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# Proceedings

OF THE

## Wesley Historical Society

*Editor: E. ALAN ROSE, B.A.*

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### WILLIAM BRAMWELL: A RE-APPRAISAL

*The Wesley Historical Society Lecture for 2004*

**W**ILLIAM Bramwell was a Wesleyan Methodist itinerant preacher. He began his ministry in late 1785 and concluded it thirty-three years later in 1818. He was pre-eminently an evangelist and a revivalist; the most successful and widely recognised revivalist among the Wesleyans in the decades following John Wesley's death. His revival methods, while warmly welcomed by lay people, were not to the taste of some of his ministerial colleagues. Jabez Bunting, emerging as the dominant figure in Wesleyanism's 'high church' party, would have been delighted if Bramwell had gone off and led his Revivalist followers in secession from Wesleyan Methodism. Bunting, and quite a number of the younger preachers, were dismayed when the 1803 Conference welcomed Bramwell back to the ranks when it looked as if he had deserted in the previous year. So who was this William Bramwell who not only had passionate supporters and vocal critics in his lifetime, but who continues to receive both bouquets and brickbats from Church historians and biographers to the present?

William Bramwell was born in February 1759 at Elswick, some ten miles from Preston in Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> His parents were devoted members of the Church of England and instilled into young William a deep respect for God and spiritual matters. Following his years of uninspiring schooling, he was apprenticed to a currier in Preston. From his earliest years he had shown great interest in serious religion and for a while he was attracted by the claims of the Catholic Church. In pursuit of spiritual assurance he frequently cut his fingertips and refused any healing ointments, believing that this mortification would lead to greater spiritual profit. Dissatisfied with his experiences of the Catholic faith, he returned to the Church of England and prepared himself with diligent devotion for the service of confirmation. While partaking of holy communion, he felt a clear sense of his acceptance with God and almost immediately afterwards began to witness to his new-found faith. But after some time he lost the sense of assurance, though to all who knew him well, his honesty, uprightness and moral earnestness marked him as an exemplary Christian. It was then

<sup>1</sup> Biographical details from J. Sigston, *Memoir of the Life and Ministry of Mr William Bramwell* (1846.ed)

that he met another Preston man, Mr Roger Crane, a recent convert of Methodist preaching and destined to be a leading light in Lancashire Methodism. Bramwell and Crane became firm friends in a friendship that lasted their lifetimes. Crane was anxious to introduce Bramwell to Methodism but Bramwell refused to attend their meetings, knowing it would distress his parents to hear that their son was attending dissenting services. Eventually he gave in to his friend's invitations and agreed to hear a Methodist preacher. He was immediately captivated by the Methodist spirit and enthusiastically joined the Society.

In late April 1780 John Wesley visited Preston and Bramwell was introduced to Methodism's founder. His biographer, James Sigston, recorded what Bramwell later related to him about the meeting.

Wesley looked attentively at him and said, 'Well, brother, can you praise God?' Mr Bramwell replied, 'No, Sir!' Mr Wesley lifted up his hands and said, 'Well, but perhaps you will to-night.' And so it came to pass; for that very night he found the comfort he had lost, and his soul rejoiced in the glorious liberty of the sons of God.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after this meeting Bramwell was appointed a class leader and a local preacher. He set up morning prayer meetings at 5 am which was to be a feature of his work in the future. Now a journeyman currier, he preached all over the Fylde area with an undaunted passion to save souls and no amount of threats or physical attacks could check his ardent enthusiasm. He battled in his mind over whether or not he had a call from God to full-time ministry and on at least one occasion spent thirty-six hours in prayer as he sought to know God's will. This preaching ministry continued for about five years and many converts were added to the Methodist Societies as a result. One of his converts was a Miss Ann Cutler, a handloom weaver, who was to become an evangelist herself and established a reputation in the annals of Methodism as 'Praying Nanny,' a reference to her mighty exploits in prayer. In subsequent years Bramwell would ask Ann Cutler to come to his help with her prayer ministry when he faced great difficulties in a number of circuits.

Bramwell's conviction that he now had a call from God to enter full-time ministry was confirmed when John Wesley appointed him to a vacancy in the Liverpool circuit in 1785. He preached there only a few months when his friends in Preston implored Mr Wesley to let him return home and continue the good work among them. Bramwell returned to Preston, purchased a shop and a house, took up again his part-time itinerancy and prepared to marry one of his converts, Ellen Byrom. But hardly had he settled in Preston before he had repeated invitations from Dr Thomas Coke to give up his business and become an itinerant preacher in the Kent circuit. Bramwell's response was typical of his

<sup>2</sup> Op cit p.16

dedication to the work and call of God in his life. He prayed long and hard over Dr Coke's invitation, consulted trusted friends and then made his decision in the light of what he believed to be God's will. He made arrangements for his business in Preston to be taken care of, bought a horse and set off for Kent. Bramwell's devotion to God's work was simply without qualification. He would go wherever he believed God was calling him, and no circumstance or friendship or fear of financial hardship could deter him.

When Bramwell arrived in Canterbury in the winter of 1785 it was the beginning of thirty-three years of itinerant ministry among the Wesleyan Methodists in fourteen circuits, most in the north of England. Before some attention is given to Bramwell's more notable ministries, it is important to look at his spiritual experience in Preston some time before he left for Kent. While he was earnestly searching the Scriptures to discover whether or not he was called to full-time ministry, he became deeply convinced about his personal need of the blessing of entire sanctification. Referred to by Mr Wesley as Methodism's 'grand depositum',<sup>3</sup> and claimed by many of his Methodist people, it was widely understood to be the cleansing of the Christian's heart from all inner sin and the filling of the heart with the love of God and man. In the two decades following Mr Wesley's death, no Methodist preacher proclaimed this blessing of 'love excluding sin' more powerfully or passionately than Bramwell. He recorded that he had sought 'the blessing,' as it was commonly known, many times, but then the Lord showed him he was seeking it by works rather than by faith.

Being now convinced of my error, I sought it by faith only.... When in the house of a friend at Liverpool.... with my mind engaged in various meditations concerning my present affairs and future prospects, my heart now and then lifted up to God.... heaven came down to earth; it came to my soul. The Lord, for whom I had waited, came suddenly to the temple of my heart; and I had an immediate evidence that this was the blessing I had for some time been seeking. My soul was then all wonder, love and praise. It is now about twenty-six years ago; I have walked in this liberty ever since.<sup>4</sup>

Bramwell went on to say that he was immediately tempted not to testify to what he had experienced for he would surely lose it. Later that night he walked to a preaching appointment and felt so filled with the sense of God's presence that he knew he must tell the congregation of this great work of grace.

<sup>3</sup> J Wesley, *Standard Letters* (1931) 8:p238.

<sup>4</sup> Sigston, pp 20-21.

I then declared to the people what God had done for my soul; and I have done so on every proper occasion since that time, believing it to be a duty incumbent upon me. For God does not impart blessings to his children to be concealed in their own bosoms; but to be made known to all who fear him and desire the enjoyment of the same privileges. I think such a blessing cannot be retained, without professing it at every fit opportunity; for thus we glorify God, and 'with the mouth make confession unto salvation.'<sup>5</sup>

In the past two centuries Methodism's 'grand depositum' has had much written both for and against it. While this is not the place to debate the subject, two facts are beyond dispute as that doctrine related to William Bramwell's life and ministry. First, all those who knew Bramwell personally during his lifetime saw in his purity of life, his humble walk with God, and his utter devotion to a soul-saving ministry, the evidences of a truly sanctified man. Bramwell was an unashamed preacher of John Wesley's doctrine of Scriptural holiness, and even those fellow Methodists who later disagreed with his revivalist methods did not question that the doctrine found exemplary witness in the preacher's own life. Second, Bramwell's ministry cannot be fully evaluated without giving attention to the place this Methodist doctrine had in his creed. Bramwell was wholly dedicated to the purpose for which John Wesley had earlier asserted that the Methodist preachers were raised up; viz. 'To reform the nation, particularly the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.'<sup>6</sup> For Bramwell this teaching was an integral part of the gospel and he preached and enforced it throughout his ministry. It was particularly prominent in the revival ministry which Bramwell promoted. He was well aware that John Wesley had made the same connection.

Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God and consequently little addition to the Society and little life in the members of it. . . . Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now, you must not look for any revival.<sup>7</sup>

Between the years 1788 and 1791 Bramwell served, successively, in the Blackburn and Colne circuits. He had married Ellen Byrom in July 1787 and their first son, George, was born in September the following year. William's ministry in these two circuits set the pattern for the years to come. He organised early prayer meetings wherever possible, faithfully visited every home belonging to the circuit, preached incessantly in the chapels and out of doors and exercised everywhere a strict disciplinary

<sup>5</sup> Op cit p 21.

<sup>6</sup> J Wesley, *Works*, 8: p.299.

<sup>7</sup> J Wesley, *Letters* (1931) 4:p321

oversight. The careless were warned, the scoffers were rebuked, the backsliders were implored to turn back to God, and any professing members who did not live according to the rules of the Methodist Societies were put on trial until they either altered their ways or left the Methodists. Needless to say this strict pastoral oversight did not meet with unanimous approval but William Bramwell was not a man to compromise his principles for fear of being unpopular. What could not be argued against was the increased Society membership and attendance that followed his labours. He rose early, prayed, studied, visited, preached, admonished and encouraged the faithful and such was his devotion to his people that in the far-flung Colne circuit he was often away from home five or six weeks at a time.

At the Conference of 1791, the year of John Wesley's death, Bramwell was appointed to the Dewsbury circuit. It was in this West Yorkshire district that Bramwell witnessed the first stirrings of what was afterwards designated the Great Yorkshire Revival, and which also gave him the tag of being a 'revivalist.' Before Bramwell's arrival, there had been a serious split in the Dewsbury Society. The main Wesleyan preaching house had been lost to John Wesley's former Book Steward, John Atlay, who broke away from the Connexion, taking many of the people with him and setting up an independent congregation. The divisions had caused much bad feeling among former friends, the Methodist witness in Dewsbury was in disarray, and Bramwell was grieved to find the spiritual temperature at a very low level as a general atmosphere of apathy and suspicion prevailed everywhere. 'I could not find a person,' he wrote, 'who experienced sanctification and but few were clear in pardon.' He resolved not to have any conversation with anyone about the divisions or who was at fault. The loss of the preaching house was a small matter to him compared to the challenge of seeing the work revived in the circuit. Bramwell had much personal experience in the power of prevailing prayer and he gave himself to protracted intercession every morning at five o'clock. Some idea of the task facing Bramwell is conveyed by the impression given by another preacher, John Nelson, who came to Dewsbury in 1792.

Things were in a disagreeable situation, which gave me great concern. Such was the distance between Mr Atlay's people and ours, as I had never witnessed among professors who retained any fear of God. Disputes, hard speeches, and I fear backbiting had soured the minds of many, and took the time that should have been in prayer for each other. I was exceedingly tried for the appearance of the people under the Word, and soon wished myself in some other place, so ignorant was I of God.<sup>8</sup>

Bramwell invited Ann Cutler to come to Dewsbury and help him in

<sup>8</sup> V. Ward, *A Memoir of the Rev. John Nelson* (1838) p. 27.

the serious work of prayer and visitation. Morning after morning, week after week and month after month, Bramwell and Cutler, in their separate quarters, interceded for the cause of God in Dewsbury. With prayer went regular house to house teaching and instruction and strong preaching on the need of new birth and entire sanctification. Bramwell admitted that that first year was one of 'hard labour and much grief,' but finally the great spiritual break-through came. It began in a Band meeting in November 1792 when four members professed to have received the grace of full salvation. Bramwell spoke of the assurance he had received from the Lord, saying he received 'an answer from God in a particular way and had the revival discovered to me in its manner and effects.' This seems to be the first time that Bramwell referred to the work in Dewsbury as a 'revival' but more controversial was the implication that the Lord had somehow shown him what was going to happen. Bramwell may have meant no more than that he had a strong impression that great blessing was coming on the work but it began to be suggested by some of his closest friends that he was gifted with something like 'second sight.' In subsequent years those who did not like his revivalist methods also criticised him for claiming he could discern spirits and that God sometimes revealed to him events that had not yet happened.

Now, however, in late 1792, the situation in Dewsbury began to change rapidly. Open confession of past sins and cries for mercy characterised many of the cottage and larger meetings and everywhere the spirit of prayer seemed to have been poured out upon the people. In a matter of weeks, Bramwell reported, some sixty members had claimed entire sanctification, many more were spiritually quickened and many conversions were reported. Love-feasts began to be crowded and when the news spread of what was happening, many people from neighbouring circuits began to visit Dewsbury to see for themselves.

Whatever is thought about revivals and however they are to be described and accounted for, what happened in Dewsbury under Bramwell's ministry was not without precedent. When his account is compared with the Awakening in New England in the mid 1730s under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, or the Cambuslang Revival of the early 1740s during the preaching of George Whitefield, there are striking similarities. While the Dewsbury Revival could not be compared with either of the other two in terms of the numbers of people involved, yet all three of them saw the same emphases and techniques. Foremost was the overt soul-saving preaching, the faithful pastoral visitation and exhortation, the open confession of sin and cries for pardon by the penitents and the reports of many finding instantaneous answers to prayer in assurance of their sins forgiven. What was exclusive to the work in Dewsbury was the Wesleyan emphasis on Christians seeking the

grace of entire sanctification, and Bramwell became convinced that this was a prerequisite for revival everywhere among the Methodist Societies. Neither should it be thought that what happened in Dewsbury in 1792 and 1793 was something new among Wesleyan Methodists. John Wesley himself carefully investigated what came to be known as the 'Otley Revival,' also in Yorkshire, in February 1760. Like the later awakening in Dewsbury, the work in Otley began with meetings for prayer for revival and a strong emphasis on the need for the entire sanctification among professing Christians. In his recent research into what he aptly names 'The Methodist Pentecost,' Dr Charles Goodwin speaks of the Otley movement as 'the first Methodist holiness revival.'<sup>9</sup> Likewise the awakening at Dewsbury was a holiness revival and Bramwell's ministry would witness many such holiness/revivalist awakenings in the next ten years.

After the success in Dewsbury Bramwell was appointed to the neighbouring circuit of Birstal in 1793. He recorded that Ann Cutler had visited Birstal some time before and her work there was fruitful. Bramwell came to where revival had already begun under the leadership of the two preachers stationed there, Thomas Jackson and Robert Smith. During his two-year stay in Birstal, Bramwell preached and visited and exhorted and disciplined as he had done in Dewsbury, and in cottage meetings, love-feasts and Sunday services, there were many who claimed to have found their sins forgiven and even larger numbers testified to the blessing of 'a clean heart.' Mr Thomas Pearson of Gomersal was a class leader and he left an account of what happened when Bramwell came to the circuit.

[Mr Bramwell] came to us full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. His powerful preaching and fervent prayers were so mighty, through faith, that the stoutest-hearted sinner' trembled under him. Before that time we had a partial outpouring; but a mighty shower then descended and the truth and power of God wonderfully prevailed. My class soon increased to sixty members, and all ranks and degrees of men began to attend the preaching. Every place of worship in the neighbourhood was crowded. Young persons only ten years of age, were clearly awakened and savingly convinced; this had such an effect upon their parents that many of them were also awakened and brought to God.<sup>10</sup>

Membership statistics for the Birstal circuit make interesting reading for the years 1790 to 1797. In 1790 the membership stood at 1266 and two years later it fell to 720. In 1793, the year Bramwell arrived in Birstal, the membership was 820 but one year later it had risen to 1300. The following year the figure was 1400 but by 1797 it had fallen again to 1070. This

<sup>9</sup> C Goodwin, *Methodist Pentecost: The Wesleyan Holiness Revival of 1758-1763 1739-1818* (1996), p. 1

<sup>10</sup> J. Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival,' *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain 7* (1974), p. 52. quoting Sigston.



means that during Bramwell's two-year ministry there had been a near 60% increase in membership. It can hardly be questioned that this significant membership increase was directly related to Bramwell's revival ministry and the extensive pastoral oversight he conducted. Enthusiasm for this kind of ministry and its apparent dramatic results must, however, be tempered by the sobering fact that in the two years following Bramwell's departure from Birstal, the circuit lost nearly one quarter of its members.

This Methodist Awakening in West Yorkshire was not confined to Dewsbury and Birstal. Using the analogy of fire to describe revival, as Charles Wesley had done some decades earlier, it can be said that while the first sparks were ignited in Dewsbury the resulting conflagration spread widely. There were similar scenes of spiritual awakening and revival phenomena experienced in the Bradford, Wakefield, Otley and Leeds circuits. One of the preachers stationed in Leeds, Joseph Entwisle, recorded vivid eyewitness accounts of the revival.

One meeting, held about a fortnight ago [at Woodhouse], was remarkable. A number of people were assembled in expectation of a prayer meeting. It happened, however, that none of the persons who exercise on such occasions attended. After they had sat in silence for a considerable time, a poor woman fell upon her knees, and with an exceeding loud and bitter cry, pleaded for mercy. While she continued crying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' some of the company went out, and called upon one or two of the leaders, who came and held a meeting, in which several were brought into the liberty of the children of God.<sup>11</sup>

Another account reads:

I preached at Woodhouse at noon. Here... the Lord is pouring out His spirit in a very extraordinary manner. Almost all the inhabitants of the village appear to be under a religious concern. They have been praying night and day most of the week, generally continuing together from evening till morning. As far as we can judge, great numbers are flocking to Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Entwisle recorded similar scenes at Scarcroft, Harwood, Chapeltown and Bellisle, all in the Leeds circuit. But he had serious doubts about some of the happenings he witnessed in Bellisle.

Our warm friends from Woodhouse were there: they had gone beyond all bounds of decency. Such screaming and bawling I never heard. Divided

<sup>11</sup> W. Entwisle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle, fifty-four years a Wesleyan minister* (1848) pp. 112-3

<sup>12</sup> *Op cit* p. 110

into small companies in different parts of the chapel, some singing, others praying, others praising, clapping of hands, etc. all was confusion and uproar. I was struck with amazement and consternation. What to do I could not tell. However, as there appeared to be no possibility of breaking up the meeting, I quietly withdrew. They continued thus until five o'clock in the morning. What shall I say to these things? I believe God is working very powerfully on the minds of many; but I think Satan, or, at least, the animal nature has a great hand in all this.<sup>13</sup>

What had begun during Bramwell's ministry in Dewsbury in 1792 had spread to most areas in West Yorkshire by 1795 and even farther afield into East Yorkshire. Alexander Mather, one of John Wesley's most senior and respected preachers, was stationed at Hull, and he reported his experiences of the revival.

When we heard of the great outpourings of the Grace of God upon the circuits of the West Riding of Yorkshire, where hundreds, even thousands have lately been awakened and converted, a very earnest desire was kindled in the heart of the people, especially among the leaders, for a revival in our society.<sup>14</sup>

The 1795 Conference appointed Bramwell to Sheffield where the chapels had experienced much blessing under the inspired leadership of Alexander Mather. From the very beginning of his time in Sheffield, Bramwell was to witness some of the greatest movements of the Spirit he saw anywhere in his entire ministry. Soon after his arrival he wrote to a friend.

On the day appointed for thanksgiving, the work broke out here in our chapel, at the evening meeting. Many souls had been previously set at liberty in the classes, and at the prayer meetings; but on that night there was a general outpouring of the Spirit. We desired all in distress to come into the vestry, when eight souls were delivered from the bondage of sin. Eight more received pardon on the Sunday. Monday was our love feast, and near the close of it the power of God came upon us. We concluded at the usual time, but begged of all in distress to stay, and before eight o'clock it appeared to many good men, that more than twenty souls were delivered: the work has gone forward every day since, less or more. In two classes more than twenty experienced salvation. I have had clear evidence, and, to speak within bounds, I am persuaded, of more than one hundred persons having found liberty, in three weeks. <sup>15</sup>

From Baslow he wrote on November 19, 1795:

<sup>13</sup> Op cit p 111

<sup>14</sup> J. Baxter, op. cit. p.53

<sup>15</sup> J. Sigston, op. cit. p. 68

There is a revival in most places, and in some of them it is a great one. I preached here last night in a new chapel, for the first time, when five persons received the blessing of sanctification, and one rich man found mercy. Congregations are uncommonly large in almost every place. This revival, if attended to and cherished, crowds our chapels and houses wherever it takes place.... The last time I preached in Sheffield, I had the happiness of seeing the large chapel much crowded, and was told hundreds could not enter. This has lately been the case every Sunday morning. The good work still proceeds.<sup>16</sup>

A particularly important part of Bramwell's ministry was his interest in all his helpers, both itinerant preachers and local preachers and class leaders. Attention has already been drawn to his extraordinary pastoral concern for the people under his care. He was no less concerned to encourage and support all his colleagues in the work of God and under his example and support, the revival spread into every area where the Methodist preachers were employed. Bramwell's letters show that his prayers and concerns spread far beyond his own circuit and while in Sheffield, he was rejoicing with his friends who were experiencing revival in their own ministries. Speaking of Bramwell's work in Sheffield, his biographer, James Sigston, summarised a remarkable three-year ministry.

Mr Bramwell always employed the talents of the local preachers, leaders and others, in prayer; and they became important helpers to him in every place. The embers of love were kindled all around, and when he revisited the Societies, he found them 'striving together for the furtherance of the gospel. Opposition was broken down, lukewarmness was destroyed, a holy union was maintained, and the work of God in the town and country broke out in a flame of life, and power and zeal. Itinerant and local preachers, with others, have come to Mr Bramwell more than fifty miles in search of the blessings of a clean heart.... Wherever he went, visible signs and wonders were wrought in the name of Christ: and in the course of his first year in Sheffield, twelve hundred and fifty members were added to the Society!<sup>17</sup>

It would be interesting to follow the progress of William Bramwell's ministry as, for the next nineteen years, he served in the following circuits; Nottingham, Leeds, Wetherby, Hull, Sunderland, Liverpool, Sheffield, Birstal, London West, Newcastle upon Tyne, and, finally, Salford. Although the spreading fires of the revival largely died down by about 1797, yet in all the places Bramwell laboured his ministry was

<sup>16</sup> Op cit, vol. 2 p. 4

<sup>17</sup> Op cit pp. 55-56

blessed with conversions, many members seeking entire sanctification and the general building up of the work. From Sheffield Bramwell moved to the Nottingham circuit and one of his colleagues wrote about his three-year ministry there.

In 1799 I was again called to labour with Mr Bramwell in the Nottingham circuit. Our chapel in Nottingham was taken from us by the separatists; in consequence of which, our preachers and people were under the necessity of meeting in a barn till another place of worship was erected in the town. Here many souls were awakened and brought to the knowledge of the truth.... Perhaps Mr Bramwell, in all his travels, never witnessed more glorious displays of the divine power, than in this circuit.... The societies were united and edified.... and their increase, during the two years I travelled with Mr Bramwell, was about one thousand persons.<sup>18</sup>

As noted earlier, the Yorkshire Revival, though it was not confined to Yorkshire, began in 1793 and began to decline in about 1797. That coincided with the first major split in Wesleyan Methodism when Alexander Kilham and his followers siphoned off some 5000 sympathisers into the newly formed Methodist New Connexion. Undoubtedly the divisions and strong partisan feelings engendered by this split did not further the work of the revival but it is not easy to determine exactly why this movement began to wane in about 1797 and had generally disappeared by about 1800. It may be that such was the intensity of the emotions aroused by it that it was impossible for it to continue beyond four or five years.

A contemporary sociologist, Dr Julia Werner, has investigated the Yorkshire Revival and came to the following conclusions about its origin and nature.<sup>19</sup> In summary:

- 1 It flourished where Methodism was well established.
- 2 It broke out in areas of economic distress
- 3 It was promoted by a network of revivalist preachers like William Bramwell.
- 4 There was a desire among the people for 'the work of the Spirit.'
- 5 There was a willingness to allow innovations in methods and ministry.
- 6 There were the means of communicating the revival to other circuits.

It would be interesting to ask what William Bramwell might have thought about these six sociological suggestions. Almost certainly he would have argued that three very significant constituents of the revival, as he understood it, are missing from this assessment. First, the work of the sovereign Spirit of God. Second, the strong and clear preaching on justification and sanctification. Third, the prolonged and prevailing

<sup>18</sup> Op cit p. 83

<sup>19</sup> JS Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion Its Background and Early History* (1984), p 44

prayer that characterised the revival in every place where it caught fire. And a fourth might be added - the diligent and exemplary pastoral visitation, counselling and care that marked all William Bramwell's ministry.

This re-appraisal has given quite a bit of attention to Bramwell's leadership in the Yorkshire Revival and that is justified by the recognition that the years 1792 to 1800 were among the most important in his entire ministry. Assessing his thirty-three years as a Wesleyan Methodist itinerant preacher, what were the characteristics of Bramwell's life and ministry?

First, his extraordinary life of private and public prayer. One of his biographers, C. W Andrews, wrote:

There is something perfectly dumbfounding about Bramwell's praying.... Bramwell's daily prayers occupied several hours. Under special circumstances, such as finding the circuit to which he had been appointed in a low spiritual condition he made colossal exertions in prayer. When in Leeds he used to go now and then to Harewood, staying with Mr Richard Leak. There was a wood adjoining Mr Leak's house, and there Bramwell would bury himself in prayer, becoming entirely oblivious of the flight of time. Often he would pray on, in a loud voice, for four hours.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout his entire ministry Bramwell's prayer life, both private and public, was regular and impassioned. He encouraged his colleagues in prayer, he normally called for a season of prayer following the preaching where penitents were welcomed to confess their needs openly, and in every circuit he served he organised early morning prayer meetings and at other times as he believed the situation demanded.

Second, his faithful pastoral visitation. Some of the more recent evaluations of Bramwell's ministry, usually drawing critical attention to his 'revivalism,' have failed to note the unwearied pastoral care he exercised for all his congregations. In all the circuits he served Bramwell set an example of diligent house to house ministry. These were never allowed to become occasions merely for social pleasantries, but in every home Bramwell encouraged the family to seek the Lord and always concluded with prayer. Historians of nineteenth-century revivalism have suggested that Bramwell's revivalist ministry anticipated that of Charles Finney in America a few decades later. This may account for the success that Sigston's biography of Bramwell enjoyed in America, running to six editions in the first twenty years of publication. However, this comparison between the revivalist methods of Bramwell and Finney does

<sup>20</sup> C W Andrews, *William Bramwell Revivalist* (1909) pp 47-52

not take account of Bramwell's unceasing devotion to pastoral care and visitation which was not paralleled in Finney's ministry.

Third, his forceful evangelistic preaching. First and foremost, William Bramwell was a preacher and it was not accidental that his only major publication was a translation of a French work on preaching which he entitled, *The Salvation Preacher*. He did not preach merely to confirm Christian doctrine or inform his hearers - he preached always for a verdict. Not only did he put much prayer into his sermon preparation, he also put in careful study of the Scriptures and related subjects where appropriate. With hard labour he acquired a very good working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek but seldom quoted other than the English text in the pulpit. His sentences were generally short, the exposition and the appeal were direct and forceful and his hearers were left in no doubt about their soul's salvation.

Fourth, his emphasis on the doctrine of entire sanctification. On Bramwell's arrival in a new circuit, he first enquired how many members professed the blessing of Christian holiness. He came to the conclusion that where this privilege was not constantly and strongly preached and encouraged, the whole work of God tended to fall into spiritual apathy. When the first sparks of the Yorkshire Revival were ignited, Bramwell identified them among a number who sought and testified to entire sanctification. He preached the blessing incessantly to all the Society members, for as far as he was concerned, it was not merely a Methodist doctrine, it was Scriptural teaching. Writing in December 1807 to his friend, and later biographer, James Sigston, he noted: 'I am certain the Doctrine of Entire Sanctification is upon the decline, and, if not enforced, will produce a declension in the work amongst the people.'<sup>21</sup> Bramwell's own promulgation of this doctrine was enthusiastic and ongoing. From the pulpit, in class and band meetings, in counsel, conversation and letters, he promoted Scriptural holiness over the land.

At the 1817 Conference he was appointed to the Salford circuit. He attended the 1818 Conference which convened in Leeds, and ended on Wednesday evening, August 12. He stayed with his long-time friend, James Sigston, and on the Thursday afternoon he left Sigston's house to catch the coach to Manchester. A few yards down Woodhouse Lane he collapsed with apoplexy and died almost immediately. He was fifty-nine years of age.

With his passing, there passed also the greatest exemplar of revivalist holiness preaching in Wesleyan Methodism in the generation after John Wesley's death. The *Methodist Magazine* for 1818 recorded:

Deep humility, ardent love to God and compassion for the souls of men perishing in sin appeared uniformly in his whole spirit and conduct. In

<sup>21</sup> J Sigston, op. cit. p 117

every circuit where this holy man laboured, he had seals to his ministry. He was eminent for the possession of every Christian grace, and the practice of every Christian duty.... As a minister his talents were respectable, and his usefulness seldom equalled, perhaps never surpassed. Thousands of his spiritual children have, no doubt, hailed him on the blissful shore, and thousands are left behind to deplore the loss.

Neither among his contemporaries or subsequent biographers has Bramwell's loyalty to Wesleyan Methodism been questioned in relation to theology and doctrinal conviction. William Bramwell was ardently a Wesleyan in his interpretation of the Christian faith and no preacher proclaimed and explained those doctrines more passionately than he did. In three other areas, however, serious questions were raised in his lifetime, and since, about his loyalty to the Wesleys. These three areas of concern were:

- a) in relation to the Kilhamite secession in 1797
- b) his sudden departure from his Leeds circuit in 1803 and the time he spent with the Manchester 'Band Room' revivalists
- c) his alleged scheme to bring together the various revivalist groups under his leadership.

These three areas were linked in overlapping interests. Bramwell feared that the authority and influence of the Wesleyan Conference gave too much ecclesiastic power to the preachers at the expense of the lay people. Side by side with this was what he perceived to be a hardening of Wesleyan ecclesiology against revivalism and revivalists, and he was persuaded that this would result in a lessening of evangelistic effort in the circuits and therefore less soul winning. These concerns lay at the heart of the three disputes where some of his colleagues questioned his denominational loyalty.

### **The Kilhamite Secession:**

When Bramwell was appointed to the Sheffield circuit in 1795 it was the centre of the agitation that eventually led to Alexander Kilham's expulsion from the Wesleyan ministry by the 1796 Conference. There had been a furious pamphlet war for the previous two years when Kilham bombarded the circuits with publications that complained about the autocracy of the Conference and claiming that lay people had no voice or representation in Methodism's ecclesiological structures. Although Bramwell was not overtly involved in either side of the conflict, there is no doubt that he had warm sympathies for Kilham. Part of the problem in assessing his response to this crisis is that, by his prior direction, all his papers were destroyed at his death. Kilham's biographer, writing forty years later, was convinced that Kilham had every expectation that Bramwell, and some of his closest colleagues, would join him.<sup>22</sup> One of

<sup>22</sup> *Life of the Rev. Alexander Kilham* (1838) p317

those colleagues was Henry Taylor, and in a letter to Kilham from Sheffield, dated 11 May 1797, he spoke in conspiratorial tones.

Mr Bramwell is now in the room with me, and what I now write you must consider as coming from both of us. We want to see you, and indeed we must see you here as soon as possible, and we intreat you, let every other plan give place to this. Your visit to us must be without any person, directly or indirectly, knowing anything about it; the nature of the business requires this secrecy....you must keep the matter from all your friends here, and from everyone. . . . When you have fixed on the night, send me a private letter, and meet us the next morning by four o'clock. Our business we think of such importance that we wish to see you before our district meeting at Leeds, the 24<sup>th</sup> instant.<sup>23</sup>

Kilham read this letter as a promise of Bramwell and Taylor's support and he left for Leeds to meet them. He recorded:

I met Mr Taylor and early the morning after I had a secret interview with him and Mr Bramwell. They both spoke freely on the necessity of a reform, and deemed determined to have this effected or leave the Connexion. I saw the paper they had written on Church government, and dictated some alterations which had their approbation. They both appeared timorous, but if their professions are deserving of credit, they are determined to have a reform at all events, or risk the consequences. I preached several times to large congregations with much satisfaction; many persons seem resolved to have a redress of grievances, and appear confident that their preachers at Sheffield would either see this effected or separate from the Conference. Nevertheless I found much reasoning in my own mind on the conduct of Messrs. Bramwell, Taylor and Emmet —they appeared so exceedingly afraid of the higher powers.<sup>24</sup>

In his biography of Joseph Benson, James Macdonald recounts what happened at Leeds when the Wesleyan preachers met. In his role as Superintendent, Benson recounted

For a time they all seemed united in love to each other and determined to labour together in harmony. But upon the 25<sup>th</sup> it was found that Mr H.T. and Mr W.B. had determined that should the Conference not comply and adopt their Rules, they would separate from their brethren. Mr B. who, however erroneous in some of his views, was a man of eminent piety, said, 'They had drawn up Rules for a separate Connexion; not having intended to unite with Mr Kilham on the one hand, or the Conference on the other; that they had communicated this to several Local Preachers and others,

<sup>23</sup> Op cit 318-319

<sup>24</sup> Op cit p 319



who had promised to stand by them, and that they had come to the District Meeting with a view to separate if we did not comply with, and adopt their Rules.'<sup>25</sup>

Benson went on to say that while he believed that Bramwell and Taylor had agreed with 'the utmost sincerity' to continue to work with their Wesleyan colleagues, yet 'the destructive fire of contention at Sheffield, which, if not kindled by them, they supplied with abundance of fuel.' In his *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Atmore*, John Stamp maintained that Kilham was encouraged 'in his divisive speculations' by the preachers stationed at Sheffield, particular Bramwell and Taylor.<sup>26</sup> Kilham's biographer notes that Bramwell and Taylor were chief among the preachers that Kilham had relied on to join him, following the support and encouragement they gave him.

Although the evidence that remains is not fully conclusive, there can be little doubt that William Bramwell had promised his support to Alexander Kilham. The *Rules* that Bramwell drew up were approved by Kilham and there is every reason to believe that Bramwell determined that if the Wesleyan Conference did not accede to these demands, then he would either join Kilham or set up his own connexion. So why, in the end, did Bramwell not go in either direction? It looks very much as if Bramwell, at the point of crisis, lost his nerve about leaving his own connexion. He was unsure about the future of Kilham's dissidents and he lacked the courage to follow his convictions and set up his own independent ministry. Perhaps the kindest construction that can be put on the whole episode is that when push came to shove, Bramwell concluded that he could effect more reform by staying in the ranks of the Wesleyan Methodists.

### **Bramwell and the Revivalists:**

In the closing years of the 1790s, groups of revivalists began to form in various Wesleyan circuits, mostly in the north of England. These revivalists were members of their local Methodist societies but their enthusiastic revivalist conduct in prayer and worship and singing alienated many of their former friends. Many of these revivalists were Bramwell's converts and soon he was being regarded as their leader. Two of the most prominent of these groups were found in Leeds and Manchester. What they had in common was some local charismatic lay leader, a love of noisy and extravagant prayer and worship and a growing independence from the rules that governed the Wesleyan Methodist Societies and particularly the ministry and authority of the appointed Preachers. The acknowledged leader in Leeds was a

<sup>25</sup> J Macdonald, *Memoirs of the Rev Joseph Benson* (1822) p310

<sup>26</sup> *WMM* (1845) pp 434-437

schoolmaster, James Sigston, a friend and firm supporter of Bramwell and later his biographer. Criticised for his refusal to adhere to Methodist rulers and disciplines, he left the Wesleyans, followed by some three hundred supporters. They met for worship in the Assembly Rooms in Kirkgate and their style of worship earned them the epithet, the 'Kirkgate Screammers'.<sup>27</sup>

In Manchester a draper, John Broadhurst, joined the Wesleyan congregation in Oldham Street. He supported revival prayer groups and evangelistic efforts that resulted in five new congregations being formed between 1795 and 1798. One of these, in North Street, was known as the 'Band Room' and it soon became a recognised centre of revivalism. Sigston wrote that its meetings were 'eminently owned of God to the conversion of hundreds. The doors, however, were so wide as to admit all who wished to enter in; to this the preachers objected and their strenuous efforts to enforce discipline caused a division in the society in 1806.'<sup>28</sup> A different estimate was given later by Jabez Bunting's son. He described Broadhurst and his supporters as 'more zealous than wise, and gathered round them a number of good but ignorant persons, who pursued the most unlikely means for promoting serious religion whether in their own or other hearts.'<sup>29</sup> It is certainly ironic that Jabez Bunting, later so strongly opposed to Bramwell, Sigston and the whole revivalist movement, should have preached his trial sermon in Manchester's Band Room, after having spent some years in Sigston's academy in Leeds.

Bramwell was appointed to Leeds for a second time, in 1801, and quickly identified himself with the revivalist movement. Among his fellow preachers there were serious doubts about his loyalties. His near-defection to the Kilhamites four years earlier was not forgotten and this suspicion was reinforced by his close association with James Sigston and the Kirkgate Screammers. During his second year in Leeds, Bramwell was in deep distress of spirit as he believed there was a conspiracy against him in the circuit. One of his closest friends was accused of immorality and although Bramwell was convinced of his innocence, he was removed from the society. Bramwell wrote to a friend. 'I am quite ignorant at the present why the Lord has kept me here. Things are low indeed in this circuit, and means must have been used to make them as they are. . . I must in a few weeks, if spared, strike home and leave the whole to God. I see hell will rise but our God is almighty.'<sup>30</sup> Soon after this Bramwell left Leeds without any explanation and fled to his revivalist friends in Manchester. Two of the Leeds preachers came to Manchester in search of Bramwell but could not find him. In the July District Meeting Bramwell's absence was discussed but lack of evidence meant that no action was taken and the

<sup>27</sup> D.C Dews, *Methodism in Leeds from 1791 to 1861* (Unpublished Bradford MPhil thesis 2 Vols. 1984), 1:pp330-333

<sup>28</sup> J Sigston, *A Brief Memoir of Joseph Woolstenholme* (1846), p3

<sup>29</sup> T P Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting* (1887) 1:p96.

<sup>30</sup> J Sigston, op. cit. p 99

situation was referred to the Conference, soon to meet in Manchester.

The Conference re-admitted Bramwell, much to the dismay of Bunting and the other preachers who distrusted him and his revivalist friends. He was appointed to Wetherby and continued as a Wesleyan preacher until his death in 1818. Bramwell's flight to Manchester was probably occasioned by the depression he felt as he faced the opposition and distrust of some of the preachers and leaders in Leeds. In Manchester he was encouraged by John Broadhurst to become the leader of the revivalist groups in Manchester, Leeds and Macclesfield. Bramwell had much sympathy with these revivalists and they would certainly have welcomed him as their popular leader. But again Bramwell hesitated, just as he had done in relation to the Kilhamite division seven years earlier. His love of prayer, evangelism and revival methods attracted him to the Revivalists but he could not bring himself to make a formal separation from his own connexion. The written evidence that survives suggests that his depressed spirit in Leeds drove him to find shelter and comfort and understanding among John Broadhurst's Band Room Ranters. But when the depression passed, Bramwell returned to the Wesleyan ranks. When the 1803 Conference received him back, although a vocal minority strongly objected, it gave Bramwell the assurance he needed. We can only guess that deep down this good man felt assured that his remarkable pastoral and revival ministry was more likely to bear permanent fruit when exercised in the ranks of Wesleyan Methodism, rather than in the uncertain future of either the Kilhamite sessionists or the Revivalist Ranters.

HERBERT MCGONIGLE

(Revd Dr Herbert McGonigle is Principal & Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology and Wesley Studies at the Nazarene Theological College Manchester)

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*George Smith: the children's friend* by Adrian Bristow (Imogen, Chester, 1999 pp.181, £8.99 ISBN 09535002 09)

George Smith (1831-1895), the son of a Primitive Methodist local preacher, began work as a child in the brickyards of North Staffordshire but eventually was comfortably well off as a mine manager. Also an active 'Prim', a Sunday school worker and Liberal, as a Victorian philanthropist he is now mainly forgotten. He fought successfully to bring about legislative improvements for children both working in the brickyards and on canal barges; at his death he was similarly campaigning for gypsy and fairground' children.

This is an excellent and well-illustrated account of Smith's philanthropic work, as well as a reappraisal of his Victorian biography. As such it is a welcome addition to our further understanding of working-class Primitive Methodism.

D. COLIN DEWS

## E. H. SUGDEN AS THEOLOGICAL EDUCATOR: INHERITANCE AND LEGACY.

EDWARD Holdsworth Sugden arrived in Melbourne, with his wife and four daughters, on January 10, 1888. Three days later he wrote to friends in England that he was surprised to find that he was not only Master of the College but also 'appointed theological tutor to the Conference [with] full and sole direction of the studies of the students for the Ministry.' He comments wryly, 'I feel rather sorry for this colony.'<sup>1</sup>

In fact he was very well equipped for this additional responsibility. As a Methodist he inherited from Wesley himself a commitment to education in general and to a disciplined preparation for the work of ministry. At the first Methodist Conference in 1744 the question was posed: 'Can we have a seminary for labourers?' The answer, untypically cautious about the future, was 'If God spare us to another Conference.' God did that alright, but Conference in the following year called upon the Almighty for a further provision. 'Can we have a seminary for labourers yet? And the answer, 'Not till God give us a proper tutor.' It took another ninety years for that hope to be fulfilled, with the appointment of John Hannah as theological tutor to a newly founded Theological Institution at Hoxton. Jabez Bunting was President of the Institute and Joseph Entwisle House Governor. This was followed soon afterwards by the establishment of an Auxiliary Branch at Abney House near Stoke Newington (where incidentally in 1738 John and Charles Wesley met Isaac Watts) to prepare 'young men unfurnished with the mere elements of knowledge' so that they could go on to the more advanced courses at Hoxton.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say that nothing was done in the intervening ninety years to educate Methodist preachers. Wesley was always urging them to read and study as widely as possible. 'Read the most useful books, and that regularly, steadily spend all the mornings in this employ, or at least five hours in the four and twenty.' Societies are urged to 'provide all our Works, or at least the Notes [on the New Testament] for the use of the Preachers,' and to those without books he offered five pounds for their purchase.<sup>3</sup> A library was kept at Kingswood School, Bristol and at the Orphan House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne for the use of preachers, and there were many gatherings of preachers, especially at those centres, for study

<sup>1</sup> in a letter to friends, dated Jan. 13, 1888. It is somewhat surprising that Sugden was surprised about this responsibility. The main argument that persuaded Conference to take up the grant of land and build a University College was that this would be the most appropriate setting for theological education. Was that not included in the approach made to him when the invitation was offered?

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for these details, and for later information about Headingley to Kenneth B. Garlick in an unpublished manuscript, *The Headingley Branch of the Wesleyan Theological Institution, 1868-1916*.

<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, *Works* ed. Jackson.(1856), vol. viii, p.303

and tuition, at some of which Wesley himself taught.

During the years 1749 to 1755 Wesley published *The Christian Library* of fifty volumes, of which there is a complete set in the Sugden Collection at Queen's College, whose Preface says it contains 'extracts from and abridgements of the choicest pieces of practical divinity which had been published in the English language.' The sources were mainly Church of England, although there were some works by Dissenters and Roman Catholics as well. As Wesley commented, 'I mind not who speaks but what is spoken.' Wesley scholar and librarian Laurence McIntosh says of the *Library*:

Its original purpose was to furnish the preachers with material that would increase their understanding as well as their spirituality. [It] was prescribed reading. Preachers who could not afford a set were given one free but, of course, there was a catch. Whenever Wesley visited them they were likely to have to suffer an examination on its contents, surely enough to fill anyone with fear and trembling.<sup>4</sup>

Sugden's own theological education was at Headingley in Leeds, which was opened on September 25, 1868, with 38 students. This was the third branch of the Theological Institution to be established, the other two being Didsbury near Manchester, and Richmond in outer London, after Hoxton was closed due to problems with the building. By the time Sugden arrived in 1874 student numbers had grown to 70. There was a Governor (later to be called Principal), a theological tutor, a classical tutor and two assistant tutors, of whom Sugden was one in classics.

The curriculum at the time was, as a historian of Headingley has put it, 'staggering, both from the point of view of the tutors and students'<sup>5</sup>, comprising English Grammar and Composition, Elocution, Geography, History, Mathematics, Logic, Philosophy, Theology, Biblical criticism, Latin, Hebrew, Classical and New Testament Greek, Church History and Homiletics. In addition the students engaged in regular preaching and pastoral work, under supervision, in nearby circuits.

Sugden was well prepared for his work there. From his parents he learned the foundational features both of Christian belief and of ordained ministry. 'From their tender love and wise guidance' he later wrote, 'I learned what the Fatherhood of God means, and from my father's glowing evangelistic zeal for the salvation of souls I received the impression (which, thank God, has never faded) that the first business of a preacher is to bring men to a definite decision for Christ.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1870, on a Gilchrist scholarship for the applicant with the highest

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence D. McIntosh, *Gold at Queen's. Mining the Wesleyana Collection*. Queen's College Occasional Paper, No.7, October 1998, p.4

<sup>5</sup> Garlick, p. 14

<sup>6</sup> E.H.Sugden, 'Some Reminiscences of my life' *The Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, 1922, p. 727

mark in the London Matriculation examination, for which he had been prepared by Woodhouse Grove, the school in the North for sons of Methodist preachers, Sugden went to Owens College Manchester and studied for the University of London Arts degree. Hear in his own words how this prepared him for Headingley, and indeed for his life's work:

Principal G.J.Greenwood introduced me to the fascinating study of the Greek Testament Textual Criticism; Professor A. S. Wilkins not only filled me with enthusiasm for the classics, but granted me the privilege of his personal friendship; Professor A. W. Ward, now Master of Peterhouse, fired me with a great love for our English poets; quaint old Rabbi Tobias Theodores initiated me into the mysteries of Hebrew; and 'Westminster' Bridge, then organist of the Manchester Cathedral, taught me all that I know of harmony and counterpoint. But, best of all, in the free atmosphere of the College, I was once and for ever liberated from sectarian prejudices, and found out that there were good men in other churches than the Methodist, and some who owned no church allegiance at all.<sup>7</sup>

His studies at Owens would have exempted him from some of the courses at Headingley. Others he taught as Assistant Tutor - Classical and New Testament Greek, Hebrew, and some Old Testament subjects. The theology texts for the curriculum were conservative - Thomas Jackson and W.B.Pope - as were his own theological tutors, Samuel Coley and John S. Banks. Coley nevertheless was noted for founding his theology firmly on Scriptural exposition, and Banks for relating theological reflection to its implications for social action, being 'ever equipped to lead the Methodist forces into contest for civil rights and liberties...often taking the newspapers into the pulpit.'<sup>8</sup> Both these features showed up in Sugden's own later teaching and preaching.

During his seven years at Headingley and the following seven in circuit ministries, Sugden developed his interest in higher criticism to which he was introduced at Owens, and became an exponent and advocate for this approach to the bible that recognized the influences of authorship, of cultural and social settings and of linguistic developments on the final text of scripture. He was a contemporary of A.S.Peake, then at Oxford, who moved in 1892 to the newly-founded Primitive Methodist College, in Manchester as its Principal tutor. He was also influenced by his friend and Wesleyan scholar, George G. Findlay, tutor at Richmond and later at Headingley, who published a number of influential commentaries in the Cambridge and Expositor's Bible series. During these years he also became convinced by scientific evidence of the truth of major features of Darwinism, in the light of which some prevailing biblical and theological views had to be modified. I can find no account of how and when he began to address these issues, but they were at the

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pp 728,9

<sup>8</sup> Garlick, p. 29

forefront of his concerns by the time he arrived in Australia, as we shall see from his inaugural lecture. By the turn of the century George Findlay is writing, in an article 'The Better Education of the Ministry':

Natural science and historical research have tested the foundations of Christian belief and have irresistibly modified and in some respects transformed its methods of teaching. Biblical criticism - a name scarcely heard in British theological schools sixty years ago<sup>9</sup>, or known as a perilous innovation of German theologians - has come in like a flood, changing the entire landscape.<sup>10</sup>

In summary then, what were the main components of Sugden's inheritance that he brought to bear as theological educator? A knowledge of and love of God from his youth up, within a Wesleyan tradition of high regard for education and commitment to an educated clergy, but in a church where there was lingering fear that zeal would be diluted by too much learning and that the end-product of theological colleges would be scholars rather than preachers. It was out of deference to this concern that Headingley and the others were still called 'Branches of the Theological Institution' rather than 'Colleges'. There was nevertheless a well-developed system of residential Colleges, although these were separate from the Universities and chronically under-staffed. In these there was a thorough-going classically oriented curriculum with provision to tutor the less well-equipped to the level needed for more advanced study, augmented with preaching and practical experience in circuits for students and probationers.

All this was set within a Wesleyan Church that, while divided denominationally from Primitives, Bible Christian and Methodist New Connexion, was still expanding; and within a society in which new scientific and historical explorations were having a profound effect, not least in the churches where responses ranged from hostility through cautious reserve to endorsement. I have not been able to determine whether there was a characteristically Headingley response to these challenges in Sugden's time, but if Findlay's view was representative it certainly differed from the Didsbury of 1890, of which Rattenbury later wrote:

The Darwinian hypothesis did not disturb the Didsbury of my day. Karl Marx was never mentioned, and as for Biblical criticism, all we knew was that Wellhausen, Ewald and Kuenan were slain three times a week by our Theological Tutor.... Symbols such as J and E and the Priestly code were

<sup>9</sup> J.E.Rattenbury, later a leading Wesleyan scholar, notes that it was not much heard at Didsbury in 1890 when he was a student there. See Dale A. Johnson, 'The Methodist Quest for an Educated Ministry' in *Church History*, vol. 51, 1982, p. 318

<sup>10</sup> in *London Quarterly Review*, 1902, pp 101

regarded as extravagances. We were behind the times theologically, and lived in strange ignorance of what was transpiring in the world of thought.<sup>11</sup>

In any case, Sugden expressed warm appreciation of what he gained from Headingley, and particularly for the influence of its Governor and his tutor of the time, Benjamin Hellier. In a letter written on hearing of Hellier's death Sugden wrote:

Of any work that I may be able to do, I shall give the credit under God first to my father; and second to Mr. Hellier. His influence is continually with me. I often find myself mentally referring [when] in perplexity to his judgement, asking myself what he would say. When we started prayers here in the hall and the singing began, it brought back the old days so forcibly that tears came to my eyes...it only wanted the Governor in the Chair to be just Headingley over again; and I said further, 'if only I can be to some of these fellows what he was to me, I shall be well satisfied.' He once told me that his plan was always to find some point in every man that he could respect; and for the future to regard him as it were from that point of view.<sup>12</sup>

In this we hear not only of Sugden's appreciation of Hellier and of Headingley; we also have an indication of how Sugden was to exercise his own ministry as Master and Tutor. His own warm relationship with the students has often been remarked upon and contrasted with the more distant and formal approach of other Heads of Colleges, and this certainly mirrors the role of Governor in the British Methodist Colleges. The Report of the Theological Institution, 1836, says of the Governor that 'his place and character is that of father of a Christian family. His purpose is to secure, by uniform amenity and kindness, the affection of the inmates of the house, and at the same time to watch over them as a sacred trust committed to his charge.'

What then was the situation in Australia when Sugden arrived? Victoria was just at the end of that period of extraordinary growth following the gold rush. Many of Melbourne's great buildings were in place but a downturn was looming. There was no Established Church (although some in the Church of England seemed unaware of that) and earlier cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church had diminished. Methodism was expanding, although union between its various denominations was still more than a decade away. The University of Melbourne had been founded with a charter that excluded the teaching of theology, and moves to rescind that clause had recently been defeated, due largely to Catholic opposition. There were five Wesleyan

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Dale A. Johnson, p. 318

<sup>12</sup> Sugden, letter dated April 1888, in *Papers...*



Church, Melbourne. Newspaper reports of the time and his own manuscripts demonstrate the bringing together of scripture and experience of which he spoke, along with the evangelical call for commitment. An *Argus* report concluded:

Intellectual men are apt to get despiritualized; spiritual men are often prone to be illogical. Mr. Sugden obviously leads both a spiritual and an intellectual life.<sup>17</sup>

He conducted Monday evening classes at Queen's for bible students and teachers of all denominations on the International Sunday School lessons. A participant records his method:

The lessons approached from different sides, negative as well as positive aspects dealt with, difficulties met fairly, members kept posted on latest discoveries, and sometimes embellished with lantern-slides of Mr. Sugden's own travels.<sup>18</sup>

He lectured widely on theology-related themes. In Geelong in 1892, for example, he spoke to a large and enthusiastic audience on 'Ideal states', and like Wesley before him he taught extra- or post-Collegiate ministers in seminars, providing a substantial library for their wider education. *Minutes of Conference 1894* record that he would gladly give assistance by correspondence to any intending candidates for the ministry to help them achieve the desired standard.

Coming now to studies for accepted candidates, what he hoped for was a course that included three, preferably four years in residence, if possible leading to a University degree. During those years there would also be preaching and practical experience in circuits, to be followed by two or three years on probation. To that end he drew up a curriculum for a three year course. *First year*: Systematic Theology I, Biblical Exegesis, Church History (ancient and modern), and Deductive Logic. *Second year*: Systematic Theology II, Greek New Testament, Church History (modern) and Inductive Logic. *Third year*: Apologetics, Greek New Testament II, Hebrew, Ethics, Homiletics and Pastoral Theology. Sugden himself was to teach the biblical subjects, logic and ethics; part-time tutors were to take the others.

This programme was never fully achieved during his time at Queen's. There was a chronic shortage of funds to pay for candidates' residence in College, successive resolutions of Conference calling on circuits to pay their Hall levies going largely unheeded, despite the publication of defaulters' names! Too few candidates were matriculated to allow more than one year in residence, let alone go on to achieve University degrees.

<sup>17</sup> *The Argus*, Sept. 7, 1888

<sup>18</sup> *Spectator*, October 22, 1897

The need for men in circuits again and again cut short the period in residence otherwise agreed upon by Conference.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless the work began in 1888, and appreciation for what was being achieved spread beyond Victoria, so that in 1894 General Conference resolved that 'the Theological Institute for Methodism in Australia should for the present be the Theological Hall at Queen's College.' At the same Conference Sugden was appointed General Conference convener for the courses of study for probationers.

Successive General Conferences received reports indicating that students came to Queen's from Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, and occasionally from New South Wales, but the vision of one Methodist theological college for the whole of Australasia was never realized. General Conference minutes of 1901 record that the theological centres located at Sydney, Adelaide and Auckland should continue to be recognized as Provisional Theological Institutions, and despite resolutions at successive General Conferences that the various State Conferences should make every effort to send their students to Queen's, Sugden finally capitulated with a good grace in 1917, stating in his report that 'We congratulate the Queensland and New South Wales Conferences on the opening of King's and Leigh Colleges,' but could not forbear from adding 'and are proud that the heads of these institutions are both old Queen's men.'<sup>20</sup> He then concluded: 'In our judgement it is no longer necessary that Queen's should be regarded as the Central Theological Institution' and moved the recession of the General Conference resolution by which it was so designated.

The possibility of concentrating all ministerial education in one place did not entirely disappear, and some fifty years later the matter was again seriously discussed at General Conference level,<sup>21</sup> but ironically one of the strongest arguments against such centralization appealed to another cause close to Sugden's heart, *viz.* the need to work with other churches. By 1966 all the Australian Methodist Theological Colleges had achieved some form of ecumenical cooperation in their own cities. To relocate, for example in Canberra, would have brought to an end the kind of cooperation that Sugden helped to initiate. He arranged for some interchange of teaching with Baptists, and when Whitley left, with Congregationalists, and in 1903 reported to the Victoria/Tasmania Conference, with approval, a United Board of Examiners for the Protestant Colleges.

Most significantly in this regard, Sugden was one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Melbourne College of Divinity. He was present

<sup>19</sup> By the time I came to Queen's as a student in 1950 the first two problems had been overcome, but the third remained. I was the only one of the 1950 intake to receive a fourth year.

<sup>20</sup> The same would be true of Wesley College in Adelaide and, much later, Kingswood in Perth.

<sup>21</sup> with a report going to General Conference in 1966

at the first meeting of the College on March 23, 1911, was on the committee that drew up the list of text books and was appointed examiner in New Testament Greek for the Bachelor of Divinity degree, and, with Professor Rentoul of Ormond, co-examined Ancient History honours. In 1914 he gave notice of motion, in a meeting of the College, that:

In the opinion of the College it would be an advantage, with the approval and cooperation of the churches represented on the College, to have a united course of lectures open to students of all denominations covering in whole or in part the courses prescribed for the degrees and diplomas granted by the College<sup>22</sup>

thus anticipating, the establishment, some sixty years later, of the United Faculty of Theology and the other Associated Teaching Institutions of the MCD.

Minutes of College meetings record Sugden's regular attendance and involvement in its affairs, and from 1917-1920 he was its President. Despite this commitment to the MCD, Sugden was nevertheless willing to allow its demise in the interest, as he saw it, of a greater good - a theology department at the University of Melbourne. He was party to a resolution (Sept. 1919) that the MCD reaffirm its desire that the University should take over its work, and that the Registrar, together with Dr. Leeper of Trinity, should arrange a private interview with the University authorities to convey that resolution. On September 17, 1919, Sugden moved at University Council to excise the clause preventing the University from granting degrees and diplomas in Divinity, but the resolution was lost by nine votes to six. Sugden reported that not all the nine opposed were against the excision, but did not want, by supporting it, to jeopardize the progress of a new University bill already before Parliament.

Although unsuccessful, this move was consistent with Sugden's unwavering view that education for the ordained ministry should include a University course, if possible leading to a degree. Why? One obvious reason was because the church needed and deserved an educated ministry, and that is most likely to be achieved within the academic discipline that a University provides. But he had another expectation, that:

A university degree should be guarantee that its possessor is a gentleman - gentle not by accident of birth, nor by spurious title of wealth, but by virtue of those manners that 'makyth man'...by contact with his fellows a man learns that consideration for others and forgetfulness of self that lies at the basis of good manners.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> MCD Minutes, 14 July 1914. The motion was seconded by Professor Adam, and discussion postponed to a future meeting. Archbishop Clarke, in a letter to the Registrar, indicated his opposition by stating that he could not accept the position of Vice-President if the proposal was endorsed, so it did not proceed.

<sup>23</sup> *Spectator*, May 14, 1890

His other reason seems, with the current pressure for University courses to yield profits both for university and its graduates, an ideal long-abandoned. He claimed that:

One with what is called 'the mercantile spirit' enters trade avowedly to make money. But for the good professional, his profession is his end, with money only incidental to meeting those needs. To the lawyer justice, to the preacher truth are the ends to which they aim. The University graduate is a lover of work rather than wages, of truth more than life... bound by a vow more than the monastic to perpetual poverty - to perpetual disregard of wealth as the end of living.

In later years that ideal which Sugden attributed to the professional has been commended as belonging to one with a vocation rather than profession.

As already suggested, what Sugden saw as beneficial in a university education is enhanced by living in a residential college. In another paper I have quoted at length from Sugden's article 'Our Methodist University College in Australia.'<sup>24</sup> Enough here to note his conclusion, that the daily interaction with students of other disciplines produces 'a stronger, more humane minister, broader in sympathy and character' than those who came from the purely theological institution as in England, and not so far as he could judge, 'less spiritual'.

There can be no surer way towards clearing the mind of cant, towards the sympathetic understanding of the difficulties and temptations of their fellows, towards the ability to view all sorts of questions in a catholic and not a sectarian spirit.<sup>25</sup>

By the time Sugden wrote this article, most in the Victorian Conference would have agreed with him, but there did persist a view among some that the British Conference had it right, and that NSW and SA, in establishing separate theological colleges, had taken the better course. Consequently Conference of 1915, in responding to Sugden's request to be relieved of the responsibilities of theological tutor, took the opportunity to reconsider the location of the theological hall at Queen's. Under the convenership of Dr. Fitchett, no great admirer of Sugden, a committee was appointed to consider whether to appoint a theological tutor with full charge of the conduct and work of theological students to continue at Queen's, or to establish a theological institution on premises of its own. Much to Sugden's satisfaction the committee brought a unanimous resolution, agreed to by Conference, that the hall should

<sup>24</sup> Norman Young, *Queen's College and its theologs* Queen's College Occasional Papers, No.8, March 1999, quoting Sugden's article in *Methodist Magazine*, Dec. 1901

<sup>25</sup> Sugden, 'Our Methodist University College...' *ibid.*, p. 901

remain at Queen's. After four further years in order to procure the necessary funding, A. E. Albiston was appointed Professor of Theology, with full responsibility for the conduct and work of theological students, and with Sugden to continue to give two courses of lectures.

Despite all the advantages of a demanding theological curriculum, and where possible a University course within the College environment, Sugden recognized that this was not enough. Therefore he involved the students in preparing themselves spiritually and practically as well. He expected theological students especially to be in Chapel daily; he himself led the weekly Class meeting, and there also were regularly scheduled discussion groups. Responding to a request from Sugden, Conference of 1901 directed that practical instruction in preaching, methods of pastoral work and management of a circuit should form part of training, and in 1908 it was reported that students were, under Sugden's direction, regularly employed during the year in connection with the Missions of the city.

Most of this has been about Sugden as educational administrator, initiating and carrying through a plan for the education of ministers. But what of Sugden as teacher within this educational system? I was disappointed to find among his papers not one page of lecture notes, but it is possible to deduce something of the content and perhaps the style of his lectures from other sources - from his major publications and perhaps even better, from his 'Answers to questions' columns in the *Spectator*.

An extensive discussion of these will have to wait for another occasion, as will consideration of how successive teachers in Sugden's chair have built on his initiatives, but we can be certain that his teaching was lively, well supported by illustrations and biblically based if they were anything like his sermons. His translation of every Psalm into English verse<sup>26</sup> suggests that his Hebrew classes would have touched the imagination and the heart as well as the mind. Biblical exegesis would certainly have brought to bear the latest critical insights, as was reported of his classes with teachers, and included relevant application. He was more than ready to draw implications from the biblical witness not just for the individual life but for the wider community. On Sept. 12, 1890, for example, he preached a sermon at Wesley Church applying 'Christian teaching to the current strike' concluding that the only solution to capital and labour conflict would be for each side to abandon selfishness (what these days would be called 'the bottom line') as the controlling principle; and in 1893 he lectured to audiences of over a thousand on 'The socialism of Jesus Christ.' His lectures on Wesley came from extensive knowledge of his work, intensive editorial study of the sermons and affectionate enough regard for him to refer to Wesley on occasion as 'old Johnny.' We can also imagine his irrepressible sense of humour shining through, as it

<sup>26</sup> E. H. Sugden, *The Psalms of David*; Melbourne, Macmillan, 1924

frequently did in his *Spectator* articles. In answer to one question, for example, about how long Noah was in the ark, following some figuring came the conclusion: 'The question is difficult to answer, but it was settled, or Noah would have been there still, I imagine.'<sup>27</sup>

All the evidence I have gathered, from articles, newspaper reports, sermon manuscripts and longer published works confirm that throughout his career Sugden followed that 'method in theology' which he laid out in his inaugural lecture. His Fernley lecture of 1928, *Israel's debt to Egypt*, returned to and further developed the theme announced forty years earlier:

The lapse of time has. . . led to the extension of the idea of evolution to all political, social and religious developments of mankind. The fundamental principle of recent biblical scholarship is the realization that Judaism is not exempt from this law, and that the Old Testament is the record of its gradual evolution from stage to stage. . . The materials out of which Judaism was built up were dug from the quarries of Babylon and Egypt; further stones were added later from Persia and Greece. But the design of the building was God's, and his spirit guided the builders at every stage.<sup>28</sup>

In summary then, what was the legacy of Sugden to theological education? In general terms, a commitment to providing the church with educated ministers who would be effective pastors and evangelical preachers. In this it would be difficult to find a better example than Sugden himself.

More specifically, he set out a plan for ministerial education that required all candidates to be matriculated, to come into residence at Queen's and to undertake both a University degree course and theological studies, to supplement this with supervised practical experience, and to complete preparation with some time on probation which would also include a prescribed course of study. He believed that this would best be done with the theological subjects taught in cooperation with other Protestant churches, preferably in combined classes and a united faculty - even better if this could be done under the auspices of the University.

Only some of this was implemented during his tenure. Not until 1933 did Conference require matriculation of all candidates, and not all candidates came into College even then. Until the late 1950s it was seldom that candidates had more than three years in College, demands of stationing taking priority. There was, however, some cooperation in teaching between the churches, although it was not until the 1960s when Conference agreed to a five year course that Queen's and Ormond Halls

<sup>27</sup> *Spectator*, Oct. 3, 1890

<sup>28</sup> E.H. Sugden, *Israel's debt to Egypt*, London, Epworth, 1928. pp. 12, 212. The book was dedicated to Sugden's friend Dr. John Hellier, son of his Headingley Governor and recipient of his early circular letters.

were able completely to integrate their theological teaching. They were joined later in the decade by Congregationalists and Anglicans to form the Joint Faculty, anticipating two years later what Sugden could never have imagined - the United Faculty of Theology that includes Jesuits as well. Ironically, just as this ecumenical hope was being realized, another feature of Sugden's legacy was being phased out - residence in College. With the average age of candidates rising and now permitted to marry before completion of training, the undergraduate life of mainly single students became increasingly inappropriate, and these days hardly any candidates reside in College.

Another feature of Sugden's legacy needs to be stressed - his conviction that his contribution to the church as theologian should not be restricted to organizing and teaching classes for ministerial candidates. As already indicated, he preached far and wide, lectured extensively, helped educate the laity, was involved in local circuit ministry, held the offices of President of the Annual Conference and President-General of the General Conference, and took notable part in the affairs of University and the wider community.

With much of the theological education scene in Melbourne in 2004 Sugden would be happy, and could justifiably claim to have envisioned and worked for. In particular, there is a disciplined and demanding course of study at tertiary level, taught in ecumenical context, not restricted to candidates for ordination, open to recent developments in biblical, theological and wider research, with the University of Melbourne recognizing degrees in theology and participating in combined degrees with the MCD although not itself having a theology department. There are highly trained faculty members, themselves producing work of world standard while engaging more widely in the affairs of church and community.

As for those who have succeeded Sugden as theological teachers at Queen's, I hope in future to write more extensively about how they have 'benefited from and enhanced his legacy. For now I shall just point to a few obvious examples of following in the first tutor's footsteps. Of Arthur E. Albiston, most would consider his preaching to have been that feature of his ministry most clearly reflecting Sugden's, although on his retirement Conference also noted that 'in the development of the inner life of the students, Professor Albiston has been a wise father in God,' another major feature of Sugden's role. G. Calvert Barber emulated his former teacher in taking out a University of London Degree (in his case a PhD), and working in a ground-breaking area of the time, only now coming back into prominence - history of religions. In his thesis Barber extended Sugden's view of the historical development of religious ideals, finding the same evolutionary principles at work in the theology of other

major religions as in Judaism. Barber too was President of the Conference, President-General of the General Conference, and for many years was the Registrar of the MCD. Colin Williams followed Sugden as one of the pre-eminent Wesley scholars of his day; his published thesis *John Wesley's theology today* has been translated into many languages and remains one of the standard texts. Eric Osborn has continued the Sugden tradition of critical biblical scholarship, grounded in the classics and on thorough knowledge of the original languages, and introducing generations of students to the most influential continental scholars of the day.

In my own case, and with some diffidence, I cite three connections with the Sugden tradition. First, in my inaugural lecture in 1964, *Biblical interpretation and the preacher's task*<sup>29</sup> I, too, undertook to relate contemporary developments in theological method to the work of ministry, arguing that Bultmann's so-called 'demythologizing project' was consistent with every conscientious preacher's endeavour to relate the biblical message to current thought and issues. Second has been my increasing regard for, and preoccupation with the theology of John and Charles Wesley. Third, I have tried to emulate, and to encourage in my students, this of Sugden, reported in the *Spectator*, January 20, 1881:

Is he eloquent? If by this is meant using long words and redundant adjectives, and shooting off what some people call 'intellectual fireworks' then he is not eloquent... But if it means effective speech, sound thought tersely expressed, spoken with the enthusiasm of conviction, then Mr. Sugden is eloquent.

This paper has turned out to be a report of work in progress. I can find no better way of bringing it to a temporary close than to quote Sugden's own conclusion to reminiscences of his life: 'I am still, first and foremost, a Methodist preacher. Whatever I have been able to do has been the gift of God's grace to me, and I have nothing which I have not received.'<sup>30</sup>

NORMAN YOUNG

(The Revd Norman Young is a retired minister of the Australian United Church)

<sup>29</sup> Published as 'Makers of modern religious thought -an aspect of Bultmann' in *The Preacher's Quarterly*, March 1965, vol II no.1 pp. 37-42

<sup>30</sup> E. H. Sugden, 'Some reminiscences...' p. 730

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#### CORRECTION

**The name and address of the author of Note 1565: 'John Wesley and the Maid' were inadvertently omitted from the last issue. The query was inserted by Dr David Ross, 26 King's Crescent, Elderslie, Renfrewshire, PA5 9AA.**



## SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE SECESSIONIST ARMINIAN BIBLE CHRISTIANS

Those of us who take a keen interest in Bible Christian history are once again indebted to Roger Thorne (*Proceedings*, 54, 4, Feb. 2004) for shedding new light on another much-neglected part of the Bible Christian story. Much to our surprise he has discovered that the secessionists were strong in East Devon where apart from some initial success in the early 1820s the Bible Christians were singularly unsuccessful until the 1860s. Even more surprising is his revelation that there were secessionists in Shebbear with two houses in the parish registered as their places of worship as late as March 1834. So even in Shebbear some preferred O'Bryan's leadership to James Thorne's. Thanks to his researches we can now be fairly certain that the Arminian Bible Christian, William Penhale, who negotiated with the Bible Christians in 1835 was none other than the former Bible Christian layman of that name who farmed at Libbear, Shebbear, a place of Bible Christian worship as early as 1817.

Despite Tom Shaw's silence on the matter one would have assumed that the overwhelming majority of the secessionists would have been found in O'Bryan's native Cornwall. The sharp decline in Bible Christian membership in most Cornish circuits after 1829 seems to support this view. For instance, in the Luxulyan circuit - O'Bryan's home patch - it fell from 968 in 1828 to 404 in 1831. A further question arises. What was the secessionists' *raison d'être* after O'Bryan emigrated to the United States in September 1831 leaving them leaderless? Why did it not disappear there and then? Roger Thorne's evidence suggests that the secessionist connexion had considerable life and vigour until the closing months of 1834.

One source which throws further light on the secessionists is the unpublished Conference Journal (MCA, MAW Ms 817) which was used selectively by those responsible for the printed version of the conference minutes to which Roger Thorne refers. It gives both the names of the secessionist deputation - John Treweek, Thomas Bayley, William Perkin (*sic*)[?Parkyn], William Penhale, John O. Roberts, and William Strongman - as well as detailed proposals. The first of these, in order to bring about a union of the two connexions, was that their property and debts should be consolidated and the preachers and members of both connexions be eligible to fill any office in the amalgamated denomination. Their second proposition, which seems to suggest that they accorded the laity a much larger role than the Bible Christians, was more radical. In every annual Conference, and not just quinquennially as was the case in the Bible Christian denomination, there should be equal numbers of preachers and lay representatives. Finally a financial

provision for William O' Bryan was, so far as they were concerned, a *sine qua non*.

The Bible Christian deputation's response to their proposals was that they were not prepared to admit into their itinerancy the secessionists' preachers until they knew who they were nor would they make themselves responsible for the secessionists' debts until they knew what they were. As for the second proposal to give the laity equal representation at annual Conferences they could not amend their constitution because it had been enrolled in Chancery and could not therefore be changed. Lastly, they refused to recognise that William O'Bryan had any financial claim on them.

Eventually both sides gave ground. The Bible Christians conceded that 'in consideration of Mr. O'Bryan's former labours and usefulness in raising the connexion and on account of a voluntary promise from him that he will make no further claim on the connexion as he is about to leave for America we agree to make a subscription on his behalf at Michaelmas next and also to the amount of at least £20 annually during Mr. O'Bryan's and his wife's natural life.' They also said they would give him £85 if he made over the copyright of his hymnbook and all his chapels except Innis in his native Luxulyan which they would allow him to retain. They also agreed to pay £60 towards settling the secessionists' debts. Furthermore, if 700 of their members joined them by the time of the 1836 Conference they would also pay off their General Account debt of £135 11s 2d. These terms they printed in the published Bible Christian *Minutes*.

The admission of the secessionists' married preachers into the itinerancy proved to be a serious stumbling block. Though the Bible Christian deputation was prepared to enlist the services of their single preachers they would not accept their married ones though eventually they made an exception for William Rodd, perhaps, because he had been a Bible Christian itinerant as far back as 1819 and came from good farming stock. That their main reason for rejecting them was financial is made clear by the comment that John Roberts had 'a young and growing family' for which, of course, the connexion would be responsible. More specifically they objected to re-admitting the former Bible Christian itinerant, William Strongman, who had led the secessionist deputation and had been given authority by his colleagues to negotiate on their behalf, labelling him 'unstable' presumably because he had defected to the Primitive Methodists in 1826-27 when stationed in Penzance. They also objected to James Langdon who though he had been the senior Bible Christian itinerant in the St. Neot circuit in 1829 was, they said, 'getting to be an old man' and was of 'very slender abilities.' At first the secessionists refused to accept these conditions but when both O'Bryan

and Strongman urged them to do so they changed their minds. A letter jointly signed by William O'Bryan, Richard Rodd and John James sealed the agreement.

It appears that the Bible Christian connexion failed to honour its commitments, to pay O'Bryan an annuity, and in 1845 he complained bitterly to the annual Conference that he had been cheated of what was due to him.

Between 1825 and 1829 he had been systematically humiliated at successive annual Conferences by a cabal of his preachers, and it may be that amongst those who seceded with him - of Roger Thome's list of sixteen or seventeen secessionist itinerants at least six were Bible Christian itinerants before 1829 - were some who were outraged by the treatment which had been meted out to him on those occasions. Such was the number who were prepared to follow his lead in 1829 that we must question William Reed's assertion after the 1827 Conference that 'all the Preachers and Representatives were of the same mind' in opposing him. If that was true it must mean that O'Bryan's supporters had been excluded from the 1827 Conference, certainly a possibility in light of the fact that it was the district meetings that decided which itinerants and laymen should attend.

DAVID SHORNEY

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*The Autobiography of David Whitehead of Rawtenstall (1790-1865)* ed. by Stanley Chapman. (Helmshore Local History Society 2001, pp viii, 207. £12.00 ISBN 0906881 10 2)

Rawtenstall, Lancashire, is a small mill town distinguished by two fine Methodist chapels, both in classical style. Longholme, with its grand Ionic portico, is still in use, while Haslingden Road is now the local museum. Both were largely funded by millowners Thomas, David and Peter Whitehead, who built up their business from nothing and yet found time each to lead a weekly class meeting. David's autobiography, here published for the first time, reveals an archetypal Victorian northern employer: hard-headed, plain speaking and independent minded. It ends in 1850, when he was sixty and so does not cover the turbulent years to follow, when two of the brothers left the Wesleyans and built a rival Free Methodist chapel 300 yards away which cost even more than the one they had left. Even so, there is much here to interest the historian of nineteenth-century religion and its links with Free Trade, temperance and the price of cotton.

E. A. ROSE

## ANNUAL MEETING AND LECTURE 2004

The Annual Meeting of the Society, attended by 32 members, was held on 27 June at Mountsorrel Methodist Church, Leics, preceded by a tea and followed by the annual lecture. The President, Dr. J. A. Newton, took the chair and led the opening devotions. In the absence of the General Secretary, Dr. E. Dorothy Graham, minutes were taken by Mr. John H. Lenton. The list of those who had died during the year included the Revs. Brian Duckworth, John Lawson and Jeffrey Harris, Martin Ludlow, Sheila Gibbs and Joan Mills.

The annual appointments were agreed *en bloc*, with the addition of the Rev. Gilbert Braithwaite as Reviews Editor and Mr. Terry Hurst as the elected member of the Executive. Annual reports were received from various officers. Finances were reported by the Treasurer, Mr. Nicholas Page, as being in a satisfactory position, following the increase in subscription rates last year. The Librarian, Mr. John H. Lenton, urged the fuller use of the Library. Mr. E. Alan Rose as Editor apologised for the late issue of the May *Proceedings* and announced an increase in size to 120 pages a year. John Vickers, as acting Publications Manager while a successor to the Rev. Colin C. Short was sought, mentioned titles in the pipeline, including Norma Virgoe on Robert Key. The Marketing Officer, Peter Forsaith, explained that there was no WHS stand at this year's Conference because of the cost and commended the WHS website. Mrs. Sheila Himsworth, Conference Secretary, distributed fliers about next year's conference on Women and Methodism. Representatives of several of the local branches spoke of their recent activities.

The venue for next year's meeting and lecture in South Devon was still being sought. Under AOB, a letter of good wishes was to be sent to the General Secretary. A seminar on MMS Finances, as part of the MMS History Project, on September 9-10. was mentioned. The electronic version of the *Dictionary of Methodism* was progressing and the Editor appealed for new entries and additional material.

Thanks were expressed to the Rev. David Leese and Mountsorrel Methodist Church for their hospitality. The meeting closed with prayer and was followed by the Annual Lecture, in which the Rev. Dr. Herbert McGonigle offered a reappraisal of the early nineteenth century revivalist William Bramwell. The text of the lecture is printed in this issue of the *Proceedings*.

JOHN A. VICKERS

**WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2003**

The Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2003 were presented to the 2004 Annual Meeting. The following is a summary of the audited accounts. A copy of the full Report and Accounts, including the Auditor's certificate, is available on request from the Treasurer.

**General Income & Expenditure Account: Year to 31 December 2003**

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Subscriptions	5,737.26	5,899
Irish Branch	712.50	713
Sales of Publications	390.06	459
Advertisements	247.28	227
Bank and Deposit Interest	322.24	318
Other Income	503.57	81
	<u>£7,912.91</u>	<u>£7,697</u>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
Proceedings and Distribution	4,937.88	4,332
Other Printing	176.10	322
Library	1,525.15	1,281
Administration	963.71	957
Advertising	168.40	37
Other Expenditure	521.18	384
	<u>£8,292.42</u>	<u>£7,313</u>
Excess of Income over Expenditure	-£379.51	£384

**Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2003**

<b>ASSETS EMPLOYED 2003</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Investments	225.00	225
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Sundry Debtors	-	-
Bank & Deposit Accounts	17,287.28	16,619
	<u>17,287.28</u>	<u>16,619</u>
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Sundry Creditors	-	184
Subscriptions received in advance	7,070.41	6,342
	<u>7,070.41</u>	<u>6,526</u>
Net Current Assets	<u>£10,441.87</u>	<u>£10,318</u>
<b>REPRESENTED BY</b>		
General Fund (unrestricted)	8,458.53	8,838
Conference Fund	504.11	903
Library Appeal Fund	1,479.23	577
	<u>£10,441.87</u>	<u>£10,318</u>

NICHOLAS PAGE

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Letters of Samuel Wesley : Professional and Social Correspondence, 1797-1837* edited by Philip Olleson (Oxford University Press, 2001 pp 1 xiii, 516 £100.00 ISBN 0 19816423 8)

The subject of this book was the youngest son of Charles Wesley, the hymn-writer, and was born on 24 February 1766. He and his older brother (also called Charles) were gifted with exceptional musical talents, which were evident from an early age. Samuel himself first played a tune on the harpsichord at three, taught himself to read from Handel's *Samson* at four and at five 'had all the recitatives, and choruses of *Samson* and the *Messiah* both words and notes by heart'. At 8, William Boyce (arguably the most important English composer of the day) dubbed him 'an English Mozart' and, despite the suspicions of many Methodists as to the sensual aspect of music outside worship, Charles Wesley encouraged his sons' musical education in the sheltered setting of the family home, permitting them to organise nine seasons of family concerts from 1779 to 1787. There was a rebellious streak in Samuel, however, and he became a Roman Catholic in 1784 and had a long relationship (leading to cohabitation) with Charlotte Louisa Martin (of whom his parents definitely did not approve) and only married her in April 1793 when pregnancy (and the consequences of illegitimacy for the offspring) imparted an urgency to the situation. Although Samuel and Charlotte had three children, the marriage was far from happy and finally broke down in 1810, after which Samuel found domestic happiness in the company of Sarah Suter, his teenage housekeeper, to whom he had nine children, the first of whom was Samuel Sebastian Wesley. The excellent Biographical Introduction deals with Samuel's life as a whole, which was further complicated by professional disappointment, lingering financial difficulties and recurring bouts of mental illness.

The main purpose of the volume under review is the publication of all known letters from Samuel Wesley to correspondents outside his immediate family between 1799 and his death in 1837. As a consequence (and given the circumstances outlined above), there are very few letters which deal with Methodism *per se*, although some of the last correspondence in the volume deals with the three hymn-tunes by Handel to his father's words which Samuel had discovered in the Fitzwilliam Collection in Cambridge. However, the contents will be of interest to readers of *Proceedings* for a number of reasons. Firstly, much of it is extremely witty (often caustically so) and indicates the breadth of the education which the sons of Charles Wesley had received. Secondly, taken as a whole, it 'fleshes out' the history of English music, giving personality to names such as Novello, Attwood, Crotch and Burney, with which the general reader might already be familiar, and Samuel Wesley's role in the introduction to this country of the work of Johann Sebastian Bach makes him a particularly significant figure. Finally, it provides

very different impression of the life of the period (and of a significant member of the Wesley family) than might have been gained solely from a reading of Methodist history.

Philip Olleson has done a tremendous service to the historians of both music and Methodism by not only making the correspondence accessible but providing such extensive and scholarly footnotes. Whilst the cost of this volume will regrettably be a deterrent to wide circulation, it is a valuable addition to the available literature on the Wesley family at a time when Samuel's music is becoming more widely available (e.g. the Complete Organ Music is being published by Fagus Music, Beech Cottage, Drumoak, Banchory, AB31 5AL). Since the publication of this work, Dr Olleson has published *Samuel Wesley: The Man and His Music* (Boydell Press, 2003) and the reader may be advised to start with the more recent book and move on to the *Letters*.

NICHOLAS PAGE

*Diversity & Vitality The Methodist and Nonconformist Chapels of Cornwall*, by Jeremy Lake, Jo Cox and Eric Berry (2001, Cornwall Archaeological Unit. pp iii + 141. £15. ISBN 1898166 79X)

Every now and again - thankfully rarely - a book appears that can only be described as... 'unreliable'

On purchasing this book, one immediate disappointment for a publication of its type becomes apparent: the lack of an index. When will publishers realise that books that give the appearance of an authoritative reference work are emasculated by the absence of the ability to use it, that is, an index? But in making my own index the book's many errors became apparent - and perhaps it was wise not to include one after all.

Among the errors are... the persistent calling of the United Methodist Free Churches by the title 'United Free Methodist' - when titles cannot be quoted correctly, questions arise; the allocation of chapels into the wrong circuit - Chacewater for instance is some way from Penzance; the elevation of Bible Christian local teacher Billy Bray to 'minister-architect' - which reveals an ignorance of the difference between minister and local preacher, and of Billy Bray himself; the absence of the earliest Wesleyan chapel from the Porthleven map; and on the same page, of the UMFC chapel from the St. Columb Major map; there is indeed some evidence that the authors have taken the chapel labelling on the Ordnance Survey maps as definitive; they have proved that this can be dangerous. It would be tedious to list all the errors of fact that I can detect - for the list will still be incomplete. Every one generates a certain uncertainty.

But as well as the errors of fact there are errors of judgement. We find the uncritical (uninformed ?) use of some sources. And when will non-Methodists realise that listing anything by parish is an irrelevance to us? Yet the list of listed buildings is so presented. What, I want to ask, is wrong with the circuit system? And if people don't know what that is, we might want to ask, why are they engaged in producing such a book ?

It all adds up to a lack of reliability, and perhaps, as has been suggested elsewhere, reflects a wish to hurry out the publication. I find it frustrating - and disappointing, because its publication will undoubtedly inhibit the publication of something more correct.

And this all in spite of an extensive bibliography, and many fine photographs, drawings and maps. For there is much that is good about the book, visually. Anyone interested in Cornish Methodism ought to own it. However, it will be unwise to quote this book as a source, for the many errors that can be detected raise questions about how many undetected errors there are.

C. C. SHORT

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*Mirror of the Soul. The Diary of an Early Methodist Preacher. John Bennet 1714-54.* ed. by S. R. Valentine. (MPH, 2002, pp. xii, 243. £15.00. ISBN 1 858522161)

John Bennet features in the general histories of Methodism as John Wesley's rival for the hand of his 'last love', Grace Murray, but earlier he was the pioneer of Methodism in Lancashire, Cheshire and North Derbyshire. The chief source for his life is a detailed but fragmentary diary, covering 1742-54, most of which is preserved in the Methodist Archives in Manchester. It is a valuable record, first for the rise of Methodism in the north west, since Bennet's network was brought into Wesley's emerging movement, but also for the light it sheds on Bennet himself, unusual as coming from an educated Dissenting back-ground, to which he returned as an ordained minister in 1754. He was also influenced by the Quakers, from whom he copied the quarterly meeting which became a prominent feature of Methodist organisation largely by his efforts.

While not unknown to Methodist historians, this diary has never been published and so Dr Valentine is to be congratulated for making this important record available to a wider audience. He provides an introduction outlining Bennet's career and assessing his character and brief notes on people and places mentioned in the text. This book complements Dr Valentine's earlier biography of Bennet (see *Proceedings* 51 pp229f) and gives us much insight into the earliest days of the Evangelical Revival.

E. A. ROSE



*Eliza Asbury: Her Cottage and Her Son* by David J. A. Hallam, (2003, Brewin Books, 56 Alcester Rd, Studley, B80 7LG pp. 98 illus. £8.95)

Most people interested in early Methodism will be familiar with Francis Asbury. Born in Hamstead, Great Barr, near Birmingham, in 1745, he became a local preacher, then an itinerant and in 1771 responded to John Wesley's call for preachers to go to America, from whence he never returned to his home land. In America Francis was the first Bishop of the American Methodist Church and came to be known as the 'prophet of the long road', travelling thousands of miles over the next 44 years.

However, little attention has ever been given to, and little is known of his parents, Joseph and Elizabeth (Eliza). David Hallam has sought to fill this gap by research into local sources in the Midlands and by his close scrutiny of Asbury's diary and letters. The hitherto very hazy picture of his mother is brought somewhat more to life. Unfortunately, the sources available provide only vague hints about the family ancestry and few more details, than already known through Francis' writings, of their life in Great Barr come to light. Nevertheless, we get a picture of a woman who, not very educated herself, was determined that her son should be.

The death of her young daughter, Sarah aged five, when Francis was nearly three, brought her in touch with Methodism. To be associated with it at that time was asking for trouble, but Eliza and Francis continued with their Methodist worship and their persistence and faith ultimately resulted in Francis going to America

What little more we learn of Eliza comes through Francis' letters to her. Over a 30 year period this correspondence was intermittent, sometimes taking more than a year for letters to arrive and ceasing altogether during the American War of Independence, although apparently he was able to send money home from time to time. Joseph died in 1798 and Eliza four years later in January 1802.

This book, well illustrated, and with quotations from the letters, explores the relationship between the son and the mother. Hallam concludes by reminding the reader that Asbury's Cottage soon became a place of pilgrimage, especially for American visitors and that after World War II it was 'listed' as having special historical interest. In 1955 the Cottage passed into the ownership of West Bromwich Borough Council, basic features were restored and it can be visited by appointment (Tel. 0121 553 0759).

E. DOROTHY GRAHAM

*Early Methodism in Birmingham: A Historical Sketch* by W. C. Sheldon. (Birmingham Mission, 2003, pp. 56, illus. £5 post free from 208 Corporation Street, Birmingham, B4 6QW, ISBN 0950966274 )

Although compact, Sheldon's history is one of the classic Methodist local histories and original copies are now very scarce. It was published in 1903 to mark the opening of the Birmingham Central Hall and one hundred years later, the Mission has reprinted it in a pleasant paperback format. It records the development of Birmingham Methodism up to Wesley's death and includes maps and illustrations of early buildings, which make it a valuable source. It is good to have it back in print.

E. A. ROSE

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*A Happy Man from Yorkshire: Herbert Silverwood and the years of revival* by David Lazell (The Author, East Leake, 2003) pp. 132(32). £11.50 including p&p from the Author, 23 Carlton Crescent, East Leake, Loughborough, LE12 6JF)

Herbert Silverwood (1901-1983) from 1931 to 1966 served as a Connexional Evangelist and his campaigns included beach missions and open-air cinema vans; he also had long associations with Cliff College. Brought up at Kexborough, near Barnsley, his Sunday school teacher was the Methodist New Connexion evangelist, William Challenger. The author captures the feel of Methodist evangelism in the years following Union especially that of a local preacher living in a pit village, now a world which increasingly survives only in the memories of an older generation. There is a good selection of illustrations.

The author is continuing to collect personal memories of Silverwood, a number being used in his book, and would be pleased to hear from those who can add to his store.

D. COLIN DEWS

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*John Wesley, The Means of Grace and the Holy Life Today* by John M. Haley (pp28 £2.50 post free ISBN 0 9537473 2 8 )

The latest publication from the Wesley Fellowship, this is a succinct yet wide-ranging survey of Wesley's attitude to the sacraments and other spiritual exercises including hymns, lovefeasts and 'works of mercy,' concluding with a brief section on today's church. There is a very full, up-to-date bibliography. Copies are available from Tony Tamburello, 13 Charles St, Colne, Lancs BB8 0LY

E. A. ROSE

## LOCAL HISTORIES

*St Mary's Chapel, Langtoft 1807-2004: A Story of Methodism* by Charles Brear (35pp) 2004. Copies from the author, 9 Avenue Court Westgate, Bridlington, YO16 4QG, no price stated.

*History and Mystery (Methodism in Sampford Peverel, Devon)* by R. F. S.Thorne. Copies, no price stated, from Rev A. Taylor, 4 Willand Road, Cullompton, Devon, EX15 1AP.

*125th Anniversary of the Methodist Church, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury, 1879-2004* by A. Buckley et al. (37pp) 2004. illus. Copies, £2.35 post free from Don Smith, 7 Dargate Close, Meole Brace, Shrewsbury SY3 9QE

*The Little Ship (Helston UMFC):A Book of Memories* by Denis Bray (48pp) Copies £3.00 post free from the author, 95 Homecourt House, Bartholomew Street West, Exeter, EX4 3AE.

*Newquay Wesley Methodist Church 1904-2004* by Douglas Williams et al. (29pp). Copies from Rev Celia M Phillips, 56 Hilgrove Road, Newquay, Cornwall, TR7 2QT, no price stated.

*175 Years in the life of St John's Methodist Church, St Austell* by Ann Whetter (29pp) 2003. illus. Copies from Rev D Morris, 71 Meadway, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4HT.

*One Hundred Not Out!* (Samares Methodist Church, Jersey). Copies, £4.00 post free, from John Le Cornu, 21 Howgate, Avalon Park, St Clement, Jersey, JE2 6FG (cheques payable to Samares Methodist Church).

*A History of Methodism in Langley, A Cheshire Village* by Thelma Whiston (117pp) 2003. illus, index, Copies, £9.95 post free, from David Bullock, Cophurst Farm, Hollin Lane, Sutton, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 ONL

*The Bible Christians in Jersey* by Tom Nicholas. 2003. Copies, £5.50 post free, from the author at 2 Maison Binet, Gorey Village Main Road, Grouville, Jersey, JE3 9FX.