

= Agapemonites =

The Agapemonites or Community of The Son of Man was a Christian religious group or sect that existed in England from 1846 to 1956 . It was named from the Greek : Agapemone meaning " Abode of Love " . The Agapemone community was founded by the Reverend Henry Prince in Spaxton , Somerset . The sect also built a church in Upper Clapton , London , and briefly had bases in Stoke @-@ by @-@ Clare in Suffolk , Brighton and Weymouth .

The ideas of the community were based on the theories of various German religious mystics and its primary object was the spiritualization of the matrimonial state . The Church of England had dismissed Prince earlier in his career for his radical teachings . The Agapemonites predicted the imminent return of Jesus Christ . According to newspaper accounts Prince 's successor , John Hugh Smyth @-@ Pigott , declared himself Jesus Christ incarnate .

The Agapemone community consisted mostly of wealthy , unmarried women . Both Prince and Smyth @-@ Pigott took many spiritual brides . Later investigations have shown that these " brides " were not solely spiritual , and some produced illegitimate children . In 1860 Prince lost a lawsuit brought on behalf of Louisa Nottidge by the Nottidge family , and the group vanished from the public eye . It finally closed in 1956 when the last member , sister Ruth , died .

= = Henry James Prince = =

The Reverend Henry James Prince (1811 ? 99) studied medicine at Guy 's Hospital , obtained his qualifications in 1832 and was appointed medical officer to the General Hospital in Bath , his native city . Compelled by ill health to abandon his profession , he entered himself in 1837 as a student at St David 's College , Lampeter (now the Lampeter campus of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David) , where he gathered about him a band of earnest religious enthusiasts , known as the Lampeter Brethren . The vice principal of the college contacted the Bishop of Bath and Wells who , in 1846 , installed Prince as the curate of Charlinch in Somerset , where he had sole charge during the illness and absence of the rector , the Reverend Samuel Starkey .

Attendances at the church were small until , during one of the services , Prince acted as if he was possessed , throwing himself around the church . Congregations grew each week as the " possession " was repeated . The congregation were then divided with separate services for men and women . Subsequently he separated them again into sinners and the righteous , which generally included females who were wealthy . The Bishop was summoned to investigate the practices . By that time Prince had contracted his first ? spiritual marriage ? , and had persuaded himself that he had been absorbed into the personality of God and had become a visible embodiment of the Holy Spirit . During his illness Starkey read one of his curate 's sermons , and was not only ? cured ? forthwith , but embraced his strange doctrines . Together they procured many conversions in the countryside and the neighbouring towns . In the end the rector was deprived of his living and Prince was defrocked . Together with a few disciples they started the Charlinch Free Church , which had a very brief existence , meeting in a supportive farmer 's barn .

Prince used money inherited on the death of his first wife , Martha , to marry Julia Starkey the sister of the rector . They all moved to Stoke @-@ by @-@ Clare in Suffolk where Prince started again to build up a congregation , which grew over the subsequent one to two years . The Bishop of Ely then expelled them . Prince opened Adullam Chapel , which was also known as Cave Adullam , in the North Laine area of Brighton . Meanwhile Starkey established himself at Weymouth . Their chief success lay in the latter town , and Prince soon moved there .

= = Followers = =

A number of followers , estimated by Prince at 500 , but by his critics at one fifth of the number , were got together , and it was given out by ? Beloved ? or ? The Lamb ? (the names by which the Agapemonites designated their leader) that his disciples must divest themselves of their possessions and throw them into the common stock . This was done , even by the poor , all of whom

looked forward to the speedy end of the present dispensation , and were content , for the short remainder of this world , to live in common , and , while not repudiating earthly ties , to treat them as purely spiritual . With the money thus obtained the house at Spaxton that was to become the ? Abode of Love ? was enlarged and furnished luxuriously , and the three Nottidge sisters , who contributed £ 6 @, @ 000 each , were immediately married to three of Prince 's nearest disciples . Agnes , the eldest of the Nottidge sisters , objected to the spiritual marriage which entailed a celibate life and , as one writer reports , became pregnant by another member of the community ; however , it is unlikely that she committed adultery because her husband never accused her , and she later gained sole custody of their child in 1850 , after proving herself of good moral character before a court . Agnes wrote to her younger sister Louisa warning her not to come to Spaxton . Despite this Louisa travelled to Somerset to join them . Her mother Emily feared the spiritual and financial influence that Prince had established over her daughters . Emily instructed her son Edmund , her nephew Edward Nottidge , and her son @-@ in @-@ law , Frederick Ripley , to travel down to Somerset and to rescue her unmarried daughter , Louisa after her arrival . The three men succeeded in removing Louisa against her will in November 1846 , and imprisoned her in 12 Woburn Place , a villa by Regents Park .

Following Louisa 's persistent claims regarding the divinity of Henry Prince , her mother enlisted medical aid and had Louisa certified insane , and then placed her in Moorcroft House Asylum , Hillingdon . Her treatment and forced incarceration in the asylum has remained of interest with respect to the rights of psychiatric patients ; Dr Arthur Stillwell , the presiding physician , made notes on Louisa 's condition and treatment , recorded in The Lancet . Louisa escaped from the asylum in January 1848 , travelling across London to meet the Reverend William Cobbe from The Agapemone at a hotel in Cavendish Square , but was recaptured two days later at Paddington railway station . Cobbe alerted the Commissioners in Lunacy , whose report by Bryan Procter led to her release in May 1848 . Louisa then sued her brother , cousin and brother @-@ in @-@ law , Frederick Ripley , for abduction and false imprisonment in Nottidge v. Ripley and Another (1849) ; the trial was reported daily in The Times newspaper . In 1860 Louisa 's brother , Ralph Nottidge , sued Prince to recoup the money that Louisa had given him as a result of his undue influence over her , in the case of Nottidge v. Prince (1860) . The Nottidges won the case , with costs . After the cases were resolved Louisa Nottidge returned to Spaxton and spent the rest of her life as one of the Agapemonites .

In 1856 , a few years after the establishment of the ? Abode of Love ? , Prince and Zoe Patterson , one of his virginal female followers , engaged in public ceremonial sexual intercourse on a billiard table in front of a large audience . The scandal led to the secession of some of his most faithful friends , who were unable any longer to endure what they regarded as the amazing mixture of blasphemy and immorality offered for their acceptance .

The most prominent of those who remained received such titles as the ? Anointed Ones ? , the ? Angel of the Last Trumpet ? , the ? Seven Witnesses ? and so forth .

= = Spaxton = =

Extensive building work was undertaken to accommodate members and followers at Four Forks in Spaxton , to which Prince and his followers moved in the summer of 1846 . Behind 15 feet (4 @. @ 6 m) high walls were built a 20 @-@ bedroom house and attached chapel , as well as a gazebo , stables , and cottages , all set within landscaped gardens . The buildings were designed by William Cobbe . The buttressed chapel , with its pinnacles and stained glass , was completed in 1845 ; today , together with the attached house , it is a Grade II listed building .

Prince died in 1899 aged 88 . His followers buried Prince in the grounds of the chapel , with his coffin positioned vertically so that he would be standing on the day of his resurrection .

In the early 20th century several houses (some in the Arts and Crafts style) were built at Four Forks by members of the Agapemonites including Joseph Morris and his daughter Violet .

Since closure of the community , the chapel has been used as a studio for the production of children 's television programmes , including Trumpton and Camberwick Green . The complex of

buildings became known as Barford Gables and was put on the market in 1997 . The chapel received planning permission for conversion into a residential house and was put on the market again in 2004 .

= = Upper Clapton = =

Between 1892 and 1895 the Agapemonites built the Church of the Good Shepherd in Upper Clapton , London . It was designed by Joseph Morris in a Gothic style . Although it is fairly conventional in floor plan , the outside of the church is a riot of statuary and symbolism . The main doorways sport large carvings of angels and the four evangelists symbolised by a man , an eagle , a bull and a lion . The same four figures , cast in bronze , look out over the four quarters of the Earth from the base of the steeple . The two flanking weather vanes show a certain symbolic debt to William Blake 's Jerusalem depicting , as they do , a fiery chariot and a sheaf of arrows (presumably of desire) , while the main steeple is clearly surmounted by a spear . The stained glass windows , designed by noted children 's book illustrator Walter Crane , and made by J S Sparrow , betray the unconventional nature of the sect as they illustrate the ' true station of womankind ' . The church was abandoned after 1956 and now is used by the Georgian Orthodox Church .

= = John Hugh Smyth @-@ Pigott = =

After Prince died in 1899 he was replaced by Reverend John Hugh Smyth @-@ Pigott . Around 1890 Smyth @-@ Pigott started leading meetings of the community again and recruited 50 young female followers to supplement the ageing population of Agapemonites . He took Ruth Anne Preece as his second wife and she had three children named Glory , Power and Hallelujah . By 1902 his fame had spread as far as India , from where Mirza Ghulam Ahmad warned him of his false teachings and predicted his miserable end .

The house which may have belonged to Smyth @-@ Pigott in St John 's Wood was visited by John Betjeman in his film Metro @-@ land . It is built in the neo @-@ gothic style . It is currently the home of the television presenter Vanessa Feltz and was previously the home of Charles Saatchi .

Smyth @-@ Pigott died in 1927 and the sect gradually declined until the last member , sister Ruth , died in 1956 . Her funeral in 1956 was the only time when outsiders were admitted to the chapel .

= = Books about the sect = =

The Abode of Love by Aubrey Menen ? " an appallingly inaccurate popular account " according to one review ? is a novelisation of the history of the Agapemonites under Prince 's leadership .

In 2006 Smyth @-@ Pigott 's granddaughter , Kate Barlow , published an account of life as a child with her family in the sect . The book includes family photographs and details of conversations she had as a child with the then elderly sect members .