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Besse's "Sufferings of Early Quakers: Southwest England, 1654 to 1690" - Book Review

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BESSE, Joseph, *Sufferings of Early Quakers: Southwest England, 1654 to 1690*, facsimile of part of the 1753 edition with new introduction and new index of people and places by Michael Gandy (York: Sessions, 2004), pp. viii + 186. ISBN 1-85072-320-6. Paper, £12.00.

Quaker historians frequently draw on Joseph Besse's monumental account of the sufferings of Quakers throughout England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, New England and the West Indies from 1650, when Quakers 'were first distinguished by that name', to approximately 1689, when the Act of Toleration gave some protection to dissenters. Over a twenty-six-year period from 1727 to 1753, Joseph Besse collected together what he considered to be the most interesting or indicative

examples of what Friends had suffered for the Truth and the two volumes of Sufferings often provide the only surviving copy of important primary documents.

Unless one is fortunate enough to have ready access to a major reference library, however, it can be difficult to locate a copy and there is, at present, no freely accessible online edition. In response to this, Sessions Book Trust is gradually publishing a series of regional facsimiles, with new indexes. The most recent of these is *Southwest England*, which reproduces the material from the original volume I on Bristol, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset and from volume II on Wiltshire.

Two original indices are included; one which lists the names of 212 persons imprisoned in Ilchester in Somersetshire in 1660 and another which gives the names of those at Bristol sentenced to banishment and transportation in 1663 and 1664. These are supplemented by two modern indices, one of people and one of places, carefully compiled by Michael Gandy.

The book is well produced and the photographic facsimiles are clearly printed.

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