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A table of contents for the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* can be found here:

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# Proceedings

OF THE

## Wesley Historical Society

Editor: E. ALAN ROSE, B.A.

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### “BY SCHISMS RENT ASUNDER”: THE WESLEYAN REFORM MOVEMENT IN DERBYSHIRE.

...such is the state of anarchy and disruption in which we found the circuit, we have not been able to take account of who are members and who are not, so that for the last quarter the Schedule Book is a *blank*. With the exception of one or two only of the congregations, all the congregation in the circuit are the most disorderly riotous assemblies of wild beasts: and the *pulpits* regularly the spit of contention between the *authorised* local preachers, and those patronised by the mob . . . I do not think it right to be any further a party to the desecration of all that is sacred on God's day, by contending with infuriated men, some of whom have, again and again, squared their fists in my face in regular pugilistic style and all but struck me in the performance of this necessary duty.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the state of the Ilkeston Wesleyan Circuit in Derbyshire, as described by Rev. Alexander Hume in a letter to John Beecham, the President of the Wesleyan Conference, dated November 5, 1850.

There had been rumblings of disaffection in the lower reaches of the Wesleyan Connexion for some time. It was felt by some, particularly by those living in the provinces, that the Wesleyan ministers were becoming too remote from their flocks and neglecting their pastoral duties. Allied to this was the undoubted suspicion held that the Connexion was in the hands of a metropolitan clique ruled by Dr. Jabez Bunting, whose control of the all important Stationing Committee was total. In 1845 the first of the *Flysheets* was sent to every minister, the fourth and the last appeared in 1848. Published anonymously, these pamphlets attacked the Wesleyan hierarchy in general and Dr Bunting in particular.<sup>2</sup> Attempts were made to trace the

<sup>1</sup> W. R. Ward, *Religion and society in England. 1790-1850.* (1972) p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> R. Currie, *Methodism divided: a study in the sociology of ecumenicalism* (1967). p. 160. Currie gives a detailed account of the *Flysheets* and the Reform troubles. A more succinct account is the more recent pamphlet, *The three expelled* by O. A. Beckerlegge (1996). Benjamin Gregory's *Sidelights on the conflicts of Methodism...* (1898) pp. 433ff is an account of the Reform troubles by a contemporary minister.

author and at the Manchester Conference held in August 1849 three ministers were expelled, James Everett, a notable pamphleteer and anti-Bunting partisan, probably the most likely author of the *Flysheets*, William Griffith, a radical minister and frequent contributor to the *Wesleyan Times*, a liberal anti-Bunting newspaper which was launched in 1849 and Samuel Dunn, the editor of a short-lived monthly liberal Methodist journal, the *Wesleyan Banner*.

The three expelled were all well-known and well liked in the Derbyshire area. Everett had started his ministerial career in the Cromford Circuit nearly forty years before and was a notable speaker at Sunday School Anniversaries and other fund raising efforts. Griffith was married to Eliza Bourne, daughter of Joseph Bourne, the Belper potter, a loyal Wesleyan and after 1850 and much heart searching, a Wesleyan Reformer: at the time of his expulsion Griffith was the superintendent of the newly founded Ripley circuit, which had been hived off from the Belper circuit in 1847, and very popular there. Dunn was the well-liked superintendent of the Nottingham Circuit.

The three were not without support in Derby; of the reform delegates who gathered in Albion Street Chapel in London in March 1850, four were sent from Derby: Thomas Jeffery, a clerk, Charles Gamble, a tailor and hatter, Richard Woolhouse, a plumber and a Mr Shilcock, who has not been traced<sup>3</sup>. By October 1850 a Reform circuit had been set up in Derby with five preaching places and thirty three preachers, headed by Everett, Griffith and Dunn with James Bromley of Bath, who had been expelled by the 1850 Conference.<sup>4</sup>

Derby was one of the chief centres of support for the Reformers. The expulsion of the three ministers took place on Saturday August 11 1849 and by August 21 a 'monster' meeting was held in Derby and a subscription list opened for their support. It was headed by the name of Jedediah Strutt, grandson of the original Jedediah Strutt, the Belper millowner.<sup>5</sup> At a tea party held at Derby in October in aid of the three, eight hundred supporters were present and the chairman Mr. Holmes, a Derby silk manufacturer, warned members of the audience not to speak, saying that if they did so they would be liable to be expelled.<sup>6</sup> At about this time, (the exact date is uncertain) a demonstration occurred in Derby when forty local preachers marched four abreast down King Street, singing hymns: they finished up at Becket Street, where the Reformers were meeting.<sup>7</sup> The flame of Reform was kept alight in Derby by William Griffith, who settled there after his expulsion

<sup>3</sup> *Wesleyan delegate takings*:... Manchester. (1850) p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> *Derby Wesleyan branch Circuit plan. Oct. - Dec. 1850.*

<sup>5</sup> *Derby Mercury* 29 August, 1849.

<sup>6</sup> *Wesleyan Times* 22 October, 1849.

<sup>7</sup> B. A. M. Alger, *King St. Wesleyan chapel, Derby: a centenary memorial. 1805-1905* (1905) p. 28.

and became the pastor of a church, which was later founded in Becket Street.<sup>8</sup> There was a great loss of members in the Derby Wesleyan Circuit, from 1628 in 1849 to 912 in 1853 and about forty of the local preachers were lost<sup>9</sup>.

At Chesterfield there was similar support for the three ministers. A letter in the *Wesleyan Times* in September 1849, signed by twenty-five local preachers and trustees from the Chesterfield Wesleyan Circuit expressed their sympathy<sup>10</sup>, while on October 1, Dunn was entertained to breakfast at Chesterfield with Mr Stringfellow, a local hat manufacturer in the chair<sup>11</sup>. The local disaffection at Chesterfield is reflected once again in the circuit membership figures; these were 1188 in 1849 and had dropped to 380 by 1851.<sup>12</sup> Original letters from William Parker, the superintendent minister at Chesterfield in 1851, have survived: these give an illuminating picture of the situation and show how the loss of members affected the ministers' stipends. The first is addressed to Brother Jobson, presumably a circuit official and is dated 15 February, 1851. :-

I duly received your circular regarding contributions to the fund for the relief of Brethren, who are deprived of their circuit allowances. I am sorry to say that my colleague and myself must be numbered among the Brethren, who are thus situate. We are both willing to take our share of the burden, which Wesleyan ministers have to bear for maintaining the purity of the body and enforcing the godly discipline of the Connexion. We have with some difficulty gone on thither, without applying to the Special Fund, but we cannot proceed thus. Since last Conference the total amount which Mr Lindley [the second minister] has received from the Connexion is £14 9s 6d and there is now due to him £35 10s 6d and he has been visited with severe affliction, which has terminated with the death of Mrs Lindley. I have received the same amount, viz. £14 9s 6d and the same sum is due to me. The prospect at present is that at least two thirds of the people will be left without tickets this quarter and we shall be almost bankrupt.<sup>13</sup>

Three delegates were sent from Chesterfield to the Albion Street chapel meeting in March 1850, John Cutts, a Chesterfield solicitor, W. Dutton a draper and a Mr Dawes. Cutts, who was elected secretary to the meeting, claimed in a letter to the *Wesleyan Times* on March 12, 1850, that the Chesterfield circuit was the first circuit to pass any resolution with regard to the 'three expelled'<sup>14</sup>. Other Derbyshire Wesleyans were not slow to show support for the three ministers: the *Wesleyan Times* at this period contains

<sup>8</sup> Alger. *Op. cit.* p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Minutes of the Wesleyan Conference, Derby Circuit 1849-53.*

<sup>10</sup> *Wesleyan Times* 17 September, 1849.

<sup>11</sup> *Wesleyan Times* 1 October, 1849.

<sup>12</sup> *Minutes of the Wesleyan Conference. Chesterfield Circuit. Passim.*

<sup>13</sup> Original in Methodist Archives Centre, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

<sup>14</sup> *Wesleyan Times.* 22 October, 1849.

letters from the Cromford Circuit<sup>15</sup>, the Bakewell Circuit<sup>16</sup>, the Ashbourne Circuit<sup>17</sup> and the Castle Donington Circuit<sup>18</sup>. The issue of the 13 August reports on 'General excitement in the Ashbourne Circuit'. At a meeting held in Ripley in August, 1849, the speaker asked those who supported Griffith to stand and the whole room rose as one man<sup>19</sup>. At Ripley later the same month a meeting attended 'largely by the working class' raised £20 in its collection.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence suggests that the Cromford Circuit was particularly lively. The letter sent to the *Wesleyan Times* on September 10, 1849 has twenty-three signatures, of whom eighteen were local preachers; no less than eleven of these may be found preaching on three Reform Plans, which have survived<sup>21</sup>. Henry Potter, a hosiery manufacturer living at Matlock, headed the Reform plan; his signature was second in the letter to the *Wesleyan Times*<sup>22</sup>. At the local preachers' meeting on December 23, 1850 it was stated that Potter was preaching on the Reform plan at Belper and the minister, J. F. England was asked to write to Belper about him<sup>23</sup>. Two other preachers were reported to be preaching on a Cromford Reform Plan and again the minister was asked to remonstrate.<sup>24</sup> One feels that Mr England is trying to be conciliatory: in other circuits members were automatically expelled for far less serious offences than preaching on rival plans. (In the Ilkeston circuit when the time came for renewal of class tickets, members were asked if they had given to the fund for the expelled ministers: an affirmative answer meant expulsion).<sup>25</sup> Some of the grievances current in the Matlock Circuit may be seen in pamphlets issued by the Cromford Wesleyan Reform Committee, which show that Mr England was not popular and that the quarterly meeting had asked for a replacement. They had been overruled by Conference and England had been stationed at Cromford for a second year. John Cardin, a class leader, who had been expelled by England, complains that England neglected his pastoral duties and enjoins him to read '*The Large Minutes, as published by Mr Wesley*' and take careful account of Rules 3,5,7,11, and 12. These rules run:-

3. Converse sparingly and cautiously with women: particularly with young women.

<sup>15</sup> *Wesleyan Times*. 10 September, 1849.

<sup>16</sup> *Wesleyan Times*. 27 August, 1849.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Wesleyan Times*. 10 December, 1849.

<sup>19</sup> *Wesleyan Times*. 20 August, 1849.

<sup>20</sup> *Wesleyan Times*. 27 August, 1849.

<sup>21</sup> *Wesleyan Local Preachers' Plan. Cromford Circuit. 1852: Cromford Wesleyan Methodist Reform Preachers' Plan. 1855-6; Cromford Wesleyan Methodist Reform Preachers' Plan. 1862.*

<sup>22</sup> *Wesleyan Times*. 10 September, 1849.

<sup>23</sup> *Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock D1431J MW 285.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> W. Smith, *Wesleyan Methodism in the Ilkeston Circuit*. (1909) p38ff.

5. Believe evil of no one; unless you see it done, take heed how you credit it.
7. Tell everyone what you think wrong in him, and that plainly as soon as maybe; else it will fester in your heart... ..
11. You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work.
12. Act in all things, not according to your will but as a son of the Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Cardin also complains that expulsion, which should be undertaken by the Leaders' Meeting, has been usurped by the ministers - 'They are a Hierarchy - exclusive, and in the *disciplinary regulations*, which they have made, they give themselves *more power* than the priests of Rome'<sup>27</sup> (Italics as in original.)

Contemporary circuit schedules show the chaos in the Cromford Circuit. At Tansley, for example, in the midsummer of 1850, three classes were broken up by agitation, while at the same time Matlock Bridge, two classes of fifty four members were disjointed by controversy; from neither place were membership figures available. A note in the minister's hand states that the Reform agitation has had such an effect that no accurate return of members can be made.<sup>28</sup> The Christmas returns of 1850 show the circuit to be still disorganised.<sup>29</sup> Further evidence may be gleaned from local returns to the Religious Census, which was taken on 30 March, 1851. The Matlock Bridge Wesleyan chapel, capable of sitting two hundred and thirty, attracted only forty people at its one service on Census Day, with forty-four Sunday School scholars. The Matlock Bridge Wesleyan Reform preaching room in contrast, which had only opened on the 20 March and which seated seventy-two adults and children in the afternoon and one hundred and forty in the evening. (Their census form was signed by the former class leader and pamphleteer, John Cardin).<sup>30</sup>

The adjoining Belper circuit was also the scene of much disaffection. First hand evidence of the disruption may be seen in two preaching plans, a Wesleyan plan of August to October, 1848, and a Reform plan of May to July 1854. The Wesleyan plan lists twenty-six names, excluding the ministers; of these twenty-six, seventeen can be found preaching on the 1854 Reform plan. Judging from their position on the plan, most of those leaving the Wesleyan connexion at this time were the experienced local preachers.<sup>31</sup> Support for

<sup>26</sup> Cromford Circuit. *Tracts for the times: no 2: being a correspondence between Rev. J. F. England of Wirksworth and John Cardin of Matlock Bridge.* Birmingham, William Watton. [1850] p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Op cit.* Footnote on page 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Derbyshire Record Office. Matlock D1431J MW 313.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> M. Tranter *et al*: *The Derbyshire Returns to the 1851 Religious Census.* (1995) p. 190.

<sup>31</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Preaching Plan. Belper circuit. August to October. 1848: Wesleyan [Reform] Preachers' Plan. Belper circuit. May to August 1854,* (Originals in Methodist Archives Centre.) It is of interest to see the number of outside preachers on the Reform Plan. All the seventeen auxiliaries are from outside Belper, thirteen of them are from Derby. A Reform plan from Bakewell shows similar signs.

this view can be found in the *Wesleyan Times* of 7 October, 1850 which stated:-

Twenty-one of the local preachers on Monday 30 the ultimo, agreed on Saturday that, a document signed by them, in which they gave up their plans, was to be forwarded to the superintendent. A new plan will be made out and the people will have the Gospel from the local preachers. The conference party are left with seven or eight local preachers and some of them are so old as to be scarcely able to preach, while the others are mere youths<sup>32</sup>

This news item provoked a long reply in the *Derby Mercury* of the following week by 'Omicron', easily identified as George Birley, the superintendent minister. (This was later issued as a pamphlet called *Wesleyan Methodism in the Belper circuit*)<sup>33</sup>. According to the account given by G. A. Fletcher, the historian of the Belper Wesleyan circuit, the trouble started when George Birley ruthlessly crossed off the class lists any members he suspected of having sympathy for the Reformers. According to a more recent publication, Everett was preaching at a rally at nearby Duffield on the day when the three were expelled and attracted hundreds of people, who attended, despite George Birley's prohibition. A service at the chapel at the same time attracted minimal attendance. Again, anyone attending the rally or having any association with it was removed from the membership list.<sup>34</sup> This provoked a letter of protest from the dissident local preachers which was sent to Birley; among their requests were 'that all brethren entitled by their office to attend quarterly and leaders' meetings be allowed full and respectful expression of their views on all matters relating to Wesleyan Methodism' and 'that as local preachers we be allowed to preach for any section of the Christian Church, when we are not employed on the circuit plan'. They also asked that tickets should be offered to all the leaders and members who had been expelled and that the names of Brother Summersides and Brother Haywood should be restored to the plan<sup>35</sup>.

Birley's reply was predictable and is indicative of the acrimony in the Belper circuit at the time. To the first request he says:- 'To comply with this proposition would be to render our ... meetings far more discordant than they now are and would prevent many valuable officers in our connexion, who are fond of peace, from attending them' and to the second:- 'There is no objection to local preachers preaching for established dissenting churches but strong objection is raised to those 'preaching for a faction in the midst of

<sup>32</sup> *Wesleyan Times* 7 October 1850.

<sup>33</sup> *Wesleyan Methodism in the Belper Circuit* [1850] (From *Derby Mercury* [No title page. Pamphlet headed thus] 4p. (Copy in Methodist Archives Centre, stamped Conference Office and signed "Dr Bunting"!)

<sup>34</sup> G. A. Fletcher, *Records of Wesleyan Methodism in the Belper circuit. 1760-1903.* (1903). p14-15. G. Barrass. *Methodism in Belper* (1993). pp27-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Wesleyan Methodism in the Belper circuit.*

agitation<sup>36</sup> His views on Summersides and Haywood were equally forthright. After Mr Summersides' 'perversion (not to say desecration) of the pulpit at Belper Lane End and at Holbrook Moor and the manner in which he has vilified Wesleyan Ministers in the Independent Chapel', he could never place him on a Wesleyan plan again, unless he had strong evidence of a change of heart. (Thomas Summersides, who lived near Ambergate, was the resident agent to the Clay Cross Lime Co. The reference to his speaking at the Independent Chapel is probably to a meeting which took place in September 1850, according to the *Derby Mercury* of 2 October, 1850). With regard to Haywood, Birley continued, if he had acknowledged that he had done wrong at Milford and promised not to do it again, he would have seen happy to restore him to the plan. (Haywood's offence was to preach for the Reformers in Milford at the same time as the Wesleyan service was held.)<sup>37</sup>

As Birley did not agree to the preachers' demands the disaffection in the circuit continued. Between September 1849 and December 1851, the membership fell from 831 to 317.<sup>38</sup> The local preachers were reduced from thirty-three to fourteen and four chapels, Duffield Chapel St., Heage Ebenezer, Horsely and Holbrook Moor, were lost to the Connexion<sup>39</sup>. The ministers who succeeded Birley, Thomas Shaw and Peter Featherstone, were apparently appointed by Conference to pacify the circuit and under their guidance the circuit gradually returned to normal through it never reached its former strength.<sup>40</sup> By 1914 the membership had only reached 413<sup>41</sup>.

Evidence for Reform activity in the above circuits has been relatively plentiful; for other Derbyshire circuits it is sparse and depends very much on *Christian Words*, the Reformers' magazine, which gave annual figures of membership<sup>42</sup>. In Glossop for example, a Reform circuit was set up, if a rather shaky one. In 1861 there was one chapel and forty-three members in Glossop, in 1862, two chapels and one hundred and six members. 1863 shows four chapels and ninety-six members but by 1868 the Reformers are down to one chapel and thirty members.<sup>43</sup> A surviving plan for May to October, 1862 confirms that there were only two chapels at that date<sup>44</sup>. The two chapels on the plan were Whitfield Ebenezer and Glossop Howard Street; there were also preaching places at Jumble, Chunal and Primrose<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Derbyshire Record Office* 544/MW 3-7. Circuit schedule books.

<sup>39</sup> G. Barrass, *Methodism in Belper*. (1993) p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> G. A. Fletcher, *Loc cit.*

<sup>41</sup> *Minutes of the Wesleyan Conference. Belper Circuit.*

<sup>42</sup> Apart from a full set in the British Library in London, *Christian Words* is not readily accessible. Even the Wesleyan Reform Union in Sheffield has only an incomplete set.

<sup>43</sup> *Christian Words* 1862, 1863, 1868.

<sup>44</sup> Glossop Library. *Wesleyan Methodist Reform preachers' plan. May to October 1862.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



By 1868 only Howard Street remained and this church remained faithful to the Reform Union until its closure and later demolition in 1960<sup>46</sup>.

The Bakewell Reform circuit, is still a member of the Wesleyan Reform Union and in 1978 was the biggest circuit in the country in terms of chapels: it had seventeen chapels and a total membership of 278<sup>47</sup>. The earliest evidence we have is a plan of October 1855 to January 1856. This lists twenty one chapels and preaching places, twenty five preachers, four preachers on trial, two exhorters and nineteen auxiliaries<sup>48</sup>. The occupations of sixteen preachers may be tentatively identified. There were six farmers, two shopkeepers, two shoemakers, two mineowners, one mineral agent, one stonemason, one joiner and wheelwright and one grocer. Farms in this area were generally small and farmers not usually too prosperous but Lawrence Furniss, one of the preachers, seems to have been the exception. Although only a tenant farmer, he was a member of the original committee of the Derbyshire Agricultural and Horticultural Society, which was founded in 1860, a committee largely composed of gentry.<sup>49</sup> In 1856 he and his brother won a cup, presented by Sir Joseph Paxton for 'the best managed large farm in the district'<sup>50</sup> and in 1843, again with his brother, he had actively promoted the Bakewell Farmers Club, which was founded in that year with the aim of encouraging improvements in farming practice.<sup>51</sup> In addition Furniss was a delegate to the Albion Street meeting of Wesleyan Reformers held in March 1850.<sup>52</sup> The two mineowners on the plan, the brothers Cook from Youlgreave, owned small lead mines and were hardly likely to have been wealthy. The other preachers who can be identified seem to have been mainly small businessmen, self-employed craftsmen and farmers, in contrast to the Sheffield Reformers who were described as 'solid working class, though well dressed' and the 'very democrats and radicals of religious society'<sup>53</sup>. At Liverpool at the same time, 47% of Wesleyan Reformers were working class<sup>54</sup>. After the United Methodist Free Churches were founded in 1857 the Reform groups began to realign and join the new church; by 1865 the only two circuits left in Derbyshire were the exiguous Glossop Circuit and the Bakewell Circuit<sup>55</sup>, which is still independent today.

<sup>46</sup> J. Bowden, *The story of 50 years: Howard St., Wesleyan Reform church*, copied from the *North Derbyshire Advertiser* by K. Bowden n.d.

<sup>47</sup> *Wesleyan Reform Yearbook 1978-9*.

<sup>48</sup> *Wesleyan Preachers [plan] in the Bakewell circuit. October 1855 - January 1856*.

<sup>49</sup> L. Waud, *A history of the Derbyshire Agricultural and Horticultural Society, 1860-1978*. (1978) pp 2 & 24.

<sup>50</sup> White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Derbyshire*. (1857) p. 484.

<sup>51</sup> C. R. Allcock, *Bakewell: an illustrated history* (1979) p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> *Wesleyan delegate takings. op. cit* p. 178.

<sup>53</sup> 'Criticus' in *Sheffield Post* from E. R. Wickham, *Church and people in an industrial city* (1957) p. 130.

<sup>54</sup> C. D. Field, 'The social structure of English Methodism' *British Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 28. No. 2. June 1977.

<sup>55</sup> *Christian Words* 1865. p. 142-3.

'The *Flysheets* controversy damaged Derbyshire Wesleyanism more severely than anywhere else in the country except Norfolk'<sup>56</sup> and more than half the membership was lost. The Bakewell Wesleyan Circuit, for example had 484 members in 1850, who had dwindled to 95 by 1852. The membership never reached 300 again and in 1906 the circuit was amalgamated with Bradwell to form the North Derbyshire Mission.<sup>57</sup> More serious still, perhaps, was the legacy of bitterness which remained more than seventy years later. In 1924 the Becket Street United Methodist Church in Derby, where Griffith had been pastor, firmly rejected any idea of reunion with the Wesleys. In the same year at Belper and Ripley the respective Wesleyan and United circuits rejected the idea of a reunion<sup>58</sup>.

The inevitable question will be asked. Why was Derbyshire so severely afflicted? and to this there can be no easy answer. Perhaps some clue to the malaise in the Connexion may be found in the undoubted lack of pastoral oversight by the ministers. This was freely acknowledged by F. A. West, a loyal Buntingite at the 1848 Conference<sup>59</sup>. Although the railways were advancing into Derbyshire by this time (the Midland Railway reached Matlock in 1849) it was still a fairly remote county and circuits tended to be large and widespread and difficult to cover on horse or foot. In the Cromford circuit, for example, the village of Ashover was situated on the edge of the circuit and communications with Cromford are indifferent even today. In September 1843 the minutes of the Local Preachers Meeting report that three local preachers had all neglected preaching appointments at Ashover<sup>60</sup>. Another preacher, James Stevens, evidently a troublemaker, 'wilfully neglected several of his appointments and refuses to promise that he would take all the appointments given him by the Superintendent and is not to have any appointments on the coming plan'<sup>61</sup>. A reading of the circuit records of both the Cromford and the Belper circuits when taken in conjunction with the pamphlets produced by the Cromford Wesleyan Reform Committee give the impression of much unrest and unhappiness. One has a strong feeling that the expulsion of the three 'Methodist martyrs' lit a match which caused an explosion which was waiting to happen.

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<sup>56</sup> R. Currie, *op cit.* p. 204.

<sup>57</sup> *Minutes of the Wesleyan Conference. 1849-51.*

<sup>58</sup> R. Currie, *loc. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> W. R. Ward. *Op cit.* p. 240.

<sup>60</sup> Derbyshire Record Office. D1431J MW 285.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

# METHODISM AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: Insights from a neglected Thomas Rankin letter

Thomas Rankin, the well-known early Methodist preacher, wrote a letter from Bristol on 7 July 1778 to Matthew Mayer, a Stockport local preacher whom he had known for a number of years. This letter has been filed with the Stockport Sunday School Manuscripts in the Stockport Central Library<sup>1</sup> and has been neglected by nearly all scholars down to the present day.<sup>2</sup> It adds interesting details to the long narrative letter that Rankin wrote to John Wesley on 16 November 1778. This latter document was published by Wesley in an early issue of his *Arminian Magazine* and in that form has been known to researchers for over two centuries.<sup>3</sup> The printed letter concentrates mostly on Rankin's religious conversion and his ministerial career before he became one of the pioneering Methodist preachers in America from 1773 to 1778. While the slightly earlier and far more candid manuscript letter contains information on some topics that have only marginal interest (the Mayer family, for example, and travel plans for the forthcoming Leeds Conference), it also offers at least four new perspectives on Rankin's years in America and the events that ensued.

First, the manuscript letter provides some insights into the numerical growth of early American Methodism, a topic fraught with difficulties. Rankin places great emphasis on the amount of growth that occurred during his first four years in America. He states that in 1773, there were 'scarce 1000 in all the societies' which were served by seven or eight preachers. He then rejoices at the progress that had been made by 1777: '[A] little better then [sic] 12 months ago, we had 7,000, and upwards, in our different societies; and about 40 Preachers engaged in the work.' His figure of '7000, and upwards'

<sup>1</sup> Stockport Central Library, Stockport Sunday School Manuscripts, B/T/3/21/1, Rankin to Mayer, Bristol, 7 July 1778. This file contains many other letters relating to early Methodism in Stockport and other parts of the North of England. Mayer was actively involved in the early development of the Stockport Sunday School, and this probably explains why some of his personal correspondence ended up in the School's archives. For additional information, see 'Memoir of Mr. Matthew Mayer,' *Methodist Magazine*, (1816), pp. 3-11, 161-70, 241-51; Peter Arrowsmith, *Stockport: A History* (Stockport, 1997), pp. 123-24, 210-11.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Dee Andrews of California State University, Hayward, has informed me (in a private communication) that she will be using this letter in her forthcoming book on early American Methodism. I am grateful to Professors Andrews, John C. English, and Elise Knapp for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

<sup>3</sup> 'A short Account Mr. Thomas Rankin: in a Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley,' *Arminian Magazine*, (1779), pp. 182-98.

suggests that actual Methodist membership was greater than the official tally of 6968 in May 1777, which itself comprised an extraordinary increase over the 4921 members recorded in 1776. Rankin's published letter sheds further light on this issue. In this later version of the story, Rankin states that when he arrived in 1773, America had six or seven preachers (figures that are slightly reduced from the manuscript letter) and about one thousand members. Then, ' . . . in May 1777, we had forty preachers in the different circuits, and about seven thousand members in the societies, besides *many hundreds of negroes*, who were convinced of sin, and many of them happy in the love of God.'<sup>4</sup> It has long been known that Methodism attracted many black slaves and free blacks from the time Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore arrived in the New World in 1769 (and to some extent even before).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the notion that the Methodist circuits could claim to have not only 'members in the societies' but also 'hundreds of negroes' is somewhat puzzling.

The most probable explanation is that while many enslaved black converts to Methodism were being counted as 'members,' many others were not. American Methodists were making great strides in Virginia and North Carolina at the time, and there is no doubt that many black slaves were being converted. Yet their owners obviously had the right to restrict their activities in various ways. It is conceivable that in some areas, there were black slave converts who thought of themselves as Methodists and were organized into classes. They were thus members in everything but name – formal Methodist membership being reserved for whites. If this were true, as seems likely, then actual Methodist expansion before and during the American Revolution was even greater than heretofore believed.<sup>6</sup> Absolute growth in 1776-77 might have been considerably more than the official increase of 2047, a figure that already ranked as the largest absolute annual increase of Methodist members recorded in the colonies up to that time. This amounted to a growth rate over 40% in one year. Rankin further claims that the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 197 (emphases added).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, 3 vols. (Nashville, 1958), I, pp. 9-10 and n. 19; pp. 25, 43, 56-57; Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed Among Blacks in America* (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), ch. 3; William B. McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 16-30.

<sup>6</sup> For insights into pre-revolutionary developments, see the 1774 Rankin letter in Frederick V. Mills, Sr., 'Thomas Rankin to Lord Dartmouth on the State of Religion and Political Affairs in America,' *Methodist History*, 23 (1984-85), 116: 'I believe we have upwards of five hundred black people, (male and female) in our Societies . . .' Once again, however, it is not entirely certain if all of these black people were being included in the official Methodist membership statistics. I am grateful to Dee Andrews for pointing out the existence of this letter.

membership figures could have been one-third higher in that year had it not been for the revolutionary tumults.<sup>7</sup> Since the recorded rate of increase in the preceding year (1775-76) had reached a phenomenal 56%, his claim may have some merit.

A second perspective offered by the new letter concerns Rankin's hostile attitude toward the American rebels and his feeling of relief when he finally sailed from the rebellious colonies to England. In the printed letter, all of this is presented in a rather genteel fashion. It is possible of course that John Wesley, as editor of the *Arminian Magazine*, abridged or rewrote parts of the letter, as he was wont to do. Twice in the printed letter Rankin (or Wesley) asserts that the main sins of the Americans were pride and luxury, and the writer goes on to state that rebellious colonists fully deserved to be punished by God. The writer also implies that the British occupation of Philadelphia and other successful military campaigns were in fact manifestations of divine wrath toward the Americans. With reference to his return to England, Rankin's (or Wesley's) language in the printed letter is quite restrained: 'The happiness I felt, for several months, after I landed, was more than a recompence for all my past sufferings.'<sup>8</sup>

The neglected manuscript letter is more graphic on all of these matters. 'Many Sheets of paper would not Suffice, to give you an adequate [*sic*] Idea, what I have passed thro', for this [*sic*] last three years,' he states near the beginning of his account. While he does not provide many factual details about his activities during the American Revolution, he is blunt in his descriptions of the 'wretched times' and the 'pains, and Sorrows of heart' he had to endure in America. 'The time may come,' he continues, 'when we yet may be comforted, concerning all we have Suffered on their [that is, the Americans'] account.'<sup>9</sup> He characterizes his departure in March 1778 as an 'escape' made 'from the hands of cruel, & Bloody men.' Whether explicitly or implicitly, he often conveys a sense of the profound relief he felt when he arrived in England. Sometimes, this is presented in a purely conventional fashion: 'At last through mercy divine, I am Safe in old England once more.' In other passages, the emotional intensity of his experiences becomes more apparent, as when he states that his 'happiness was so great, for the first 8, or

<sup>7</sup> At approximately the same time, Wesleyan Methodist membership among the slaves in the West Indies was undergoing similarly phenomenal increases. When John Baxter arrived in Antigua in 1778, for example, there were probably fewer than one hundred members. After one year of intensive proselytizing, he reported that there were six hundred. Thomas Coke, *A History of the West Indies, containing the natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical History of each Island*, 3 vols. (Liverpool and London, 1808-11), II, p. 429.

<sup>8</sup> Rankin, 'A short Account,' p. 198.

<sup>9</sup> Rankin is presumably talking about spiritual or emotional 'comfort,' but like many others, he might have had financial compensation in mind, too. On this topic see Mary Beth Norton, *The British-Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England 1774-1789* (Boston, 1972), chs. 7-8.

10 days, that I spent in London; that sleep, (and almost food) departed from me.' This type of response suggests that Rankin may have experienced acute psychological trauma as a result of the persecution inflicted upon him for his devout loyalism.<sup>10</sup>

Rankin offers a third perspective in his comments about his Methodist colleagues in America. As indicated above, Rankin returned to England with some other preachers, and those departures undoubtedly help to explain the unprecedented net loss of nearly a thousand Methodist members in America in 1777-78. In the entry on Rankin in the *DNB*, Ramsay MacDonald wrote a bleak appraisal of the situation at that juncture: '. . . the jealousy of those whom he had supplanted and his own brusque manners rendered him unpopular, and after the disputes with the American colonies had begun, and there was considerable ill-feeling stirred against Englishmen, [Rankin] prudently returned to England . . .' While MacDonald is probably overly negative in this account,<sup>11</sup> Rankin's manuscript letter to Matthew Mayer does contain at least one suggestion of discord. In the passage in which Rankin discusses the clerical exodus, there is a comment that is less than flattering to Francis Asbury: 'Brs. [George] Shadford, [Martin] Rodda, & myself; have got happily among our Brethren once more; and Br. Asbury might have been here also; but he was unwilling to leave a few Books behind. How it will go with him I know not.' None of this material appeared in the later, printed letter. It is true that Asbury was a voracious reader. In the summer of 1777, for example, he was devouring sixteen volumes of *An Universal History from the Earliest Account of Time*, among many other tomes.<sup>12</sup> Yet it was unfair of Rankin to caricature Asbury's decision to stay in America as the result of uncontrollable bibliophilia. Asbury himself thought that it was his 'duty to abide with the flock,' and in stark contrast to Rankin's euphoria, Asbury experienced 'heaviness of mind' after the departure of his colleagues.<sup>13</sup> This abiding commitment to his numerous congregations is underscored by Asbury's later itinerant labours and his reputation as the founding father of

<sup>10</sup> In a revised account of his life completed in 1808, Rankin discusses his return to England in language that conveys the emotional tone of the manuscript letter rather than the stoical resignation of the printed letter: 'For some time I was in a new world. The happiness I enjoyed was unspeakable [etc.] . . .' Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, 3 vols. (London, 1837-38), III, p. 82. See also *ibid.*, III, 47, for the circumstances surrounding what may have been Rankin's first meeting with the Mayer family in 1765.

<sup>11</sup> For more moderate views, see Edwin Schell, 'Rankin, Thomas (1738-May 17, 1810),' *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*, ed. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., and Susan E. Warrick (Lanham, Maryland, 1996), pp. 175-76; James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, Conn., 1996), pp. 341-42; and *ibid.*, pp. 67-71 for a brief, up-to-date account of Methodism in America in the 1760s and 1770s.

<sup>12</sup> Asbury, *Journal*, I, p. 245.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 235, pp. 263-64.

the Methodist Episcopal Church. It seems fair to conclude that the motto by which he is best known ('Live or die, I must ride') was not mere rhetoric and that, *pace* Rankin, his decision to stay in America was not simply a matter of 'a few Books.'

Finally, Rankin states that 'another young preacher came with me, who was left in Ireland, and a Black Preacher, who is now in London.' The black preacher was part of a small but steady stream of blacks who were making their way to England during the eighteenth century. It has been estimated that England's black population had reached fifteen or twenty thousand by the 1770s. While some became respectable citizens and others got into trouble (three were capitally convicted for their roles in the Gordon Riots of 1780), a surprising number became associated with the Methodists.<sup>14</sup> The exact identity of this black preacher is unknown, but there are some interesting possibilities. A manuscript letter by a man known only as 'Scipio' (a name commonly given to slaves) indicates that by 1783, he had left London and settled in Yorkshire. While Scipio was presumably a Methodist, it is not clear if he was also a preacher. A letter from Bristol in 1784 states that 'Mr Blake the Black' had begun preaching there, but his origins have not been traced.<sup>15</sup> Further local researches may reveal if either of these men was the black preacher who fled with Rankin from the 'cruel, & Bloody' Americans in 1778.<sup>16</sup>

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- <sup>14</sup> Kathleen Wilson, 'Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity in the English Provinces, c. 1720-1790,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1995-96), p. 81; Marika Sherwood, 'Blacks in the Gordon Riots,' *History Today*, 47:12 (1997), pp. 24-28; Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and America* (New York, 1995), 4, pp. 27-8, 161, 235; John A. Vickers, 'One-Man Band: Thomas Coke and the Origins of Methodist Missions,' *Methodist History*, 34 (1995-96), pp. 138-9; Robert Wedderburn, *The Horror of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Iain McCalman (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 9, 66-67.
- <sup>15</sup> John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Methodist Archives and Research Centre (Manchester), DDCW 2/14, 'Scipio' to 'Scipio's Master,' Sheriff Hutton, 6 Dec. 1783; DDPr 1/23, Henry Durbin to Charles Wesley, Bristol, 20 Oct. 1784. I am grateful to Gareth Lloyd for pointing out the existence of these two letters.
- <sup>16</sup> The rise of black preachers in early American Methodism is discussed in Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1998), pp. 108-117.

# THE EXETER REFORM COMMITTEE

*".. if action had been taken against a single Reformer, Conference Methodism would have been ere this a Hissing and a Bye Word."* - Richard Keeping of Chard.

When the Fly Sheets controversy came to a head at the Wesleyan Conference of 1849 a new wave of reform was launched. In the attenuated peninsula of South West England the earlier secession, the Wesleyan Methodist Association, had only established itself at all strongly in Cornwall where it had six circuits<sup>1</sup> by 1847. Devon had one weak circuit, Tavistock and Devonport, on the Cornish border. Somerset had two circuits, Bath and Worle near Weston Super Mare. Dorset had none. Beyond these to the north and east the nearest circuits were Cheltenham and Gosport, an indication of the Association's general lack of support in the South West of England. Between the Tavistock and Devonport circuit on the Cornish border and the Worle circuit lay the whole of Devon and West Somerset, a distance of eighty miles with no Reform cause.

After 1849 the efforts of the new reformers resulted in more circuits in the South West. The 1858 printed *Minutes* of the second Assembly of the United Methodist Free Churches show that the South West, west of the line between Cheltenham and Gosport, had gained a mixed bag of eight circuits although Gosport was no more. Cornwall<sup>2</sup>, Gloucestershire<sup>3</sup> and Somerset<sup>4</sup> had gained two each and Devon<sup>5</sup> and Dorset<sup>6</sup> one each, although one new Cornish circuit, St Columb, had been a late effort by the Associationists.

Only two of these new circuits, Exeter and Bridgwater, were in the eighty mile long swathe between the Devon/Cornwall border and Worle. The progress of Reform within this area had been monitored and encouraged by a committee of Reformers in Exeter, and their minute book<sup>7</sup> is the only surviving manuscript record created by Reformers within Devon and West Somerset. In addition printed Reform plans<sup>8</sup> survive from the strong Exeter circuit and the weak West Somerset circuit of Bridgwater. The Exeter minute book covers the period September 1850 to October 1852 inscribed 'Exeter Branch of the Wesleyan Reform Society. Organised Augt. 28th 1850 at a

<sup>1</sup> Camelford, Wadebridge & Bodmin; Helston; Launceston & Stratton: Liskeard; Penzance; Redruth.

<sup>2</sup> St. Columb; Truro.

<sup>3</sup> Bristol; Kingswood.

<sup>4</sup> Bath & Frome: Midsomer Norton.

<sup>5</sup> Exeter.

<sup>6</sup> Dorchester and Weymouth.

<sup>7</sup> Devon Record Office 64/2/25.

<sup>8</sup> Devon Record Office 2514D The Tiverton Circuit records contain a collection of papers, mostly plans, of George Woodbury Cockram (1818 - 1885). He was successively in membership with the schismatic Arminian Bible Christians, the Wesleyans and the Reformers. He preached in Exeter and Bridgwater.



Meeting held in the Reform Association Room, Musgrave Alley'.

The Reform committee met frequently, sometimes appointing the preachers for the following Sunday. The book includes minutes of committees, sub-committees, society meetings, quarterly meetings and just one district meeting in March 1852, which is the main subject of this article. The 'district meeting' was no more than a gathering convened by the Exeter committee to mark the visit of William Griffith<sup>9</sup>, to which they invited congregations and individuals with Reform sympathies. The minutes give a unique picture of local Reform activity with reports from Wesleyan circuits in Devon, West Somerset and West Dorset and the full text is given below. All twelve circuits mentioned were within the Wesleyan Exeter District and Crediton had a degree of autonomy within the Exeter circuit. Probably there had been some Reform agitation in each of these circuits, even where the meeting received no report. The Wesleyan district contained two further circuits, Barnstaple and South Molton, that were not mentioned. Author's notes are given in [] or in footnotes. Places are in Devon unless indicated.

**Exeter District Meeting**

Wesleyan Refuge Chapel (Exon)<sup>10</sup> March 22nd 1852

Mr. J. Trehane in the chair.

**Present.** Brs. Steer, Lambie, King, R. Fisher, W. Guest, S. Trehane, Hutchings, J. Challice, Barber, Manning, Jarman, J. Fisher, J. Wills, T. Guest, Popham (Topsham), E. Hawkins and J. Perriman (Silverton) and Rev. Wm. Griffith.

**Also** Br. Ling<sup>11</sup> (Weston Zoyland) Bridgewater [*sic*] circuit [Somerset]

Br. May (Lyme [Regis]) Bridport do. [Dorset]

Br. Reynolds Teignmouth do.

**Question** - The present state of the movement in District?

[**Exeter Circuit**]. An account was given of the state of the Exeter circuit which was very flourishing.<sup>12</sup>

[**Tiverton Circuit**] A letter was read from Mr Burrows<sup>13</sup> (Collumpton<sup>14</sup>) giving

<sup>9</sup> William Griffith was one of the three ministers who were expelled by the 1849 Wesleyan conference. Subsequently they toured the country in the Reform cause.

<sup>10</sup> Exeter

<sup>11</sup> Richard Ling of Weston Zoyland appears on the Reform plan for Bridgewater 1852-54.

<sup>12</sup> Nothing was recorded since the Committee were mostly Exeter people who knew their local situation.

<sup>13</sup> R. Burrow, Collumpton, appears on the Tiverton Wesleyan plan, February - May 1852, as a local preacher. His last appointments were on April 25. The next quarter he appears on the Exeter Reform plan, April - June 1852, as Burrows, Cullompton [*sic*]. His first appointments were on April 4.

an a/c of the state of Conferencism in the Tiverton Circuit. Viz. Circuit fund - embarrassed. Circuit debt from £20 to £30. Quarterly income (by very great exertion) about £45. Quarterly grant from Contingent Fund £3. 2. 6. Obligated to make public collections towards the so called Worn Out Ministers Fund. Great efforts have been made to reduce the debt of Tiverton Chapel, assisted by the Conference, they have reduced it to £1000 - still the debt is very heavy.

Congregations falling off especially in Tiverton. Number of members in circuit 271 - 133 of whom are in Tiverton. Several have stopped the Connexional supplies - all the Local Preachers (except Mr Lawrance<sup>15</sup> an ex Travelling Preacher) are on the moderate side and for the present disposed to remain quiet.

**Taunton and Wellington Circuit** [Somerset] No representative nor letter.

**Bridgewater** [*Sic*] Circuit [Somerset] Represented by Br. Ling of Weston Zoyland. There have been 7 Local Preachers left off the Conference Plan thus leaving but 14 and 6 of these are amongst the dissatisfied. Separate services recently commenced. Preachers on the Reform Plan 7, classes in the circuit 5, members 50, 1 week-evening and 1 Sunday (afternoon) service is held, a Sunday forenoon service is contemplated.

**South Petherton** Circuit. [Somerset] A letter was read from Mr. Wm. Taylor (Ilminster). The people here have been kept in ignorance by the Preachers who are assiduously endeavouring to blacken the character of the Reformers and denounce their cause. There are a few Reformers in the circuit, not yet sufficient to commence separate services except at Ilminster<sup>16</sup>. About 2 months since a room was taken there and services commenced. There are 22 members, most of whom were expelled. An aged Local Preacher, Jno Morris, for letting the said room has received notice for trial by the Superintendent<sup>17</sup>. The Conference cause is very low and the chapel (Ilminster) very badly attended. They are willing to unite in engaging a paid lecturer in believing his services would do great good.

<sup>14</sup> Modern spelling is Cullompton, but contemporary spelling varied as may be seen above.

<sup>15</sup> S. Lawrence, Sampford [Peverell], appears on the Tiverton Wesleyan plan, February - May 1852, as a local preacher.

<sup>16</sup> M. D. Costen, *Wesleyans and Bible Christians in South Somerset. Accounts and Minutes, 1808 - 1907.* (1984) pp. 49, 51. In March 1850 the Wesleyan membership at Ilminster was 47, by September 1852 it was 21.

<sup>17</sup> Costen, 1984. p. 192. On 30 March 1852, Morris was suspended by the Local Preachers' meeting of the South Petherton Wesleyan circuit and his remaining appointment were given to others. He had opened his house for reformers to preach, preached for them himself and 'in various other ways aided them in their agitating and divisive measures'. p. 196. A Mr Morris of Ilminster was received back again in September 1858 'on condition that he is willing to live peaceably among us.'

**Axminster** Circuit. A letter was read from Mr Keeping<sup>18</sup> (Chard) [Somerset], who was prevented from being at the meeting by illness, stating that if action had been taken against a single Reformer, Conference Methodism would have been ere this a Hissing and a Bye word. It is intimated the Superintendent Preacher<sup>19</sup> must do something before May. If so the Local Preachers and people being united will be prepared to defend themselves and resist every attempt to coerce or intimidate. The circuit generally is thought to be rooted and grounded in the principles of Wesleyan Reform.

**Budleigh Salterton** Circuit. A letter was read from Br. Burrows (Exmouth) stating that the present position of the circuit was rather uncertain. It was expected the chapel at Exmouth would soon be freed from Conference yoke. Lymptone chapel was free and congregation improved. At Budleigh Salterton conferencism has a strong hold. At most of the other places the people grumble and go on - the greater part of them.

Throughout the circuit the Conference preachers<sup>20</sup> defend Conferential doings at the expense of degrading all who happen to differ from them in opinion and judgement.

**Bridport** Circuit [Dorset] Represented by Br. May (Lyme Regis). In a quiescent state, Mr Beech<sup>21</sup>, Bridport, Circuit Steward, supplies the required salt [?] and with some others is making every effort to keep the circuit quiet.

The present Superintendent, has however commenced the expelling system and there is reason to suppose will proceed still further. As a consequence things will take a move as several of the Local Preachers determine to stand by the expelled. At Bridport there are only 5 known Reformers, while at Lyme all the males [?] are on the side of the question.

**Bideford** (Circuit). Letters were recd. from Br. J. Pickard. No steps had been taken in reference to the movement until 2 or 3 weeks since. A committee is now appointed. The Rev. S. Dunn<sup>22</sup> is to visit and to them a tale unfold. It is believed that a large majority of both officers and members of society are on the side of liberty.

**Dunster** Circuit. [Somerset] There are as yet no decided Reformers here although several signed the moderate declaration.

**Okehampton** (Circuit). No representative or letter.

<sup>18</sup> R. F. S. Thorne, *A History of Methodism in Chard* (1994) pp. 5-8. Keeping had been the leader of two classes at the Chard Wesleyan chapel. He was leader of a reform secession which kept the Wesleyan chapel and later built a new one.

<sup>19</sup> John Collier.

<sup>20</sup> Josiah Mycock and Thomas Chope.

<sup>21</sup> Read as 'Beach'.

<sup>22</sup> One of the 'three expelled'.

**Teignmouth** (Circuit) Represented by Br. Reynolds. No decided step has yet been taken - a public meeting would be held at Newton Abbot and great hopes entertained of ultimate success.

**Crediton.** No representative or letter.

The following questions were then discussed.

2nd. What shall we do to promote the future state of the movement?

3rd. Shall a paid lecturer be employed for 3 months?

4th. Can the Publications Department be rendered more efficient?

After considerable discussion it was resolved on the motion of Br. Jarman, sec'd. by Br. Perriman, That the General Committee (London) be applied to for a Lecturer<sup>23</sup> for the District for 3 months. Resolved on the motion of Br. Wills, sec. by Br. R. Fisher, That it be strongly recommended to the friends in the various circuits of the District to get the Wesleyan Times<sup>24</sup> introduced gratuitously into the Reading Rooms etc.

These reports probably raised hopes of Reform progress in the near future. Exeter was flourishing, at Tiverton the old body was losing money and taking a battering, Reform services were being held at Bridgwater and Ilminster, Axminster was 'rooted and grounded' in reform, Lymptstone was free and Exmouth soon would be and there were supporters in other circuits. The actual outcome was less exciting and a small reward for a great deal of anxiety, uncertainty and bitterness.

The textile town of Tiverton proved to be a disappointment despite local dissension and attempts to alienate the Wesleyan chapel in Willand village by physical violence. Exmouth did lose its Wesleyan chapel to the Reformers, who joined the Exeter circuit with Lymptstone, but both causes collapsed, which opened the door for the Primitive Methodists, who built chapels in both places.<sup>25</sup> Led by Keeping, a Reform circuit was formalised at Chard in the Axminster circuit in 1859 but it petered out in 1874 and may have drawn members away from the Bridgwater circuit<sup>26</sup>. Nothing came of Ilminster and by 1858 the only new circuits were at Exeter and Bridgwater.

Although remote from the strongholds of Free Methodism, the two circuits, Exeter and Bridgwater, survived into the present century. By 1855

<sup>23</sup> Some contemporary Anglican clergymen insisted that inscriptions on the grave of a Methodist cleric should refer to "teacher" not "minister". Here the reformers are using the same trick.

<sup>24</sup> The *Wesleyan Times* (1849-67) was an anti-Conference newspaper.

<sup>25</sup> E. Chick, *A History of Methodism in Exeter* (1907) p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> R. F. S. Thorne, 1994. pp. 5-8.

there were twelve places on the Exeter plan but three of these were distant in South Devon, Newton Abbot, Paignton and Brixham. There were 225 members in 1858 and the Exeter Free Methodists went on to build their prestigious Queen Street chapel in Northernhay Gardens in 1857/58; this handsome stone building survives as offices. The circuit settled down with six chapels in and around Exeter and one awkwardly located at Newton Abbot. It contributed 419 members to United Methodism in 1907 but would not join the former Bible Christian circuit and remained a separate circuit until 1932 when it had 222 members. By this time it had closed its Queen Street church, lost one church to the former BC circuit and contained only one church in a working class suburb and another in a village.

In 1853 there were three places on the Bridgwater plan, the town church, Westonzoyland and Woolavington. In 1858 there were 219 members but the next year only 70 and by 1907 the circuit was a shadow with a mere 64 members, a town church situated behind shops and one preaching place. In fact its town congregation left its building in December 1906 to join the local Bible Christian congregation with the object of building a new church on an awkward site. This was opened in 1911 and today is Bridgwater's only Methodist church.

The last paragraph of the Exeter minutes highlights the whole question of ministry that the Reformers were anxious to avoid but eventually had to face. On the first of April, a few days after the Exeter meeting, the committee told the Secretary to apply to the London General Committee for a 'District Lecturer' and the district would pay half his salary. Stephen Davies from Camborne, Cornwall was recommended and he was appointed on 3 June 1852 at £75 per year.

It was one thing to appoint Stephen Davies as paid help in 1852, calling him a 'lecturer' to emphasise that he was not a minister. It was quite another thing to define his status five years later, in 1857, at the time of amalgamation with the Association and its stated ministry. In fact Davies was put on probation and he was received into full connexion in 1859, nominally after four years probation, which dated his ministry from 1855. Davies could not have been the only ex-reformer who felt his seniority had been unfairly underestimated, with all the consequences for future superannuation benefits. A resolution in the 1863 *UMFC Minutes*, p. 32, conceded that 'The length of the Ministerial service of the Ex-Reform brethren who entered the ministry of the United Churches at the general Amalgamation of 1857, shall be determined by, and include, the time in which they were fully employed as ministers in Connexion with Churches which Amalgamated...' In 1863 the *Minutes* gave dates for entry into ministry for the first time and '1852' appeared beside Davies' name. Probably justice was done thereby but it is typical of the euphoria of church union that such practical questions were left unresolved. Davies died in 1874

and his carefully worded obituary<sup>27</sup> might have mildly surprised any surviving Exeter Reformers. It said that in 1852 'he took oversight of a church', his first field of labour being Exeter.

This insight into early Reform ends when the Exeter book ends in October 1852. The Reformers 'movement', as they called it, never gained popular support in rural Devon and West Somerset and today only four of their fifteen Devon congregations survive in Methodism.<sup>28</sup> The Primitive causes in Devon have fared marginally worse as only three of their sixteen congregations survive. The only New Connexion chapel in Devon closed long ago. All the other Primitive and Free causes have amalgamated or closed, the inevitable fate of minority partners in church unions.

R. F. S. THORNE

<sup>27</sup> *UMFC Minutes*, 1874 p15.

<sup>28</sup> Their Devon churches are as follows:- DEVONPORT: Albert Rd., Honicknowle. EXETER: Queen Street, St. Thomas, Silverton\*\*, Topsham, Tedburn St Mary\*\*, Newton Abbot. LAUNCESTON: Virginstowe. PLYMOUTH: Ebrington Street, Pomphlett\*, Colebrook\*. TAVISTOCK: Russell St., Beeralston, Morwellham. (\* Original building in use. \*\* Continuing congregation in new building.)

## THE MAKING OF AN EARLY BIBLE CHRISTIAN CIRCUIT

**I**n the Autumn of 1822 the young Bible Christian Connexion opened work in Bristol. What led to this outburst of work in a city - for the Bible Christians were always, and especially in the early days, a predominantly rural community - we do not now know; and as we shall see, this experiment soon followed the normal Bible Christian pattern. But the work started there some time in the Autumn and Elizabeth Dart, who after three years' work had been resting<sup>1</sup>, was called out of her supernumeraryship to take charge. In the following March John Parkyn came to join her from his station at Canworthywater, and that quarter the 'Weare Circuit Book'<sup>2</sup> shows the following places as forming the circuit: Lam Street (*sic*), Park Square, Tower Street, Screwshole, Kingswood, Fishponds, Bedminster and St. Phillips. Pioneer work indeed, for the only members returned were nineteen on trial and six full members, all at Tower Street. Conditions were very much in a state of flux; the Midsummer quarter returns list only five preaching places: St Phillips' Chapel, Tower Street, Kingswood,

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Dart was the first B.C. 'itinerant female', and the need for three years' rest is perhaps indicated by the note attached to her Kirkhampton appointment in the first (1819) *Minutes*: 'to travel as her health will admit'. After some fifteen years; pioneer labour's, she married John Hicks Eynon on March 18 1833 and went with him to pioneer the work in Canada; and it is said that, when he was dispirited, she had only to enumerate his full name slowly in order to revitalise him! Truly an amazing woman.

<sup>2</sup> In the writer's possession.

Bedminster and Fishponds. To continue the story of constant change, the Michaelmas returns list St Phillip's Chapel, Tower Street, Nailsea, Backwell, Wraxell (*sic*), St Phillips Plain, Kingswood, and St Phillips. Two points in that new list are of interest: we see the clear move from Bristol into the country to the south and south-west (Nailsea, Hackwell and Wraxall), and the confusing similarity of three place names, all of which reported a handful of members; presumably they were contiguous - were they in reality three classes of the same society, or are they new names for some of the places that have disappeared?

For the moment we will look at one more quarters listing, that of Christmas 1823. Here we find Bristol, Nailsea, Wraxall, Backwell, Yatton, Clevedon, and Custock (i.e. Kewstoke; the spelling of place names frequently varies, and makes some of them difficult to identify). By now the 'ruralisation', so to speak, of the circuit is almost complete; only Bristol remains to represent the eight places in the city and immediate area of a year earlier, and Bristol has disappeared in the following quarter, reappearing briefly, with seven members, in Midsummer 1825; as we shall see, it was clearly for some time onwards worked as a mission from what the returns for Midsummer 1824 call the Weare Circuit; and it is significant that in the *Minutes* for 1824 the Weare Circuit, has replaced the Bristol Circuit. As late as twenty years later, in 1843, while there is a Bristol District, there is no Bristol Circuit, though for a few years there had been a struggling Bedminster Mission.

Perhaps rather surprisingly, this fervent evangelistic connexion seems to have been loath to receive new members too eagerly. As we saw, only one of the first list of preaching places returned members; in Midsummer 1823 only two of the five did so (St. Phillips Chapel and Tower Street); by Michaelmas 1823 St Phillips Plain and St Phillips also do so, and three of the villages return members on trial, while Christmas of the same year shows members at Bristol, Nailsea, Wraxall and Backwell with nine on trial at Yatton. But when we find that Bristol's society of 39 members has disappeared at Ladyday 1824, we do wonder what has happened, as the 1824 *Minutes*, six months later, list no circuit to which they could geographically have become attached. It looks very much like a local secession for some unknown reason.

With the care of Bristol off their backs (one almost feels that that is the right way to express it), the now rural circuit set out on a campaign of vigorous extension, and by Midsummer 1824 had causes in no less than nineteen places, now suddenly headed by Weare with fourteen members and twenty on trial, which henceforth gave its name to the circuit; and of these nineteen places, thirteen return members; in six months the circuit membership has risen from 65 to 131, and those on trial from 36 to 63. Hardly any two consecutive quarters list the same places exactly. But the list for Midsummer 1824 does give some idea of the area covered by the circuit henceforth. It included: Weare, Compton, Woodborrow, Shipham, Draycott, Allerton, Bleadon, Luxton, Crickham, Churchill, Nailsea, Wraxall, Backwell, Clevedon, Worle, Puxton, Kingston, Kewstoke, and Yatton. 'Compton' is Compton Bishop (there are several Comptons in Somerset), for it is so designated a couple of years later; Woodborrow is difficult to identify, even though it is later spelt

'Woodborough'; 'Allerton' is one of the adjacent villages of Chapel Allerton or Stone Allerton, to the south of Weare; 'Luxton' is now spelt Loxton; Crickham, again, is unidentifiable; and Kingston is presumably Kingston Seymour. All in all, and bearing in mind future developments, one may say that the Weare circuit covered a considerable area from the villages south of the Mendips, running west to the coast, and thence north-east in the direction of Bristol. Villages and hamlets come and go, some not appearing on any modern map, and some names are deceptive. 'South Brent' is not the modern South Brent, east of Plymouth, but represents Brent Knoll (East Brent is a short distance to the north-east; as late as 1882 Johnston's *General Gazetteer* calls it by the old name). It was a considerable distance for the preachers to walk, especially as there was normally an 'itinerant female' in the circuit; and walk they would, unless a friendly farmer or carter gave them a lift on a cart or trap. It explains also of course why the preachers often had lodgings in the villages as they passed from one to another in their itinerations.

As the beginning of the circuit's life was eminently pioneer work, there were for a long time financial problems. The first accounts at Christmas 1822 are significant in their brevity (we reproduce the original spelling):

Receipts, Publick Collection	14.9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d
Donation	<u>2.0</u>
Receipts total	16.9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d
Disburstments	
Elizth Dart's half-quarter's sallery	15.0
Do. Expences	3.6
Rent for room and Candles	<u>2.0</u>
	£1.00.6
	<u>16.9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></u>
Deficient Christmas quarter 1822	3.8 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d

The following quarter's accounts (Ladyday 1823) are even more expressive:

Publick Collections	17.8 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d [from eight chapels]
Tower St. Quarterage	10.11 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
Donation by E. Dart	2.0
John Parkyn collected on his way to Bristol	<u>£1.10.6</u>
	3.1.2
Disbursements:	
John Parkyn's quarterage	£3.0.0
Do. Expences Coming to Bristol	£1.9.6
Rent of a room 6 weeks 2/6 per week	15.0
John Parkyn's provisions	1.5.0
Wm Mason's expenses to & in Bristol	1.14.6
Elizth Dart's quarterage	1.10.0



Do. 12 weeks' lodgings 1/- per week	12.0
Do for food &c Ladyday quarter	18.2
J. Parkyn paid postage for letters	<u>3.4</u>
	£11.76
	<u>3.12</u>
Deficient	£8.64

These accounts are very revealing. From the second quarter's accounts, which show a donation by Elizabeth Dart, it is probably fair to assume that the donation in the previous quarter also came from her - out of her salary of 15.0s.0d! And it says much in the Ladyday quarter that over half of the circuit's income was raised by the two preachers' efforts; not only does it speak of the poverty of their hearers (and possibly also that they expected a cheap gospel), but it speaks volumes for the self-sacrificial labours and generosity of the preachers. John Parkyn had £3 per quarter as stipend, plus a home - or homes - provided by the members, towards the expenses of which the circuit paid 25s.0d; his expenses in travelling to the circuit were more than covered by the money he collected *en route*. Elizabeth Dart's stipend was £1.10.0; she lived in a humble lodging for which the circuit paid a shilling a week, and the food she bought for herself, when she was not entertained overnight in a village, as must often have been the case, cost the circuit 18s.2d for the quarter. The normal arrangements for the preachers were thus a very modest stipend plus board and lodgings in one form or another.

We find further indications of the arrangements for preachers when we come to the Michaelmas accounts for the same year. At that date his wife and family joined him - one wonders where they had been in the meantime - and the provision for a married man, presumably the normal connexional provision, copied from their Wesleyan forebears, was his own salary of £3, a quarterage of £4 for his wife to cover housekeeping for the family, £1.10.0 for each of three children, coals and candles £1, and provisions, backdated from the previous quarter, of £1.5.8, and six weeks' lodging at 1s6d per week; it looks as if a house had been found partway through the quarter (half a year's house rent of £4 was paid in the Ladyday quarter 1824). Grace Palmer had begun her ministerial labours in the circuit some months previously; she first appears in the *Minutes* in 1823, appointed to Wales, but apparently returned to Bristol for one quarter, as the accounts shew a quarter's stipend and 2s.0d for her 'water passage from Wales to Bristol'; for part of the quarter she lodged at a Mr Hole's at 4s.0d a week, and for one week with John Parkyn at the same rate. It would appear that Elizabeth Dart's health had broken down again, and that Grace Palmer came to supply for her; Elizabeth had also lodged with John Parkyn and family. The following two quarters Parkyn was without assistance, and trouble struck both his family and the circuit. First of all, the circuit's financial stringency reduced his stipend to £2 (it remained at that figure until Michaelmas 1826), and illness struck in the spring of 1824; not only was there a doctor's bill for illness for £1.18.0 and other expenses of 7s.0d but the accounts ominously report one child's 'sallery' instead of three hitherto; it would seem that illness struck the whole

family and that two of his children died. What happened then? Neither wife nor child appears in the Midsummer accounts, there is another doctor's bill, and John Parkyn himself disappears from the *Minutes* after that year. Had his wife taken as much as she could stand, and had she returned home, with that result that he followed her? We do not know. In his trouble Mary Cottle had been dispatched from Exeter to help out for the quarter, together with one Richard Marshman, 'helper' - possibly a sort of part-time lay agent - who had been paid 6s.0d for his assistance. But those pages give a poignant picture of the cost of the ministry in more sense than one.

*(To be continued)*

O. A. BECKERLEGGE

## LOCAL BRANCHES REPORT 1999

The new Millennium year will be an opportunity for our seventeen local branches to take stock of, celebrate and publicise our Methodist history. This summer our North Lancashire branch are starting early with a special edition of their Bulletin comprising short contributions about significant events this century. While we are still in this Millennium our branches continue to hold very worthwhile meetings and visits. Our Bristol branch invited members to bring personal memorabilia at a meeting and the result was overwhelming! The Manx branch had an 'Excursion to the back of beyond' beginning with the former Wesleyan chapel at Lhergydhoo.

Editors produce journals and occasional publications of an increasingly high standard and some include reviews of publications of local or national interest, which are invaluable especially where a price and supplier is given. However it would be good if the fulsome and often inaccurate description 'This beautifully produced booklet...' could now be laid to rest! Several branches of course mention the death last year of our old friend and WHS President Raymond George. From the Cumbria branch comes a long but readable article by Paul Glass about ministerial training. He looks at the colleges briefly and then turns in much more detail to Cambridge's Wesley House, a place where elitism was not entirely unknown. At a less exalted level, Lincolnshire includes an interview with a centenarian, Dolly Knott of Boston and East Midlands has an article about the Ruddington Framework Knitters. The London Bulletin has a long article about Mudie Smith's 1903 survey *The Religious Life of London*, reproducing the Methodist statistical entries. Looking at the original volume on my shelf, its very size underlines the difficulty of tracing the history of chapels and circuits in the metropolis or indeed any other urban conurbation.

An unusual note of theological controversy appears in the Spring issue of the West Midlands Bulletin. There is an eleven page report of a lecture by Arnold Cooper [who entered our ministry in 1936] about the intercession of Our Lord as found in Charles Wesley's hymns. He says that Christ's praying will continue on into eternity '...until, I believe, all will respond....' He acknowledges that this is

known as universalism. Following this report is a four page article by the Rev Colin Short, who says he was disappointed and disturbed by the lecture and reminds us that universalism is contrary to our Conference-interpreted doctrine.

I hope all our branches will not just survive the Millennium but actively enjoy it!

ROGER THORNE

## **Methodist Archives: Manuscript Accessions, February 1998 - February 1999**

Significant ms. deposits in the period including the following:

Further instalments of the Donald Soper archive, comprising books, pamphlets, lecture notes, files and diaries of tours of Ceylon, Canada, Australia, and the U.S.A, 1947-60 and copies of Hansard for 1981-91 comprising House of Lords debates in which Soper made a contribution (Transferred from West London Mission) .

Conference Papers, 1962-90 (Deposited by Rev Brian Beck).

Large Deposit (20 boxes) of Division of Social Responsibility records.

Division of Youth file records, Chester House, mainly 1950s-1980s.

Ms. letter of John Pawson to William Eden, May 1769. (Deposited by Dr R. Highfield, Merton College Oxford).

Ms. theological treatise on prayer by Samuel Wesley senior (1662-1735), c. 1720; ms. letter of Samuel Wesley Junior (1766-1837) to his mother, 4 July 1811; ms. letter of Samuel Wesley Junior to Charles Wesley junior, 21 March 1807. (All items purchased at Hamptons auction, May 1998).

Ms. letter of Samuel Sebastian Wesley to [J. Street], 30 October [1825] (Purchased)

Ms. letter of S.S. Wesley in Leeds to anon, n.d. (Purchased)

Ms. letter of S.S. Wesley to his mother, Sarah Wesley, 7 Sept [no year] (Purchased)

Ms. letter of S.S. Wesley to Henry John Gauntlett, 30 Sept, [no year] (Purchased).

Sermons and preaching notes of the Rev K.H. Crosby, Methodist minister, 20th century. (Deposited by Michael Booth)

Scrapbook containing letters and papers relating to the Perks family, late 19th century.

PETER B. NOCKLES

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* by Colin Podmore. Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998. pp. xv, 332. £45.00 ISBN:0 19 820725 5)

This book is an important study of the Moravian church in England from 1728 when, several months after the Moravians in their Herrnhut settlement had enjoyed a 'quasipentecostal experience' (p.6), the first 'messenger' was sent to England, until 1760, the year of Zinzendorf's death, by which time the Moravian church in England, legally recognised in 1749, had been discredited by several years of vilification and mockery. Podmore convincingly makes a case for his periodisation: the years covered make for an intriguing rise and fall narrative and four of the book's nine chapters - the first and last two - provide a chronological frame. The central thematic chapters focus on the 1740s, exploring the Moravians' relations with Methodists, their part in the Evangelical Revival, the attractions of the movement to its members and adherents, their understanding of their relationship to the Established church and the changing attitudes of some prominent Anglican bishops to the Moravians.

As such, there is plenty in this excellent study to interest Methodist and Anglican historians alike. Readers will be aware that a Moravian, Peter Böhler, prompted John Wesley's 'heart-warming experience' at Fetter Lane, but Podmore's study adds much to our knowledge and corrects some misunderstandings. In the first chapter, for example, he argues convincingly that the early Moravian arrivals in England from 1728 to 1737 were inspired not by evangelistic motives, but by the wish to establish ecumenical relations and to seek openings for a settlement in the new American colony of Georgia.

Chapter II, exploring the information and development of the Fetter Lane Society between 1738 and 1740, is a re-working of Podmore's articles in *Proceedings* (46 (1988), pp 125-53 and 47 (1990), pp 156-86). Chapter III explores the relationship during the 1740s between the Methodists (Whitefield's and Wesley's) and the Moravians, now firmly established in English religious life. From 1740, the Wesleys increasingly distanced themselves from the Moravians, theological differences focusing particularly on Wesley's doctrine of perfection and the Moravian doctrine of 'stillness'. Whitefield, however, Podmore informs us, came close to union with the Moravians, though ultimately the meeting of minds with Zinzendorf was problematic and the defection to the Moravians of John Cennick, with a large number of Whitefield's followers, further strained the relationship. Nevertheless, both the Wesley brothers and Whitefield, we are told, retained a strong attraction to the Moravians long after they had severed close ties.

Podmore's exploration of the appeal of the Moravian church (chapter V) is fascinating and impressive though at the same time, inevitably, perhaps the least convincing part of the book. If it is difficult for historians confidently to identify the motivations of the individual, it is notoriously so in the case of groups of people. Whilst much of the study is concerned with the thoughts and deeds of some of the key figures in the Evangelical Revival, this chapter must necessarily generalise from scattered comments and, to a certain extent, assume the appeal of various characteristics of Moravian life and worship whilst describing them. The attractions are sevenfold: a distinct identity as 'Christ's Chosen Flock' (p.125); a refuge from the world and the tyranny of reason; assiduous pastoral care (particularly marriage guidance); a spirituality particularly associated with the years 1743-50 (known as the 'Sifting Time')

focusing on Christ's blood and wounds; community life (planned discrete settlements, including Fulneck in Yorkshire); distinctive forms of worship, plain and egalitarian, community being reinforced particularly by the communion and singing services; and a strong aesthetic appeal in the form of buildings (Fulneck), music and even paintings, predominantly though not exclusively Zinzendorf's collection, displayed during lovefeasts.

Podmore shows that, unlike the other churches which developed out of the Evangelical Revival, the Moravians, who emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit in effecting conversions, did not proselytise. As a result they had a mere twelve congregations in England concentrated in four areas (Yorkshire, Bedford, Cheshire and Wiltshire) by 1760, and these were almost exclusively the fruits of the endeavours of evangelism by non-Moravian field-preachers, producing societies which only later joined the Moravian church. If their numbers were small, however, the Moravians had a powerful attraction for a number of eminent religious figures, including the Dissenters Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge and the Anglican William Grimshaw.

Relations with the Church of England remained of central concern to the Moravians throughout the period of this study, and their non-proselytising stance assisted them in this respect. Podmore shows that Zinzendorf hoped to maintain a position for the Moravians as a sort of religious order (or 'tropus') within the Anglican church. The Anglican bishops were divided in their response to Moravian overtures, some accepting their claims to authentic episcopacy and Apostolic succession, others, including Bishop Gibson of London remaining implacably opposed. The 1749 Act, the product of skilful lobbying, provided the Moravians with formal recognition and provided them with the basis for expansion in American colonies. The years from 1749 to 1753 were the high tide of Moravian influence and prestige, courted by prelates and princes and flooded by offers of land in America and the British Isles. The fall from grace resulted from a combination of well-publicised financial mismanagement and anti-Moravian tracts which appeared from 1753. The writings of Henry Rimius supported, Podmore argues, by the previously sympathetic Archbishop Herring, focused on Moravian hymns and their apparent sexual impropriety. Whitefield weighed in, publishing his own condemnation and the accusations were popularised in newspapers and tracts. In 1755 Zinzendorf left England for the last time, the campaign against the Moravians waned and the church retired for some years into the background of English religious life.

Podmore's study is both lovingly constructed and in the best scholarly traditions. It is a welcome contribution to our knowledge of the eighteenth-century Revival, bringing into the foreground for closer inspection a group generally acknowledged to be of fundamental importance but too often treated relatively briefly as a quiet background to the noisy drama of field-preaching and popular evangelism.

RICHARD SYKES

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*Confidence in Mutual Aid - A Biography of the Methodist Local Preachers Mutual Aid Association 1849 - 1999.* by Alan Parker. (MPH. 1998. pp. 386 £10.00 ISBN 1 85852 105 X)

The early Victorian age revealed that Great Britain was 'Two Nations', as Disraeli put it in 1845. Thomas Carlyle's 'Condition of England Question' had many answers - one was independent self-help and self respect and voluntary collectivism which produced

Trade Unions and Friendly Societies and the Co-op. The LPMAA fits that scene. It coincided, too, with the fearful tensions in Wesleyanism, culminating in the 'Fly Sheets' controversy of 1849, with angry abuse on both sides, an immature and defensive ministry clashing with a laity not prepared to tolerate dictatorship. Mass expulsions of rebels included many local preachers like Francis Pearson, a pioneer of the LPMAA.

The historian of the LPMAA needs to be aware of the development of concern for the poor from the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 with the 'less eligibility' of the dreaded workhouse, through Lloyd George's Acts of 1908 and 1911, on through Beveridge and the Welfare State to what Frank Field has called the 'stakeholder' society. In 1849 James Uriah Walker of Halifax was ashamed to consign a local preacher to the workhouse, in Cromford John Turner, another preacher died of starvation. LPMAA enabled people like that to avoid the workhouse with a sum of eight shillings a week. Alan Parker takes us through all the details of the early days with descriptions of the early 'Aggregates' (no conference - thank you!) and vignettes of the pioneers like Pearson, Harris, Dr. Melson of Birmingham and later the formidable Judge Waddy, who did so much for the national image of the local preacher. An interesting section describes the local preachers' cottages at Fillongley, near Coventry, anticipating the styles of later days.

Alan Parker avoids overlapping Alfred Gilliver's *More Precious Than Rubies* (1989) on the early history of the Residential Homes picking up the story in 1989, showing the present work with 100 residents in the five homes and 100 helped in other ways. It is significant that from the beginning the LPMAA involved some of the non-Wesleyan bodies, including the Wesleyan Reform Union, with the Primitive Methodists coming in only at Methodist Union bringing 5,000 local preachers into membership of the Association. The story of the Primitive Methodists before 1932 would be pertinent considering the greater number of working class preachers among them. We then have an impressive 'Cook's Tour' of all the districts with the distinctive styles and characters like Sir William Stephenson, R. Parkinson Tomlinson, Albert Bailey and the women preachers who gradually made their mark in the LPMAA. Methodist worship would have been impossible without these local preachers who were always complementary to ministers, not 'stop gaps'.

Alan Parker gives detailed accounts of negotiations over pensions and Charity Law and the long negotiations with the Local Preachers' Department beginning when Fred Farley was LP Secretary, continuing with John Stacey's suggestion of LPMAA 'taking Conference into its system' and now, at last, the Association within the Connexional structures. This is all a labour of love done with meticulous accuracy, even if Griffiths is Griffith (p28)! At times one is almost overwhelmed with detail and needs the chronology at the back which charts the story admirably.

What of the future? Could the LPMAA and Methodist Homes unite? What of the role of LPMAA meetings in relation to the Local Preachers' Meetings and entirely new styles of worship? LPMAA and its magazine has now long ago left behind a slightly pietistic image. What of younger preachers' involvement? This is not really the business of a reviewer but the WHS can heartily congratulate the Association on its 150 years of work for, as Dr. Brian Beck puts it, 'Mutual Aid by the preachers to support the very poor among them was as much an expression of the Gospel as preaching itself'. Hearty thanks to Alan Parker for telling this story - along with *Workaday Preachers* we now at last have proper perspectives on the local preacher in Methodism.

*Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair.* The 1998 Scott Holland Lectures by Alan Wilkinson. (SCM Press. 1998. pp 302. £14.95 ISBN 0 334 02749 7)

Dr. Alan Wilkinson - son of J. T. Wilkinson - points to three themes in this most perceptive and readable book. First the important contribution Christianity has made to British socialism and the Labour Party; second the way in which the Labour Party has recently abandoned its dominant 'statism' and some of its secularism and thirdly the writer's rejection of a progressive or Utopian view of history held by some socialists.

The story takes us from F. D. Maurice to Tony Blair. After a swift but sound survey of the nineteenth-century background, there are penetrating analyses of the thinking of Scott Holland, Gore and the clearly formative thinking of R. H. Tawney, the Christian Social Union and William Temple. Wilkinson is sympathetic but highly critical of the 'Christendom group' and indeed of Temple - 'he did not anticipate how pluralist post-war Britain would become'. What of the Methodist contribution? We have fine vignettes of a Methodist in local affairs - Peter Lee, and one at the top of government - Arthur Henderson, who did much to create the modern Labour Party. Among what Wilkinson calls 'the Dissenters' (ie those who found the Labour Party too tame) emerges Donald Soper who 'has been the best known Methodist and possibly the best known Christian in Britain . . . a rebel of the kind the British enjoy domesticating and neutralizing, but a restless matador always on the look out for a bull'. Very similar to George Macleod who, like Soper, graced the House of Lords, the heart of the Establishment! Soper was essentially a man of the Enlightenment who believed the Kingdom of God could be secured by political action. John Vincent follows, living like Scott Lidgett in the inner city. His theology is a reflection of action and discipleship. Wilkinson asks the hard question: Is the 'Journey Downwards' that John Vincent advocates 'largely middle class professionals, most with secure incomes'?

The book ends with John Macmurray (who greatly influenced Tony Blair) saying 'We need one another to be ourselves' which blends with recent Roman Catholic thought about the Common Good. This is one of those books I couldn't put down, written with verve, style and humour and total mastery of the material. Not all will like the layout of the end-notes which need constant reference to the bibliography. This is Alan Wilkinson's fourth book on what he calls 'the Church on the frontier'. I heartily commend it.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER.

*Methodist Theology* by Thomas A. Langford, (Epworth Press, 1998, pp 112 £9.95 ISBN 0 7162 05211)

This third volume in the 'Exploring Methodism' series highlights the problems presented by the scope and format of the series as a whole. A summary of two centuries of theological developments in a hundred pages inevitably falls between two stools. On the one hand, it cannot go into the amount of detail that would satisfy the serious student (as distinct from the 'crammer' who imagines that reading a summary is a substitute for engaging with the real thing). On the other, such concentrated treatments of large topics are likely to prove incomprehensible to the

non-theological general reader. A bird's-eye view is all that can be expected, and this is well provided in the present volume. Any shortcomings may be laid at the door of the editors, who, it may be argued, should have given the author considerably more scope by (a) providing a separate volume (instead of an introductory chapter) on the theology of the Wesleys and (b) insisting that the largely separate development of American theology, however important in itself, did not belong here.

It is certainly true (as David Carter rightly insisted in his recent lecture on J. A. Beet) that Methodist scholars have been 'ecclesiologically irresponsible' in concentrating too narrowly on John Wesley and, to a lesser extent, on the theology of his brother's hymns. This volume will go a little way to redressing that balance. But what is needed is a series of monographs on such men as John Fletcher, William Burt Pope and John Scott Lidgett, backed up by more extensive extracts from their writings which would demonstrate whether or not they really do have something to say to a post-modern age.

JOHN A. VICKERS.

*Children of the Manse* by Ruth G Rees (Church in the Market Place Publications, Buxton 1998 £4.00 from Rev Robert Davies, 1 St James' Terrace, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 6HS)

The authoress, daughter of a Wesleyan Methodist Minister, John Goldsborough, was born in 1920. In those days the three year itinerant system meant that the manse family moved house six times during her childhood and adolescence. Their place of residence and circuits in this time were South Milford (Selby) 1920-21; Baildon (Bradford, Shipley) 1921-24, Addingham (Ilkley) 1924-27, Leeds (Chapel Allerton) 1927-31; Leeds (Headingley) 1931-35; Wallasey (1935-38) and Lancaster (Sulyard Street) 1938-46.

The book, as the preface states, is 'a fascinating piece of social history, particularly to a generation for which life without a motor car seems unthinkable.' There was also no TV, people made their own fun and, given the chance, kept chickens in their backyard.

The writer also provides a fascinating glimpse into the days when manses were fully furnished sometimes with congregational cast offs (the inventory of their manse in one circuit included "three tea towels, one torn" and "six tea cups, one without a handle"). Ministers travelled by bicycle and the schooling of their children was regularly interrupted by the demands of itinerancy.

Yet, in spite of all, Ruth was not afraid to marry a Methodist minister, Austin Rees, with whom she 'travelled' until their final 'station' Buxton, where, after superannuation, they made their home. A book to enjoy.

KENNETH LYSONS

*Susanna Wesley: the Complete Writings* edited by Charles Wallace Jr., (OUP. 1997, pp.xv, 504, £47.50. ISBN 0 19 507437 8)

Much of the material in this volume has already appeared in print, but it is good to have it gathered into a single volume and so meticulously edited. We are fortunate that so much of Susanna's writing has survived, enough certainly to show how



formidable a woman the 'mother of the Wesleys' was in her own right. Wallace provides a substantial Introduction, including a biographical sketch and review of earlier assessments of her. Each section of the text is prefaced by its own introduction and there are detailed end-notes throughout the volume. The whole is an exemplary piece of academic editing. Susanna's writings fall conveniently into three categories. Her letters provide glimpses of many facets of her life and personality, for example as adviser to the 'Holy Club'. Her Journals are not diaries of events, but meditations and spiritual jottings, amounting to 'a spiritual account book'. Here we see one source of John Wesley's early diaries. Finally comes a section of 'educational, catechetical and controversial writings' which provides evidence of her intellectual calibre. Here we have dissertations on the Apostles' Creed and the Decalogue and her comments on the controversy in 1741 between Wesley and Whitefield over the doctrine of election. Susanna Wesley was undoubtedly a worthy daughter of Dr Annesley, one who was well ahead of her own time and would have found herself in many ways at home in ours. She has been well served by her editor, who rounds off the volume with a detailed bibliography and an in-depth index.

JOHN A. VICKERS

## NOTES AND QUERIES

### 1523 WINSFORD AND THE 1907 METHODIST UNION

Further to Roger Thorne's WHS Lecture for 1997 reported in *Proceedings* 51, part 3, on the 'United Methodist Church 1907-1932' we read that 92% of the Quarterly Meetings voted for union; what happened to the 8% that voted against? Did they become independent? Even of those who did vote for union, many had reservations, as extracts from the minutes of a special Quarterly Meeting of the Winsford and Sandbach UMFC Circuit in Cheshire, held in 1905 to discuss the proposed new Constitution, reveal. The main objection was the clause relating to the Minister and his powers in the Circuit. For example, the Constitution proposed that the Minister was to be Chairman of all Circuit Meetings. But this, the meeting declared, 'is opposed to the basic principle of free election, and this Circuit is absolutely opposed to it'. An amendment was therefore proposed:-

'That the words "unless the meeting take exception"  
be inserted after the clause referring to Ministerial  
Chairmanship of Meetings.

Taking the new Constitution generally, the meeting summed up the debate in these words:-

That although we agree with the idea of union on general lines, and believe that many advantages would accrue therefrom, yet because of the proposals in the Constitution mean the sacrifice of the Basic Principle of Free Methodism, viz:- Free representation, and free election, we are distinctly opposed to union along these lines.

An amendment was then proposed:-

That this Circuit is in favour of Union, but with our amendments.

The voting was:-

For the amendment                      14

Against the amendment	9
Abstentions	5

This antagonism towards the ministry continued in this Circuit for many years, when many unfavourable comments appear in the Minutes of Circuit Meetings. One minister who asked for an increase in his stipend was told that he was more concerned with 'laying up treasure on earth' than encouraging his flock to 'lay up treasure in Heaven'. Another was censured because he 'nipped' to the off-licence.

The 1907 Act of Union produced a Model Deed which it was hoped that all Societies would adopt, but the Winsford Trustees wished to keep their foundation deed of 1840 in which the ownership of the property was vested in the Trustees personally, not wanting to hand over 'our chapel' to the united church. In 1924 the then President of the UM Church, the Rev Joseph Lineham came to Winsford in person to address the church meeting in an effort to persuade them to adopt the model deed, but this pleading fell on deaf ears and he went away without success. There the matter rested until 1966 when, at a sparsely attended meeting, it was decided to adopt the model deed of the Methodist Church under the item of 'any other business'!

G. J. C. GRIFFITHS.

#### 1524 THE MISSIONARY REGISTER

In the MMS Archives at the school of Oriental and African Studies in London, the MMS Archives and Records at 25 Marylebone Road, and several other places there is a considerable amount of material about individual Methodist missionaries, about the work they did and the churches in which they served. Students from many parts of the world come to Britain (especially to SOAS, where there are also other missionary society archives) to do research into the life and development of overseas churches, and the role the churches played in the development of education, agricultural training, and struggles for justice etc. Often they come upon references to missionaries and want to find out more about them and the work they did. Unfortunately there is no easy access into the archive material - no easy way of discovering when and where the missionaries served, what work they did, and where there are fuller accounts of the missionaries' work. I have begun work on preparing a 'register' of all the missionaries and their spouses who were sent out by the various branches of Methodism since 1769. I hope to include as much as possible of the following: Christian names, years served overseas, District(s) and country(ies) in which they served, work done, the branch of Methodism with which they were linked, name (including maiden name) of spouse, any other missionaries to which they were related (son, daughter, brother etc), and where an obituary and other information can be found. With the help of several ex-missionaries I have already gathered quite a lot of information but there is a lot more work to be done. I am putting the register on a data-base so that it can be set out in many different ways.

If anyone has spare copies of pre-1933 *Hill's Arrangements* or any of the 1910-1915 *Who's who in Methodism* that I could borrow it would be a considerable help.

ALBERT W. MOSLEY  
30, Brocks Hill Drive, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 5RD

## 1525 JOHN WESLEY PLAQUE UNVEILED IN WHITEHAVEN

Whitehaven was the most important centre in the north-west corner of England for John Wesley's itinerant ministry. He visited the town no less than twenty-five times between 1749 and 1788. Often preaching in the open-air not only to the miners but also to the local gentry, he also preached in the first Methodist Chapel built in Michael Street in 1761 on land provided by Sir James Lowther who had gifted the site some ten years earlier. Not only did Wesley visit the town itself to help establish the Methodist society, but Whitehaven provided a useful staging post as he journeyed up the west side of the country to cross the Solway Firth into Scotland and a convenient point of embarkation when visiting both Ireland and the Isle of Man.

The Cumbria Branch of the Wesley Historical Society and the Whitehaven and District Civic Society have co-operated to erect a plaque to commemorate these events. On October 14 1998 the plaque was unveiled by the Chairman of the Cumbria Methodist District, the Revd. David R. Emison after a previous District Chairman, the Revd. Norman Pickering, had spoken briefly about the background to these historic events. The plaque is well positioned on an exterior wall of the Old Kent Market Hall in Whitehaven's Market Square. A fuller account of Wesley's connection with Whitehaven may be found in an article in the Autumn 1998 (No. 42) issue of the Journal of the Cumbria Branch.

NORMAN PICKERING

## 1526 GODFREY TALBOT AND METHODISM

A careless slip in the research for my article 'Leeds and the MNC' (*Proceedings* 51 p124) confused Frank Talbot's son Geoffrey with Godfrey Talbot, the BBC commentator. It would appear that Godfrey Talbot's family was originally connected with Crofton UMFC in the Wakefield circuit but later moved to Leeds where they associated themselves with Woodhouse Lane and Horsforth, Bachelor Lane chapels.

D.C. DEWS

## 1527 DID WESLEY EMPLOY 'SHOUTERS'?

In *The Times* recently I read a letter describing the manner in which politicians made themselves heard when addressing large outdoor meetings before the invention of electronic voice amplification. Apparently they employed 'shouters' to relay the speech to those on the outskirts of the crowd. Is there any evidence that John Wesley employed this technique?

A. R. BUTLER

## 1528 JOHN WESLEY, RUBRICAL PRECISION, AND THE S.P.G.

John Wesley's liturgical angularities during his Georgia ministry are well known and frequently commented on. It is worth noting that the S.P.G., although its principles could not be appealed to in all of Wesley's liturgical enthusiasms, was committed, as any Anglican Society naturally would be, to worship well and explicitly ordered according to the English Prayer Book. The S.P.G.'s 1702 instruction to their missionaries included much more than this. To give a just impression of the Society's scale of priorities, we should note that their resolutions included the advice 'not to decline any fair opportunity of preaching to any number of people as may be occasionally met together from remote and distant parts, though it may not be on a Sunday or Holyday. That the chief subjects of their sermons should be the fundamental Doctrines of Christianity, and the duties of a sober, righteous and godly life, as resulting from such doctrines. That they should carefully instruct the people concerning the nature and use of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as being the peculiar institutions of Christ, pledges of communion with him, and means instituted of deriving Grace from Him: that they should duly consider the qualifications of such grown persons to whom they shall administer Baptism [note that the rubric requiring notice to the Bishop is tacitly treated as inapplicable], as also of those whom they admit to the Lord's Supper, according to the directions of the rubric in our Liturgy: that they take a special care to lay a good foundation for all their other ministrations, by catechising those under their care, whether children or other ignorant persons, and explain the Catechism to them in the most familiar manner: they should be diligent to show to Heathens and Infidels, the necessity of a revelation, and the truth of the Christian [sc., revelation], contained in the Holy Scriptures. *Lastly*, The Society direct their Missionaries to visit frequently their parishioners...' (from David Humphreys, *An Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts, containing their Foundation, Proceedings, and the Success of their Missionaries in the British Colonies, to the year 1728* (London, printed by Joseph Downing, 1730, reprinted in the *Church Review*, 1851-2, and separately, no place or printer, p.33).

Wesley's strictness about sacraments (and also his commitment to preaching) were entirely in line with S.P.G. persuasion, and their directions certainly enforced his natural disposition, although his manner of applying their principles cannot be laid at the Society's door.

DAVID TRIPP

## THE ANNUAL LECTURE

will be delivered in Ainsdale Methodist Church, Southport

on Monday, 28 June 1999 at 7.30pm

by The Rev Dr Stuart Mews MA

### 'Methodism and the First World War'

Chairman: The Rev Dr Henry D. Rack MA

The Lecture will be preceded by TEA\* for members at 5pm  
and the Annual Meeting at 6pm.

*\*It is essential to book with the General Secretary by **18 June**  
Cost: £1.00 per head (minimum)*

### TRAVEL DIRECTIONS

By Train Liverpool trains (every 15 minutes) stop at Ainsdale. From station walk through the village. Turn right by the Royal Bank of Scotland; Church is on the right.

By Bus No 8 or 9 from Lord Street to Ainsdale village every ten minutes but every half hour from 7.30pm. Journey time 20 mins.

By Car From Southport Theatre go south along Promenade into Esplanade and out along Coastal Road, past Royal Birkdale Golf Course. At cross roads just after Golf Course, with Pontin's Holiday Village ahead on right, turn left into Shore Road. Continue under railway bridge into Station Road, then fourth right into Liverpool Road. The church is on the right at the corner with the main road.

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Clerihew Corner  
William O'Bryan  
Was never at ease in Zion  
But James Thorne  
Was to the manna born.

ANC