptist history, a biographical study of a
remarkable Estonian Baptist who packed into one lifetime a formidable panoply of evangelistic and social ministries, including a local pastorate, widespread prison ministry, compassionate concern for Estonia’s lepers, and the directorship of the Baptist Theological Seminary, as well as networking with a wider evangelicalism through the Evangelical Alliance and other movements concerned with deepening evangelical spirituality. That wider evangelicalism is the subject of an analysis of the attitude of Evangelicals in Germany to the plight of the Jews during the Third Reich, showing that the attitude of German Baptists to National Socialism (so well set out in Bernard Green’s *Baptists and the Third Reich*) was part of a mindset more widely present among German evangelicals.

The collection concludes with five theological/missiological reflections – discovering the witness to truth in narrative rather than proposition, reflections on the experience of believers’ baptism for Baptist spirituality, the importance of integral mission, the need to either reinterpret female happiness theologically or to establish alternative goals like securing a meaningful life in the context of the believing community. The fifth reflects that, within the total range of the church’s existence, listening to the Word as the gathered people of God has been more normative than reading it, hence the importance of a process of congregational hermeneutics. All sound notes that if heeded will be for the strengthening of Baptist and Evangelical life and witness. The collection amply fulfils its editors ambitions, ‘to honour Ian and provide resources to help renew evangelicalism’.