John Samuel Bewley Monsell

Litvack, L. (2004). John Samuel Bewley Monsell. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18982>

Published in:
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Monsell, John Samuel Bewley

(1811–1875)

D. J. O'Donoghue, revised by Leon Litvack

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18982>

Published in print: 23 September 2004

Published online: 23 September 2004

This version: 21 May 2009

Monsell, John Samuel Bewley (1811–1875), hymn writer, was born at St Columb's, Londonderry, on 2 March 1811, the second of three sons of Thomas Bewley Monsell (*d.* 1846), archdeacon of Derry and precentor of Christ Church Cathedral, and his wife, Jane, *née* Rae (*d.* 1852). He entered Trinity College, Dublin, graduating BA in 1832, and LLB and LLD in 1856. He was ordained deacon in 1834 and priest in 1835, was chaplain of the chapel of ease, St Augustine's, Londonderry (1836–8), and was successively chaplain to Bishop Richard Mant; rector of Ramoan, co. Antrim (to 1839); chaplain of Magdalene College, Belfast (1843–6); rector of Dunaghy (1846–7); and chancellor of the diocese of Connor (1847–53). On 15 January 1835 he married Anne, daughter of Bolton Waller of Shannon Grove, co. Limerick; they had two sons and one daughter.

In 1853 Monsell became vicar of Egham, Surrey, near to his widowed sister-in-law Harriet Monsell at Clewer, and remained there until 1870, when he became rector of St Nicholas's Church, Guildford. He died on 9 April 1875, at Guildford, after being struck by a stone falling from the roof of his church, then in the course of reconstruction. He left a daughter, Jane Diana (1838/9–1877), who married the Revd Charles Wellington Furse and was the mother of the artist Charles Wellington Furse, and two sons, Bolton James Alfred Monsell (1840–1919), chief constable of the Metropolitan Police, and William Thomas Monsell (1843–1900), an inspector of factories in Ireland. The politician Bolton Meredith Eyres Monsell was his grandson.

Monsell was a prolific writer, producing eleven volumes of verse, which included 300 hymns, 70 of which came into common use. A fine preacher of happy disposition, he urged that hymns should be fervent and joyous, and that congregations should abandon their sense of distance and reserve in singing. From this reasoning emerged those hymns for which he is best known: 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' and 'Fight the good fight with all thy might'. He also believed in spontaneity in writing and relevance to parish concerns; as he stated in his preface to *Parish Musings* (1850), his work consisted of 'the unpremeditated aspirations and utterances of the heart of one engaged in the active service of parish

---

labour'. Monsell was also a writer who felt a compulsion to edit; therefore various versions of his hymns exist. His most important collections of hymns are *Hymns and Miscellaneous Poems* (1837), *Spiritual Songs* (1857), *Hymns of Love and Praise for the Church's Year* (1863), and *The Parish Hymnal* (1873).

Sources

F. P. Green, 'J. S. B. Monsell (1811–1875)', *Hymn Society Bulletin*, 133 (June 1975), 120–22

J. Julian, ed., *A dictionary of hymnology*, rev. edn (1907); repr. in 2 vols. (1915)

M. Frost, ed., *Historical companion to 'Hymns ancient and modern'* (1962)

J. Miller, *Singers and songs of the church* (1869)

J. I. Jones and others, *The Baptist hymn book companion*, ed. H. Martin (1962)

J. Moffatt and M. Patrick, eds., *Handbook to the church hymnary, with supplement*, 2nd edn (1935)

K. L. Parry, ed., *Companion to 'Congregational praise'* (1953)

Burke, *Peerage* (1939)

chaplains of the chapel of ease, St Augustine's, Londonderry, www.btinternet.com/~st.augustine/year_2000.htm, 20 Jan 2009

Archives

BL, corresp. with W. E. Gladstone, Add. MSS 44363–44436

Keble College, Oxford, letters to H. P. Liddon

U. Reading L., letters to George Bell & Sons

Wealth at Death

---

under £5000: probate, 7 July 1875, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

Archive Edition

View this article in the DNB archive

External resources

National Archives <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F60671>