

*The Kingdom of Heaven*

# The British Connection

Why were one-third of the people in the Waco seige from England, and how did they get there?

by *Albert A. C. Waite and Laura Osei*

**A**BOUT ONE-THIRD OF DAVID KORESH'S converts from around the world came from Britain. Why? The majority of those recruited from Britain were educated black Adventists or former Adventists with Afro-Caribbean roots. Why?

Damian Thompson, religious affairs correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* (April 21, 1993), provided an historical and demographic explanation: "During the years of this century, Seventh-day Adventists made great strides in the West Indies and as a result have a large West Indian following in this country. Given that Koresh recruited specifically from Seventh-day Adventists, it was inevitable that a large proportion of his British followers would be from the Afro-Caribbean community."

We will probably never know for sure why people joined David Koresh's cult, but this essay tries to collect what information we do have about the converts from Britain. If one

generalization is possible about them, it is that they had enduring relational problems, particularly conflicts within their families, sometimes having endured the trauma of a divided or divorced home. One married woman confided to a friend before she left Britain for Waco, "David Koresh provides the excuse I need to leave my husband and Britain." She never returned.

Koresh's inroads into Britain began in 1988 with Steven Emil Schneider, later his chief lieutenant in Waco. Born on October 16, 1949, Schneider did not do well as a student at Wisconsin Academy. After graduating in the early 1970s, Schneider applied to attend Newbold College. One of his references, the vice principal of Wisconsin Academy, praised his outgoing nature and leadership quality. Another reference, a pastor, said, "Schneider will do well in working to draw other young people to the Lord."

Schneider identified himself as a German-American with French connections. He was determined to come to Newbold, and offered to cut his long hair if that would help the

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admissions committee to make up their minds. He wanted, he said, to be an evangelist.

During the first semester at Newbold, Schneider studied Choir, Matter and Energy, Fine Art, Life and Teachings of Christ, General English and Private Instruction in Singing. It is understood that his overall grades were very poor.

At Newbold, Schneider was heavily influenced by another American who was expelled for frequenting too many social gatherings in the community. A farewell party was held in the community, to which Schneider was invited. Late that night, a drunken Steve Schneider was picked up by a taxi driver and taken to the police station. He was charged and eventually fined for disorderly behavior. Newbold College asked him to withdraw. He did, on February 27, 1973.

Fifteen years later, Schneider returned to Newbold College as Koresh's "John the Baptist." He made friends easily on the open, relaxed campus. Soon he was talking at gatherings in a bungalow on college property occupied by kitchen staff. He constantly invited students to "come and see."

Some students began displaying drooping eyes after attending long, nightly meetings. The buzz among the students mixed with uneasiness among the faculty. Those who attended began to suspect the authority of the church and misuse Ellen White's work. Those expressing concern about Schneider were told, "you cannot condemn or speak against

something you have not heard or examined for yourself."

Finally, one of the authors of this report, Albert Waite, a member of the faculty, went to one of the meetings. After two hours, I recognized the psychological ploy being used. The speaker agreed with certain fundamental teachings of the church, suggested apparently reasoned answers for certain controversial questions, and quietly introduced new concepts without explanation. All this was done in a low-key monotone that was both disarming and knowledgeable.

In 1988, Schneider persuaded three theology graduates from Newbold College to become recruiters: Livingstone Fagan, John McBean, and Cliff Sellors. Fagan, who was employed as a ministerial intern, soon lost his job. That allowed him to recruit openly, particularly in Nottingham. John McBean targeted Manchester. In London, recruiting targeted a group of newly baptized Greek Cypriots

who had just begun attending meetings sponsored by *Our Firm Foundation*. In turn, the Greek Cypriots influenced Teresa Norbrega, Leslie Lewis, and Bernadette Monbelly, all of whom are believed to have died at Waco. None of the Greek Cypriots suffered such a fate.

The authors of this article knew the three recruiters Schneider convinced to represent Koresh in Britain. Livingstone and McBean began enlisting and recruiting Britons from the north of England for the Branch Davidian commune in Waco.

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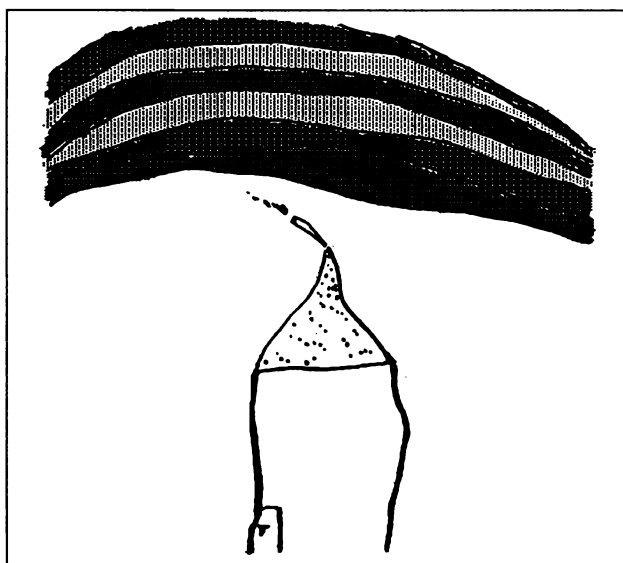
## Nottingham

Livingstone Fagan, aged 33, and his attractive wife, Evette, age 32, were typical black British Adventists. They had two children, Renee and Neharah. Soon after joining the Adventist church in Nottingham, Livingstone—a short, small-framed man—zealously pursued ministerial training at Newbold College.

Keen and intense, with an avid interest in controversial issues, Livingstone had a love for power. Formerly a social worker, he gave the impression that he “knew it all” about sociological topics. Although his family was originally from Jamaica, West Indies, he had holidayed in America, and spoke with a loud, American accent.

His wife, Evette, had a zest for life and was a proud mother. She was a bubbly, friendly individual to those she knew. However, in public, she was private and standoffish. She had been introduced to Adventism by Livingstone. Shortly after, they both entered Newbold.

Finding herself working as an office clerk, Evette desired to improve her educational skills and to qualify as a nurse or teacher. Impressed by her husband’s knowledge and rhetorical skill, she felt increasingly inferior to him.



*A girl drew her bome's dotted roof. "Bullets," she said.*

Livingstone questioned and challenged his fellow students and lecturers on a variety of doctrinal topics. In 1988, Livingstone attended some of Schneider's discussions on biblical prophecy. Livingstone continued to attend these meetings. He was attracted to the Branch Davidian message, and thus found the channel for propagating his discontent with the church.

The following year, 1989, Livingstone graduated from Newbold and was placed as an intern in the Leicester church in the north of England. Livingstone also soon began proselytizing for Koresh. Once the North England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists received news of his actions, his license was revoked. Eventually he was disfellowshipped. Nevertheless, he continued to recruit members for the Davidians from his home community of Nottingham.

Livingstone's power and influence over the members of his family is particularly striking. His wife, Evette, followed him to Waco as did his mother, Adina Fagan, aged 61.

Livingstone also convinced his first cousin, Beverley Elliott, aged 28, to travel to Waco. Talented and musical, she loved singing and playing the guitar and piano, but she had recently suffered a broken relationship and was desperately seeking redirection for her life. Beverley struck up a friendship with Winston Blake, aged 28, and invited him to join her in moving from Nottingham to Waco. There Winston became one of six special disciples of the "Lamb of God," as Koresh called himself. Winston is thought to have died in the shootout when U.S. government agents first moved in to clear the cult's fortified compound.

From Waco, Beverley wrote to her ex-boyfriend, suggesting she was unhappy with her life. She described the lack of basic toiletries, and asked him to send deoderants, soaps, and a baggy T-shirt. She stressed that the sender's name and address be omitted from

the back of the parcel as “people over here are very nosy.” Sadly, her mother died while Beverley was at the commune. Her family was distraught at her non-appearance at the funeral. She had had a very close relationship with her mother. Suzie Benta, aged 30, was Beverley Elliott’s best friend. She flew out to Waco on the pretext of going on a two-week holiday. Her friends and family were baffled when she wrote from Waco stating her desire to stay there for some time. Once the siege began, they heard nothing more from her.

Two weeks before the fire, Livingstone left the compound and was placed in custody. He is still preaching homilies from prison. But the family and friends he left behind inside the compound died in the inferno: his wife, Evette; his mother, Adina; his cousin, Beverley Elliott, and her friend Suzie Benta. Altogether, five people from Nottingham died at Waco.

## Manchester

John McBean was a resolute, determined, and energetic person. He had clear ideas of right and wrong—no grey areas. He fervently believed in Ellen White’s writings, but did not appear to be fanatical. He cared about people and mixed easily with them. He graduated from Newbold with a B.A. in theology. Immediately after receiving his degree, he began recruiting for Koresh in Manchester.

John drew into the cult his Adventist girlfriend, Diana Henry, aged 28, a psychology student. She then recruited her family: Pauline, 24; Vanessa, 19; Stephen, 26; Philip, 22; and her mother Zilla, 55, a nurse originally from Trinidad. The father, Samuel, alone remained in the Manchester Seventh-day Adventist church the family attended. He attempted to win back his family by visiting Waco. Instead, he received the wrath of Koresh’s tongue. His entire family of six died in Waco.

One of the six Henrys at Waco, Stephen,

had a girlfriend in Manchester, Sandra Hardial, aged 27. She quit her council job in Manchester last year and joined Stephen in the commune. Her cousin, rock star Denise Johnson, flew from London to help her captive cousin. Her family says she seemed fine over the telephone, but after the gun battle they heard nothing from her. She is presumed dead.

Richard Bennett, aged 26, was a building supervisor with Manchester City Council. Easy-going, he left his girlfriend and three children for Waco. Ten days before the siege began, he rang his mother and said, “Mum, I am coming home soon.” All together, 10 individuals from Manchester, including Bennett, died at Waco.

Rosemary Morrison, aged 29, and her six-year-old daughter, Melissa, also left Manchester for Waco. Melissa was the youngest Briton to die. During the siege, Melissa begged to be allowed to leave. Koresh had agreed, but at the last moment changed his mind. Rosemary, her mother, had left England to start a “new life” with the Koresh cult.

## South England

At a weekend seminar in Derby, I saw a most interesting backdrop for the lectures. It was the work of artist Cliff Sellors, a recent convert to Adventism. I talked with this white, unassuming Englishman about his painting. His only objective was “to work for the Lord.” At the time Cliff mentioned something about going to Newbold. My mind did not focus on the idea. He did not look the ministerial type.

On registration day in September of 1985, I looked up from the table along the line of first-year theology students who were waiting to see me. I was astonished to see Cliff Sellors. This time he looked neater, although not as well groomed as his peers in line. I dropped my pen on the table, walked over to Cliff and said, “I need you.” I had forgotten his name.

He looked puzzled, smiled wider, and said, "Who, me?" pointing to himself. I replied, "Yes, you." That was the beginning of a close three-year relationship with Cliff at Newbold College.

About two years prior to our Newbold meeting, I had conceived the idea of a painting to combine the Creation account of Genesis with science and aspects of Ellen White's work. Since I cannot paint, the idea would never become a painting unless I could find an artist. Cliff and I carefully studied the Creation account in Genesis. Together we planned and designed the Creation painting project. He listened intensely, often with few comments. He would put his whole self in anything he decided to do. The painting took three years to complete. The finishing touches were done only seconds before he left for Waco, Texas. The local press acclaimed the work to be a Creation masterpiece (it measures 17 feet x 5 feet).

Cliff loved nature. He always carried a pocket book in his back pocket to sketch scenes from nature or to place an unusual blade of grass or flower between the pages. He once caught an adder on the back step of the bungalow where Koresh held his meetings. Cliff put the adder in a box and, while the others wanted to kill it, he saved its life by releasing it in the woods.

Cliff also had high personal morals. He was more interested in showing a young lady the beauty of nature than in holding her hand. He read Ellen White excessively. He also taped many chapters from her work, which he listened to while painting.

Clifford Sellors had an all-or-nothing personality. Soon after conversion to Adventism he burned most of his artwork and diplomas.

He said God was not pleased with his work. Before he went to Waco, he gave away many of his books and tapes. For him, Koresh was Jesus. Yet, I was not surprised that Cliff at one stage had left the cult, if, as rumored, immortality was part of its practices. But why did this humble, honest, 33-year-old artistic genius go back to Waco?

Cliff befriended Livingston Malcolm, aged 26, a high-strung young man who was often tense and could be militant. Livingston sought knowledge but was not prepared to receive it from established bodies. He drifted from Adventism to Shepherd's Rod, to Rastafarianism, and finally to David Koresh. Actually, only the common bond of Koresh kept Cliff and Livingston together. Twin brother Solomon spoke to Livingston frequently, but each time the conversation was finished by Schneider.

Teresa Norbrega, aged 48, left London with her daughter, Natalie, aged 11 years. She did not inform her husband, Vincent, as to her whereabouts, leaving the country while he was away on holiday. He visited Waco and managed to bring Natalie out on the seventh day of the siege, but failed to convince his estranged wife to leave.

Diane Martin had strong, clear ideas. She strictly adhered to Ellen White's writings. She was a denominational employee, working as a secretary to a conference president and a union church ministries director.

Bernadette Monbelly, aged 31, was the girlfriend of Renos Avraam, one of the survivors of the Waco disaster.

About three of the individuals from England whom recruiters managed to convince to go to Waco we can find no information: Leslie Lewis, Anita Richards, and Doris Vaega.

All together, 24 Britons died in the inferno at Waco, Texas.