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Proceedings OF THE Wesley Historical Society

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‘HATS OFF’:

Methodism and Popular Protest in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the Chartist Era: a Case Study of Benjamin Rushton (1785-1853) of Halifax

Contemporary newspaper reports of the West Yorkshire Chartist demonstration on Whit Tuesday, 21 May 1839, on Peep Green, a flat expanse of moorland between Huddersfield and Leeds, record the chairman of the meeting, Mr Samuel Dickinson, after the singing of a hymn, issuing the solemn injunction ‘Hats off’ whereupon the vast crowd, variously estimated at between 200,000 and 250,000, dutifully removed their hats and stood bareheaded in silence with heads bowed. The Methodist local preacher, William Thornton then opened the proceedings in prayer, proclaiming fervently that ‘the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end’ prompting Feargus O’Connor to clap him upon the shoulder remarking memorably: ‘Well done, Thornton, when we get the People’s Charter I will see that you are made Archbishop of York’.¹ Another later source reveals that the

¹ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, second edition, 1968, p. 438; *Halifax Express and Huddersfield, Bradford and Wakefield Journal*, 25 May 1839, *Bradford Observer*, 25 May 1839; Eileen Yeo, ‘Christianity and Chartist Class Struggle 1838-1842’, *Past and Present*, 91, (1981), p. 121 estimated attendance at the meeting at 200,000 but it has been estimated as high as 250,000 by R.G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854*, 1894, p. 63 and Frank Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites, Chartists and Plug-Drawers*, fourth edition, 1968, p. 317, who described the demonstration as ‘the largest political meeting ever held in England’. This article is a revised version of a paper presented to the ‘Methodist Identities’ Conference, Wesley House, Cambridge, August 2007.

opening hymn sung on this occasion was Charles Wesley's hymn 'Peace, doubting heart! My God's I am', a hymn which was still being sung by Methodists as late as 1983, appearing in the *Methodist Hymn Book* of 1933 in the section entitled hymns for 'The Christian Life: trustfulness and peace'. The opening verse in this version concludes with an explicit reference to the atonement:

His blood for me did once atone
And still He loves and guards His own.

Subsequent verses allude to the Old Testament parting of the Red Sea for Moses and the children of Israel and the deliverance from the fiery furnace of Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and the New Testament stilling of the storm by Jesus.²

The prominence given to the commencement of a Whitsuntide open-air popular protest meeting with the singing of a hymn, followed by extempore prayer, gives some indication of the influence of popular religion in the year in which the first Chartist National Petition, demanding political rights for working men, was presented to Parliament. The historian Eileen Yeo described the meeting as one of the first to take on some of the features of a Primitive Methodist camp meeting with the hymn and prayer followed by a series of exhortations from no fewer than four lay preachers with Methodist lineage, namely John Arran, a Barnsley blacksmith who later worked at the *Northern Star* office in Leeds; Abram Hanson, an Elland shoemaker, who had earlier played a prominent role in the launch of the Great Northern Union; Benjamin Rushton, a handloom weaver from Ovenden near Halifax, who had been engaged in radical protest since Peterloo and William Thornton, a Bradford wool comber, who fled to America later to escape prosecution in 1839. Collectively their associations with Methodism encompassed Wesleyanism, the Methodist New Connexion, the Wesleyan Methodist Association, Primitive Methodism, Primitive Methodist Revivalism and Independent Methodism and several were also regular preachers in Chartist Churches. Abram Hanson, who suffered expulsion from the Elland Wesleyan Society after urging the crowd at the Peep Green meeting to keep away from preachers who

² Peel, *Risings*, pp. 317-18; *The Methodist Hymn Book*, 1933, No. 500..

‘preach Christ and a crust’ and ‘go to those men who preach Christ and a full belly, Christ and a well-clothed back – Christ and a good house to live in – Christ and Universal Suffrage’ had reputedly once confessed to his wife, Elizabeth, that he believed passionately that ‘t’ Charter is to be gotten by preaching and praying’. William Thornton had associations in Halifax with both the Wesleyans at Skircoat Green and the Primitive Methodist Round Hill Chapel at Roper Lane, Northowram, which made ‘a quiet schism’ from Primitive Methodism in 1839 to become a Chartist chapel. He also had associations with other Primitive Methodist congregations; with the Gospel Pilgrims at Little Horton, Bradford, and the Baptists at Clayton West and Sowerby, near Halifax. John Arran, a Wesleyan Methodist Association local preacher, moved a resolution at the Peep Green meeting ‘that civil liberty is in perfect agreement with the precepts held forth by the founder of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ; and that all ministers who are faithful and true to their calling will uphold the same.’ He declared that ‘the founder of the Christian religion was the greatest and purest democrat that ever lived’ and also preached in the Chartist chapel at Bradford in September 1839. Benjamin Rushton, who may well have had associations with Wesleyanism in his childhood and youth, later became a Sunday School teacher, local preacher and member of the Leaders’ Meeting of the Methodist New Connexion in Halifax and at Oviden and following his resignation developed links with Independent Methodism. Eileen Yeo also concluded that after Peep Green attempts were made in a number of localities across Yorkshire ‘to absorb worship into [Chartist] branch life’.³

The universal, reverential removal of hats for prayer at Peep Green contrasts with the portrayal by an artist identified only by the initials ‘HMP’ of Chartist behaviour at one unspecified parish church during the nationwide demonstrations following the rejection of the first Chartist National Petition by Parliament in July 1839. Two of the

³ Yeo, ‘Christianity and Chartist Class Struggle 1838-1842’, *Past and Present*, 91, (1981), pp 120, 122. For a fuller discussion of Hanson, Thornton and Rushton see J.A. Hargreaves, ‘“Evangelical Piety and Gallic Flippancy”: Religion and Popular Protest in Halifax Parish in the Age of Revolution’ in K. Dockray and K. Laybourn, *The Representation and Reality of War. The British Experience*, Stroud, 1999, pp. 75-80 and J.A. Hargreaves, *Benjamin Rushton Handloom Weaver and Chartist*, Halifax, 2006. For Arran see R.F. Wearmouth, *Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century*, 1948, pp. 175, 186, 188.

Chartists in the image are depicted wearing hats and one of them is asleep whilst another is smoking. The protests occurred in no fewer than thirty-one parish churches across England and Wales principally from late July to early September 1839. The ecclesiastical historian, Owen Chadwick concluded that ‘most of the visits were orderly displays of good temper’, though he recorded that at Bolton several ‘smoked pipes during the service’ and at Norwich a clergyman experienced disruptive heckling by Chartists waving sticks. Eileen Yeo concurred that ‘their decorum during the service’ during these demonstrations was ‘usually impressive’ but revealed that during the protest at Bolton offence had been caused by the behaviour of a minority of inebriated Chartists appropriating sacred books and even a pew drawer for use as a chamber pot (though this was judged less offensive than it appeared to Yeo since sanitary arrangements of this kind were apparently normal practice for the congregation at another Lancashire parish church at Rochdale!).⁴

Despite the impressive evidence of Chartist piety at Peep Green in May and even by and large during the parish-church sit-ins later in the year there has been a marked reluctance by both ecclesiastical and secular historians to recognise the pervasiveness of the influence of popular religion on the culture of the Chartist Movement, despite the general acceptance following the detailed research of Robert F. Wearmouth and others that Chartist organisation owed much to Methodist involvement in the movement, particularly in its advocacy of class meetings for the more efficient collection of subscriptions and its adoption of the Methodist model of itinerancy for Chartist missionaries.⁵ Why, then, has the popular religious dimension and in particular Methodist-derived expressions of faith and spirituality in Chartist culture been marginalized? The Chartist leader, Feargus O’Connor’s vigorous denunciation of Christian Chartism along with Temperance, Educational and Household Suffrage Chartism as divisive distractions in his attempt to retain control of the movement from his prison cell at York and to stifle support for his rival Lovett’s New

⁴ S. Roberts and D. Thompson, *Images of Chartism*, Woodbridge, 1998, p. 36; O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 1, 1829-1859, third edition, 1971, pp. 34-36; Yeo, ‘Christianity and Chartist Class Struggle 1838-1842’, *Past and Present*, 91, (1981), pp. 123-131.

⁵ Wearmouth, *Working-Class Movements*, 1948, pp. 126-27; J. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom. Feargus O’Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1842*, 1982, p. 226.

Move in April 1841 has often been held responsible for undermining explicitly Christian influences on Chartist culture. Moreover, although it is acknowledged that O'Connor was noticeably less antagonistic to the Scottish Chartist Churches, his denunciation of Arthur Neill's Birmingham Chartist Church was particularly vitriolic and the effect of his admonition, James Epstein has concluded, undoubtedly created confusion within Chartist ranks. Other historians, however, notably, F.C. Mather, have observed that his condemnation did not succeed in eliminating the Chartist churches, which Mather has affirmed remained 'an authentic expression of the sentiments of the people', even if the character of these institutions varied considerably in England.⁶ However, later Chartist commemoration in some localities has appropriated Chartist figures like Benjamin Rushton into a secular Marxist pantheon, where religious expression has been subordinated to, if not eradicated from political ideology and so the influence of popular religion has consequently been marginalized.⁷

Furthermore, although Methodism has long been recognised as 'one of the most fissiparous religious movements in English history', Methodist historiography has tended to focus more on the mainstream Wesleyan manifestations of Methodism than on some of the more obscure secessionist movements which seem to have had particularly strong links with the Chartist movement.⁸ However, it is perhaps salutary for Methodist historians to recall that the major exodus from Wesleyanism in the nineteenth century occurred in the two years immediately following the decade in which popular protest reached its zenith through the Chartist movement. Indeed, the returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship and other contemporary sources reveal that the centres of the greatest disruption in the industrial towns and villages of West Yorkshire during the flysheets controversy were also centres in which Chartism was particularly strong, including many within the orbit of Peep Green. Moreover, although Deborah Valenze

⁶ Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, pp. 240-41; F.C. Mather, *Chartism and Society*, 1980, pp. 293-94.

⁷ Report of centenary commemoration of Benjamin Rushton by the Halifax Fabian Society, *Halifax Evening Courier*, 26 February 1954; Article by Norman Berry, *Halifax Evening Courier*, 24 June 1976 and report of memorial meeting, *Halifax Evening Courier*, 28 June 1976; Address by Anne Collins 'Remembering the 1976 memorial to Ben Rushton', Halifax Chartist Festival, Lister Lane Cemetery, Halifax, 16 July 2006.

⁸ D. Hempton, *Religion and political culture in Britain and Ireland from the Glorious Revolution until the decline of empire*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 42.

in her study of female preaching and popular religion in industrial England included an examination of the culture of Independent Methodism, this strand of Methodist sectarianism has been a neglected area of study by historians of Methodism until comparatively recently with the publication of John Dolan's new history of the Independent Methodists.⁹

The fortuitous discovery of some important evidence in hitherto neglected circuit plans in Norfolk and West Yorkshire and the utilisation of the registration documentation of meeting houses has enabled at least a partial reconstruction of the wider constituency of Methodism in the Chartist era to be identified.¹⁰ Benjamin Rushton of Ovenden is one of the most outstanding examples of a preacher and radical agitator who inhabited this constituency during this period, but he and the sub-strata of Methodist culture which he typified, appear to have escaped the radar of most Methodist historians. While the attitudes of Methodists at the grassroots towards Chartism are likely to remain elusive because of the limited surviving evidence, a re-interpretation of the evidence now available might stimulate further exploration of the extent of the diffusion of Methodist attitudes and beliefs within the wider popular culture. It is interesting that the most recent historian of the Chartist Movement Malcolm Chase has acknowledged that the meta-narrative of secularisation may have obscured the religious underpinning of the Chartist movement.¹¹

In the view of George Bowers, a local historian in membership at Salem Methodist Church, Halifax, where Benjamin Rushton had also once been a member, Rushton 'never wavered in his beliefs, neither in Chartism nor in Christianity'.¹² One of the driving forces behind the building of the new Salem Chapel in 1815, Rushton had been received into membership of the Methodist New Connexion at Salem, North Parade, Halifax on 19 February 1815 and was appointed a class leader on 15 October 1816. He subsequently supported the development of the

⁹ D.M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, Princeton, 1985.

¹⁰ J. Dolan and J.G. Terry, 'The Primitive Methodist Revivalists and the Gospel Pilgrims', Notes of a lecture to the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch), October 2005. I am grateful to Dr Gordon Terry for making these notes available to me.

¹¹ Malcolm Chase, Radical Riding Conference, University of Bradford, 14 April 2007.

¹² George Bowers, M.B.E., 'the Life and Times of Benjamin Rushton, Halifax Christian Chartist, 1785-1853', unpublished typescript kindly made available by Chris Bowers.

cause at Ovenden, serving as a Sunday School teacher and popular local preacher, appearing at chapel anniversary services in a clean brat, patched knee breeches, highly polished clogs and a tall hat.¹³ However, increasingly critical of organised religion and vociferously anti-clerical, he was summoned to a meeting with the Superintendent Minister, the Revd Thomas Allin at the request of the leaders' meeting who expostulated with him 'respecting his none attendance at the leaders' meeting', whereupon he tendered his resignation to the meeting and this was accepted on 14 May 1821.¹⁴ Moreover, his continuing popularity as a preacher with the remoter societies of the circuit was a growing source of embarrassment to the Halifax Methodist New Connexion Circuit. A local preachers' meeting in April 1829 had recorded its disapproval 'of the conduct of our Lighthazle's friends in employing Benjamin Rushton to preach in the school connected with Soyland' and similar disapproval 'of the conduct of our friends at Ovenden in employing preachers from other bodies' in January 1830 was probably a reference to the same problem.¹⁵

Indeed, during the 1820s he became associated with the Independent Methodist causes at Rastrick and Halifax and later with the Gospel Pilgrims, an Independent Methodist sect with Primitive Methodist roots in Bradford and his name rendered elliptically as 'Ben Ruston of Ovenden' appears at the end of a list of thirty fully accredited unremunerated local preachers on the Bradford and Leeds Gospel Pilgrims' preaching plan in 1834, under a text from Nehemiah, chapter four, verse four: 'Hear, O our God! For we are despised'. Moreover, the most recent historian of Independent Methodism, John Dolan, regards Benjamin Rushton, the Halifax Chartist, as an even more significant figure in both movements than Festus Fielden, the highly regarded local preacher and Chartist orator from Lees, near Oldham, who was the leader of 'a small church where the members all knew the meaning of

¹³ *Halifax Guardian Almanack*, 1920, pp. 49-51; E.V. Chapman, *John Wesley and Co.*, Halifax, 1952, p. 44.

¹⁴ WYAS, C(alderdale) D(istrict) A(rchives), Halifax North (Salem) MNC Leaders' Meeting Minutes, SA:14.

¹⁵ WYAS, CDA, Halifax North (Salem) MNC Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting Minute Book, 1829-51, 13 April 1829, 11 January 1830, MR: 74. See J.A. Hargreaves, 'Religion and Society in the Parish of Halifax, c1740-1914', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Huddersfield Polytechnic, 1991, p. 256.

acute poverty' and who represented 'a strand within Independent Methodism which saw religion and politics as indivisible'.

By 1834 the Gospel Pilgrims, which had come into existence around 1830 possibly as a result of a disruption in Primitive Methodism in Bradford, which Hugh Bourne attributed to 'a troubler and divisionist' who had previously been a travelling preacher among Robert Winfield's Methodist Revivalists in Leicester, had several chapels and over twenty societies in West Yorkshire. In 1838 their annual meeting was held at the Little Horton chapel, which like its neighbouring Bradford chapel also hosted Chartist meetings in a district, which the Victorian topographer William Cudworth described as 'a very hot-bed of Chartism'.¹⁶ Rushton had well-documented links with the Mount Carmel Gospel Pilgrim Chapel at Little Horton, where he is described as minister (signifying preacher) in the *United Free Gospel Pilgrim Magazine* and was involved in the registration of similar Primitive Christian Dissenting Meeting Houses in Halifax at a room at Swan Coppice Yard in 1841 and Cleckheaton at a room in Back Lane in 1842.¹⁷

Rushton espoused those strands of Methodism most associated with the assertion of the democratic rights of the laity, notably the Methodist New Connexion or Tom Paine Methodists as they were dubbed by contemporaries, and the popular revivalism of the Primitive Methodist open-air camp meetings, which provided a model for more secular radical assemblies. The Independent Methodists with their aversion to a paid ministry also had a profound influence on his political as well as his religious attitudes and beliefs. Born in Dewsbury in 1785, Rushton later moved to Halifax, where he found employment as a fancy worsted weaver, residing at Friendly Fold in the industrial village of Ovenden, some two miles north of Halifax. Details of his education are not known, but he may have acquired a basic literacy from a religious upbringing possibly at a Wesleyan Sunday School since he was able to sign his name in the parish register by the time of

¹⁶ J. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists. A History*, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 64, 91. I am grateful to Dr John Dolan for supplying me with a copy of the Bradford and Leeds Gospel Pilgrims' Plan, 1834.

¹⁷ University of York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Dissenting Meeting House Certificates, 1841/23 and 1842/9. I am grateful to Dr John Dolan and Dr Gordon Terry for this information.

his marriage at Halifax Parish Church on 16 August 1809, whereas his bride, Mary Helliwell of Ovenden (born 1786) was only able to make her mark.¹⁸ They had seven children, John, Zimri, Lemar, Martha, Caroline, Henry Hunt and Mary. By 1851 he was a widower, living with his daughter, son-in-law, grandchildren and sons Zimri and Henry Hunt Rushton, who bore the names of an obscure Old Testament rebel leader and a celebrated contemporary radical orator. His grandchildren's names commemorated the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, the prominent Christian Chartist, Henry Vincent, and the legendary Swiss freedom fighter, William Tell, revealing the radical sympathies of this weaving family across two generations.¹⁹

He appears first to have become engaged in radical politics in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819, when he led a march of demonstrators with heads bared as a mark of respect for the victims of Peterloo from Halifax to Huddersfield and possibly suffered arrest and imprisonment for his involvement.²⁰ He re-emerged in the 1830s as a champion of the handloom weavers, whose declining economic status came under the successive scrutiny of a parliamentary enquiry in 1834-35 and a royal commission in 1834-41; a determined opponent of the New Poor Law and a stalwart supporter of the Ten Hours Movement and Chartism.²¹ At the Chartist demonstration at Peep Green in May 1839, Rushton indicated his opposition to paid ministry when he boasted that he had given nothing to the parsons since 1821, which John Dolan interprets as a reference to his refusal to pay parochial tithes or church rates and E.P. Thompson as a response to William Cobbett's appeal to Methodists not to pay their dues.²² Nevertheless, he continued to preach in Methodist pulpits despite official disquiet until at least 1830, even conducting the Sunday School anniversary services of the more politically conservative Wesleyans at Luddenden Dean, a weaving community in the Calder Valley. However, he had certainly become estranged from institutional religion

¹⁸ W(est) Y(orkshire) A(rchive) S(ervice), Wakefield, Halifax Parish Church Marriage Register, D53 1/45 136.

¹⁹ 1851 Census. HO 107/2301 Folio 117 p. 4/5 schedule 18.

²⁰ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 438.

²¹ This brief summary is based upon the article by J. A. Hargreaves in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and Hargreaves, *Benjamin Rushton*, 2006.

²² Dolan, *Independent Methodists*, p. 64; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 438.

by the early 1830s and on public platforms he adopted an increasingly anti-clerical stance in the late 1830s. At an anti-poor law meeting in Halifax in 1837 he criticised the Whig government's provision of a salary of £15,000 for the Archbishop of Canterbury and later seconded a resolution at Hartshead Moor binding the meeting 'not to attend any place of worship where the administration of services is inimical to civil liberty'.²³ This was in effect an extension of the notion of exclusive dealing from the political into the religious sphere, a tendency later deplored by Feargus O'Connor in his famous denunciation of Christian Chartism.²⁴

Thereafter Rushton occupied the pulpits of radical and secessionist congregations across the West Riding, taking as his text 'The poor ye have with you always' on one documented occasion at the Chartist chapel at Littletown in the Spen Valley, formed after supporters of Joseph Rayner Stephens seceded from the Halifax Wesleyan Methodist Circuit in 1834. Rushton was a regular visitor to the Chartist chapel at Littletown on Sunday mornings. The Victorian antiquary Frank Peel recounts a lively service conducted by Benjamin Rushton at Littletown before a packed congregation on an unspecified date during the Chartist era which Thompson attributed to the 1840s, commencing with a hymn by a Chartist poet exhorting the Chartist congregation to rise, unite and 'shake off ... slavish fears', accompanied by a lively band 'with tremendous effect'. Many of the congregation were without coats to put on that were decent and so Rushton's text 'The poor ye have always with you' would have resonated with his congregation. With 'fiery eloquence' he went on to denounce 'the men who refused political justice to their neighbours, and who held them down till their life was made one long desperate struggle for mere existence'. 'As he depicted in glowing language the miseries of the poor man's lot and the sin of those who lorded it so unjustly over him', Peel recounted, 'the feelings of his audience were manifested by fervid ejaculations which gradually culminated until at last one, carried away by Mr Rushton's strong denunciations of oppressors, cried out, 'Ay, damn 'em, damn 'em.'. Peel commented 'strange as the outburst may seem to us it created no

²³ E. Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist Struggle, 1838-1842', *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), p. 120.

²⁴ Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, p. 241.

scandal, and the service went on to its close without anyone thinking that ought blameworthy had occurred'.²⁵

With other Methodist preachers Rushton preached sermons in many of the districts around Halifax to raise money for the defence expenses for the trial of the Tory radical preacher the Revd Joseph Rayner Stephens, a prominent anti-poor law agitator, who exercised a great influence on Rushton as a political preacher, though Rushton went further than Stephens in his unequivocal endorsement of Chartism. At New Pellon in March 1839, Rushton preached in the Radical Sunday School, raising £1 13s 2d for the Stephens Defence Fund and following Rushton's lecture in the Social Institution rooms in Halifax, collections taken for the defence fund amounted to £6 1s 6d.²⁶ He later preached two sermons on behalf of the relatives of John Clayton, a Chartist prisoner from Derby, who had died whilst incarcerated in Northallerton Gaol in 1841 at the former Upperhead Row Primitive Methodist Chapel, Huddersfield, on Sunday 14 March 1841.²⁷ On Sunday 25 September, 1842, he preached two sermons in the afternoon and evening at the Working Man's Hall, Sun Street, Keighley 'on behalf of the persons suffering confinement for what are commonly called Chartist offences' when collections were taken 'towards raising a Defence Fund for procuring the prisoners as fair a legal trial as the circumstances and charges made against them will permit'. The poster announcing the event insisted that 'the prisoners are men of high moral and intellectual character' who 'have been taken up for giving their honest opinions upon the cause of the sufferings of the Labouring Class, together with the remedy for removing the same'.²⁸ On 3 September 1843 he preached at the opening of a Sunday school at Salford, Todmorden, at a Chartist reading room, which had become the nucleus of a 'Democratic Chapel' by August 1843. Its Sunday school, housed in 'a small dirty garret in Foundry Street' instructing about thirty boys and girls in reading, writing, English grammar and

²⁵ F. Peel, *Spenn Valley: Past and Present*, Heckmondwike, 1893, pp. 317-19, 323-24; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 439.

²⁶ *Northern Star*, 30 March 1839; *Halifax Guardian*, 23 March 1839. M.S. Edwards, *Purge This Realm. A life of Joseph Rayner Stephens*, 1994, pp. 38-66.

²⁷ *Northern Star*, 13 March, 10 April 1841; R.F. Wearmouth, *Some Working Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century*, 1948, p. 188 refers to the preacher as Mr B. Rushden. For an account of Clayton's funeral see F.C. Mather, *Chartism and Society*, 1980, pp. 299-302.

²⁸ Public Record Office, Home Office Papers, 45, 264, Folios 1-226, HN 03906.

mathematics offered a deliberately wider curriculum than that of mainstream denominational Sunday Schools and aimed 'to render that instruction which will not only prepare the scholars to become good members of society, but give them the means of judging for themselves which party or sect is best fitted for their adhesion'.²⁹

His Methodist background and uncompromising radical sympathies were characteristic of a generation of popular preachers who brought radical instincts into Methodism and Methodist insights into radicalism until expulsion or withdrawal severed their increasingly tenuous links with the Methodist movement. Indeed, before his death he pointedly requested that no paid minister be allowed to speak at his funeral and the epitaph on his tombstone, appropriated from the Scotland's peasant poet Robbie Burns (1759-96), speculated 'if there is another world he lives in bliss' but 'if there is none he made the best of this'. However, this particular line with its ambivalence about the after life was not penned as a primary tribute to Rushton, who never abandoned the rhetoric of Christianity and his firm instructions that no paid minister should officiate at his funeral should not be interpreted as a loss of faith, but rather as a renunciation of institutional Christianity.³⁰

Indeed, local newspaper reports reveal that a hymn was sung at his home in Ovenden before the cortege left and members of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity, conducted a funeral service from their customary liturgy since Rushton was an honorary member of the Order. Although there had been suspicion by some Methodist ministers of the activities of friendly societies such as the Oddfellows in the early 1830s, when the Revd Jabez Bunting had counselled a Wesleyan colleague in Burnley 'to discountenance in our societies the practice of joining combinations of that kind' and some Yorkshire friendly society funerals 'with "pagan" regalia and "illegal" orations not surprisingly aroused the hostility of both Anglican and Nonconformist churches', James Epstein has implied that with the development of nationwide affiliated orders the 'more "sophisticated" form of working-class association' would have generated less alarm in

²⁹ L. Croft, *John Fielden's Todmorden. Popular culture and radical politics in a cotton town c1817-1850*, Todmorden, 1994, p. 71.

³⁰ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 438; J.A. Hargreaves, 'Benjamin Rushton' in J.A. Vickers, ed., *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, 2000, p. 303.

religious circles.³¹ Moreover a recently recovered copy of a contemporary Oddfellow funeral service makes it clear that the liturgy used at Rushton's committal was explicitly Christian declaring that 'the grave ... is but the gate of life to every true heart' and offering the hope of reunion with the deceased when 'leaving this earthly lodge, we meet in the Grand Lodge above and live in perfect unison of friendship in the presence of the all beneficent and Most High God'. The liturgy then concluded with the brotherhood responding 'Amen' with their hands clasped to their breasts, 'immediately afterwards dividing and passing off on each side of the grave and throwing in sprigs of thyme in token of esteem'.³²

Rushton's funeral like his life was a remarkable blend of the sacred and the secular. Benjamin Rushton had died, as he had lived, in poverty without anyone in medical attendance on 17 June 1853 at Friendly Fold, Ovenden, aged sixty eight, after suffering from jaundice from an unspecified illness for six months.³³ Consequently, the local Chartist executive decreed that he should have a public funeral at their expense on Sunday 26 June 1853 and that in accordance with his wishes a petition calling for the People's Charter should be adopted 'over his remains'.³⁴ A large procession led by leading Chartists Ernest Jones and R.G. Gammage, followed by marshals, bearing wands tipped with crape and members of the public walking six abreast met his remains at Friendly Fold, Ovenden. They were encased in an elegantly

³¹ D. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850*, 1984, p. 104; W.R. Ward, *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-29*, 1972, pp. 56-57; D. Neave, *East Riding Friendly Societies*, East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1988, p. 27; P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Self-Help. Voluntary Associations of Nineteenth Century Britain*, 1973, pp. 27-28, 49-50; Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, p. 226.

³² 'Funeral Address', Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity Friendly Society, Manchester, 1851. I am grateful to Andrew Porter of the Oddfellows Huddersfield District for obtaining for me a copy of this address.

³³ General Register Office, Certified Copy of Death Certificate; there are discrepancies between the details in the death certificate relating to the date of death and the age of Rushton and the details recorded in B. Wilson, *Struggles of an Old Chartist*, Halifax, 1887 reprinted in D. Vincent, ed., *Testaments of Radicalism*, 1977, p. 219, where Rushton is stated to have died on 19 June 1853 in his sixty-eighth year. Rushton himself, hyperbolising in his public speaking, on one occasion in 1844, nine years earlier, conveyed a misleading impression of his age implying that he had attained the age of seventy in stating that 'although seventy years had passed over his head and blanched his hairs, he was as devoted as ever to the principles of Chartism', *Northern Star*, 14 September, 1844.

³⁴ *Halifax Courier*, 25 June 1853.

embellished double coffin covered with black cloth, bearing the inscription 'Chartists weep! And let your grief be true A nobler patriot country never knew' The procession led by a brass band and a marching column of Chartists from Bradford was so large that it took an hour and a half to pass through the town along a route lined, as Ernest Jones observed, by 'a continuous wall of human beings ranged for a length of two miles on either side of the road'. Indeed, the hearse, of the most classic design, adorned by weeping figures of life-like size surrounded by a forest of plumes and drawn by two horses, which was intended to bring up the rear of the procession soon formed but a feature in the centre of the long column so great was the multitude pouring in from all parts.

In the event, the Chartist petition was adopted at a rally held immediately after the funeral ceremony, which was conducted at the Halifax General Cemetery, Lister Lane, by R.G. Gammage of the Chartist National Executive and 140 members of the Ovenden Oddfellows, of which Rushton had been an honorary member. After Mr Gammage had spoken of 'the steadfastness of Benjamin Rushton to the principles he professed' and sympathised with his friends and relatives in their bereavement, 'the customary funeral service' of the Oddfellows, of which Rushton was an honorary member, was read by 'one of the brethren' over the grave.³⁵ In a long eulogy hailing Rushton as 'a noble patriot', Ernest Jones proclaimed: 'We meet to honour a departed brother. There rests a working-man. There rests a producer.'³⁶

Five special trains brought Chartists from Bradford and attendance at the funeral, estimated by the *Halifax Guardian* at between 6,000 and 10,000, was greater than that at the funerals of some national Chartist leaders, though that of his friend Ernest Jones, the last leader of Chartism, in Manchester in 1869 attracted crowds of 100,000. While Karl Marx writing in a bulletin to the *New York Daily Tribune* after Rushton's death reported a much higher attendance figure for Rushton's funeral than other contemporary estimates, his figure of 200,000, 'a number unprecedented even in the most excited times' was clearly exaggerated. His account, however, throws light on the initiative

³⁵ *Halifax Guardian*, 2 July 1853; Tiller in Epstein and Thompson, *Chartist Experience*, 1982, p. 327.

³⁶ Wilson in Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism*, p. 220.

for the organisation of the funeral. He revealed that Ernest Jones had announced Rushton's death at a meeting at Blackstone Edge and had proposed that his funeral should be made a great political demonstration, and be connected with the West Riding meeting for the adoption of the Charter, 'as the noblest obsequies to be given to that expired veteran'. It concluded that 'never before in the annals of British Democracy has such a demonstration been witnessed, as that which attended the revival of Chartism in the West Riding and the funeral of Benjamin Rushton'. The *People's Paper* in its report of the funeral commented that 'a more imposing spectacle of self-created order was never witnessed'. Ernest Jones hailed it as a 'Glorious Revival of Chartism' while the Chartist Executive viewed it not only as 'the overwhelming Demonstration of the West Riding' but also as 'an event European in its importance' ushering in 'the re-inauguration of Chartism'.³⁷ However, the historian Kate Tiller, observed that 'Rushton's funeral had been the last great Chartist occasion in Halifax which combined pride in past strengths with a forward momentum into expanded fields of struggle', but concluded that its impact was relatively short-lived and that Chartist activity in Halifax after 1853 was characterised by 'spasmodic but lively, retrospectively orientated activity in increasing isolation from other areas'.³⁸

However, Rushton's place in the broader history of Chartism was secured by Edward and Dorothy Thompson in a joint study originally intended for the collection of local studies on Chartism edited by Asa Briggs in 1959, which although it outgrew the volume for which it was intended and has remained unpublished, provided conclusions about Rushton which have emerged in the later writings of both historians. Indeed, Benjamin Rushton was perhaps one of the finest examples of one of the 'obsolete' handloom weavers whom E.P. Thompson sought to rescue 'from the enormous condescension of posterity' along with other neglected artisans such as the 'poor stockinger' and the Luddite cropper.³⁹ Moreover, the heroic status conferred on Rushton by Edward Thompson was underlined by his wife the Chartist historian Dorothy Thompson who has concluded that 'Rushton epitomised the type of

³⁷ *People's Paper*, 2 July 1853.

³⁸ Tiller in Epstein and Thompson, *Chartist Experience*, p. 331.

³⁹ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 13.

West Riding local leader', the majority of whom were weavers, 'earning their living at their work but always taking time to attend, and very often chair great demonstrations or local meetings'.⁴⁰ Referred to variously as 'an old bald-headed radical rascal' or as 'the beloved old veteran in the people's cause' his long experience, his unquestioned integrity and lack of self-interest, his sterling and warm-hearted good feeling as Dorothy and Edward Thompson have maintained 'served again and again to rally the movement'.⁴¹ As the *Northern Star* reporter commented in 1846:

There is something very attractive to the eye and to the ear of labour in this man's person and in his voice. He has stood all the trials, the chances, the risk and responsibilities, consequent upon fidelity to the Democratic principle; and his unswerving honour, his modest demeanour, indefatigable perseverance, have secured him the universal respect of his order.⁴²

His powers of oratory, his native Yorkshire wit and his presence at public meetings during the era of radical agitation from Peterloo until the demise of Chartism won Benjamin Rushton iconic status amongst the labouring classes of the West Riding of Yorkshire and Pennine Lancashire during this period.⁴³

Rushton was remembered by contemporaries as a passionate speaker with a tendency to use 'rather broad language' and 'as steady, fearless and honest a politician as ever stood upon an English platform'.⁴⁴ His imagery and rhetoric drew heavily on the Bible and particularly the Old Testament and was characteristic of his vernacular preaching, contrasting with the more flamboyant and sophisticated platform performances of some of the gentlemen radical orators of the era. He observed cynically at a general election meeting in 1841 that all the candidates were promising: 'plenty of gold and silver like the stones

⁴⁰ Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 225-26.

⁴¹ D. and E. Thompson, 'Halifax as a Chartist Centre' p. 49.

⁴² *Northern Star*, 8 August 1846.

⁴³ Edwards, *Purge This Realm*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Wilson in Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism*, p. 220; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 440.

in the Jerusalem streets and loaves as large as Goliath of Gath'.⁴⁵ His interest in radical politics spanned the era from the Napoleonic Wars to the eve of the Crimean War and his active involvement in politics from Peterloo to the Chartist demonstration at Kennington Common in 1848. He provided continuity in the local leadership in Chartism in Halifax and the West Riding from the emergence of Feargus O'Connor as a national leader to the succession of Ernest Jones following O'Connor's debilitating illness. But geographically his influence extended across the Pennines into the industrial towns and villages of Lancashire through his chairmanship of a series of important meetings of Lancashire and Yorkshire Chartists at Blackstone Edge in 1846 and 1850.⁴⁶

There is evidence that Rushton's character and beliefs were shaped by Methodist influences derived from Wesleyanism, the Methodist New Connexion, the Primitive Methodists, the Primitive Methodist Revivalists and the Independent Methodists in an era in which at the interface between Methodism and radical politics at the grass-roots level in the West Riding of Yorkshire Methodist identities were shaped by a variety of sectarian and political influences. His anti-clericalism which derived from his radical politics should not be interpreted as a loss of faith and if his Christian commitment sustained his continuing involvement in popular politics his case may well be typical of that of many others who became identified with the Chartist movement, readily doffing their hats at a political meeting opening with community hymn singing and fervent prayer as at Peep Green at Whitsuntide in May 1839, providing support for the view that twentieth century meta-narratives of secularisation may indeed have obscured the religious underpinning of Chartism at grass-roots level in some localities, which may also have owed more than has hitherto been allowed to the culture as well as the organisation of Methodism in the decade and a half in which Rushton was a leading West Riding Chartist.

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⁴⁵ *Halifax Guardian*, 3 July 1841; for a discussion of the different styles of Chartist oratory see O. Ashton, 'Orators and Oratory in the Chartist Movement, 1840-48' in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts, ed., *The Chartist Legacy*, 1999, pp. 48-77.

⁴⁶ J.A. Hargreaves, 'Benjamin Rushton (1785-1853)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004.

THE REV. JOHN STAMP:

Primitive Methodist Secessionist And the Christian Temperance Brethren

Minor secessions emerged in the early nineteenth-century Methodism, including Primitive Methodism. These usually were more about personalities, sometimes concerned with issues on church government but rarely theological disputes. In Scarborough, for example, Matthew Baxter¹ was in the Hull Primitive Methodist circuit from 1829 but soon after ceased to itinerate; from 1831 he led the Independent Primitive Methodists of Scarborough. This localised Primitive Methodist secession joined the Wesleyan Methodist Association in 1834, Baxter becoming the President of its Annual Assembly in 1856². The case of the Rev. John Stamp was, however, much more complex, for he soon had a reputation for being a popular and successful revivalist, as an early advocate in Primitive Methodism of total abstinence and for being a hopeless administrator. He ceased to itinerate essentially because of the problems created by his poor administrative skills but was this the real reason, or was there another explanation, namely his radicalism and support of the teetotal movement?

I

John Stamp and his wife, both exceptionally gifted, were natives of Lincolnshire and a product of the Louth Primitive Methodist Circuit. He was born about 1808, converted in 1835, and itinerated from 1835, his first circuit being Louth where he quickly gained a reputation for being a successful revivalist. In 1839 Stamp reported:

We have built sixteen chapels, enlarged one, bought another, and fitted up a large room; and have had an increase of twenty-five local preachers and four hundred and sixteen members; and our last quarter's income was £65 more than the first... we have called out three additional travelling preachers, and have fitted up a preacher's house. I have walked

¹The Rev. Matthew Baxter (1812-1893).

²The reason for the secession in Scarborough is not clear, Primitive Methodist historians fail to mention it and only Oliver A. Beckerlegge, *The United Free Churches; a study in freedom* (London, 1957) *passim*, notes this secession but without an explanation as to the causes.

more than 10,000 miles, have preached upwards of 1,500 sermons and have visited over 6,000 families.³

In terms of expansion Stamp was indeed a success story; circuit membership grew from 204 (1835) to 610 (1838) and there was a substantial chapel building programme. In Louth, for example, mainly by his efforts, the original 1820 meeting place in Northgate, which was adjacent to the Workhouse, was replaced in 1836 by another that seated 300, the loan for the land purchase and building coming from William Byron, a North Reston farmer who in later years would become the Connexional General Mission Fund Treasurer.⁴ Yet success came at a price, for Stamp also acted recklessly in that many of the newly opened chapels lacked adequate financial support and proper legal titles; some were only retained by the financial intervention of Byron. Further, Stamp assumed, and possibly usurped, the powers of the superintendent minister⁵ who was also stationed in the market town. Stamp the revivalist was also an advocate of teetotalism. For example, when in the Louth Circuit when speaking at Hogsthorpe, eighty-one signed the pledge; he is known to have also spoken on the subject in Louth.⁶

Obelkevich in recognising both Stamp's revivalist qualities and administrative failings, sees him fitting into the transition in Primitive Methodism as it moved from its early years to an era of revivalism. In the early years Primitive Methodism swung from extreme to extreme, violently and unpredictably; circuit memberships soared, collapsed, and then rose again; societies oscillated between enthusiasm and neglect; individuals were converted then became backsliders; the world was divided between 'saints;' and 'sinners', not members and non-members. Nevertheless, whether over-optimistic or dejected, expanding or contracting, Primitive Methodism remained dynamic and unstable. In the second period missioning and remissioning continued,

³ James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society; South Lindsey, 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976) p.224 citing the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1839) pp.418-9. This was probably Stamp's report on leaving the Louth Circuit in 1838. The extensive Louth Circuit, formed from the Grimsby Circuit in 1823, extended to the coast at Skegness and included Alford.

⁴ William Leary, David N. Robinson, *A History of Methodism in Louth* (Louth (1981) p.19-20. This chapel was replaced by a much larger, galleried, 800 seater in 1850, which became a warehouse on closure in 1954 and was demolished in 1976.

⁵ The superintendent was the Rev. John Coulson (1777-1862: em 1821), Louth Circuit, 1835 to 1838.

⁶ Leary; Robinson (1981) p.20.

although less frequently and less vigorously. If it was God who had initiated conversions in the early period, it was now believed that revival could break out by the self-conscious actions of the preachers, by their own will power and the power of prayer.⁷ In 1838 Stamp moved to the Sheerness & Canterbury Mission in north Kent, part of the vast and important Hull Circuit. Stamp held the view that he had been sent there as a punishment because of his advocacy of teetotalism, then seen as the radical and extreme position within the wider temperance movement and one not then held by Primitive Methodism in general.⁸ This total abstinence pledge had originated with the ‘Seven Men of Preston’ signing the pledge on 1 September 1832, three years before Stamp had begun his itinerancy. Yet on the night of this signing a Primitive Methodist minister, the Rev. Samuel Smith⁹, then in the Preston Circuit, was a leading speaker and subsequently took a prominent part in the movement, serving on the first Preston Temperance Committee. His brother-in-law, the Rev. James Austin Bastow,¹⁰ also presided at one of the meetings.¹¹ Was, therefore, Stamp ‘exiled’ to Kent for his radical total abstinence views or is there another possible explanation?

The Kent Mission had already been in the care of the Hull Circuit and much effort expended on it but despite this, the Hull Circuit had to take it over for the second time and now sent Stamp. Whatever his failings in the Louth Circuit, certainly as an administrator, it could not be denied that he was a successful revivalist and likely to bring about an increase in membership. There was now a renewed vigour in the Mission and hopes of greater success; an initial membership of 112

⁷ Obelkevich (1976) p.250-251

⁸ H. B Kendall *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church, vol. I* (London, nd) p.454

⁹ The Rev Samuel Smith (1796-1977, em 1820). His Conference Minutes and related ephemera are now in the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch) Collection deposited with the University of Huddersfield Archives. For Smith and this collection see: D. Colin Dews, ‘The Branch Collection: the Samuel Smith Collection’, *Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch)* 93 (Spring 2008) pp.13-17.

¹⁰ Rev. James Austin Bastow (1810-1894 em 1832), then in the Bolton Circuit but from the 1833 Conference in the Preston circuit; he would gain fame for his *Bible Dictionary* which went to five editions between 1845 and 1888.

¹¹ William Beckworth, *A Book of remembrance, being records of Leeds Primitive Methodism compiled during the centenary year, 1910* (London, nd) p.18; Henry Carter, *The English Temperance Movement: a study in objectives, vol. I – the formative period, 1830-1899* (London, 1933) pp.36-37.

grew rapidly to 310 (1839), at which point it became an independent circuit, with three ministers; membership reached 410 (1840), when the circuit became part of the Brinkworth District, Stamp began to use American revivalist techniques, including the penitent bench, and it has been claimed that he was the first Primitive Methodist to hold a protracted meeting; this took place over a fortnight in July 1839, with services at 5.00am, 3.00pm and 7.00pm and resulted in 20 converts. At Ashford in 1840, with a society of 20 members, a place was taken for worship and four villages were opened up. Certainly Kent between 1838 and 1840 was the scene of a remarkable revival and the efforts of Stamp were beginning to yield results and, unlike previously, no doubt hope of permanency.¹² Without doubt Stamp's presence in Kent was generating considerable excitement. Stamp claimed that there were now seven preachers in the circuit but as the Conference Minutes only show three, perhaps the other four were hired local preachers.

The pattern of success which had accompanied Stamp in the Louth Circuit was repeated in Kent and likewise the same problems emerged. Soon there were serious problems in the fledgling circuit, some preventable, others plainly occasioned by mismanagement and the reckless incurring of liabilities; this was the Louth situation being repeated. At Ramsgate a chapel was bought for £1,100 and at Margate a playhouse was turned into a chapel. Of his three colleagues, one died¹³ and another, Henry Thomas Marchmont¹⁴ resigned, possible because he was unable to work with Stamp; a third assistant, Joseph Eden,¹⁵ on Stamp's insistence, refused to be bound over for £100 to not sing in the streets of Canterbury, and so was imprisoned for nine weeks in Canterbury Gaol. Stamp also suffered a personal tragedy on the death of his wife and child, then shocked the propriety of some of his

¹² Kendall vol.I (nd) p.455; Obelkevich (1976) p.252. The Primitive Methodist cause at Ashford that offered so much promise did not survive.

¹³ The Primitive Methodist Conference *Minutes*, 1839 list three itinerants in the Sheerness Circuit – J. Stamp, H.T. Marchmont, and W. Edwards. Presumably it was Edwards who died as he is not listed in the 1840 Minutes; he had itinerated in the Frome Circuit in 1836, had no station from 1837 until coming to Sheerness in 1839.

¹⁴ Rev. Henry Thomas Marchmont (em1839) itinerated in the Sheerness Circuit, 1839-1841; it is believed that he became either a Baptist or a Congregationalist Pastor.

¹⁵ Joseph Eden's name does not appear in the Conference *Minutes*. If he was an itinerant, rather than a hired local preacher, it must be presumed that he was called out and then ceased to itinerate between Conferences.

friends by conducting their funeral service.¹⁶

Dissension finally came to a head in the circuit when Stamp moved to the Canterbury Branch, where Primitive Methodism seems to have been introduced into the cathedral city in 1839, their first chapel certainly being registered in that year.¹⁷ A deputation from the General Committee came to hear and take evidence on a series of charges brought against Stamp, who had become superintendent minister on the formation of the Sheerness Circuit a little before the Conference of 1840. Leading the deputation seems to have been the Rev. Thomas Holliday,¹⁸ who was then stationed in the Hull Circuit. The report went to the Reading Conference in 1841, which concluded that Stamp was unfit for the office of a travelling preacher and thus his services were discontinued.¹⁹

The Rev. John Petty,²⁰ a slightly older contemporary of Stamp, saw him as being: 'utterly incompetent' for being a superintendent with a 'lack of discretion'. And with 'rash and headstrong' behaviour.²¹ Surely here was the heart of the problem in that Stamp totally lacked business and financial acumen; it was not enough just to be a popular and effective revivalist. Perhaps if he had been a junior minister under a strong, experienced superintendent minister the situation may have been different. Stamp should never have been appointed to this post, especially after so few years in the itinerancy and a clear indication from his time in the Louth Circuit what the outcome might be. There was, however, a wider context for this in that of the unique Primitive Methodist structure of circuit and branch. The Hull Circuit was known for its pioneering spirit and opening up new work in different parts of the country, like Kent, and yet its missions remained part of the Hull Circuit and gained branch status. In the 1830s England was on the verge of major changes in communications with construction starting

¹⁶ Kendall vol. I (nd) p.456.

¹⁷ John A. Vickers, *The story of Canterbury Methodism (1750-1961)* (Canterbury, 1971) p.24.

¹⁸ Rev. Thomas Holliday (1797-1857 em1821); in 1843 he would be appointed Mission Committee Treasurer and Book steward in 1845.

¹⁹ John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, from its origin in the Conference of 1860* (London, rev ed., 1880) pp.419-420.

²⁰ Rev. John Petty (1870-1868: em1827) became one of the Connexion's leading ministers, holding the post of Editor (1851), President (1860) and Governor of Elmfield School, York (1865-1868).

²¹ Petty (1880) p.419.

on what would soon be a national railway network and the introduction of the penny post but these only began to have an impact in the following decade. When Stamp was appointed to Kent, it is likely that those going from Hull to Sheerness would sail from the Humber to the Thames Estuary, a distance of over 200 miles. It was therefore extremely difficult for the parent circuit to keep a close watch on events and take speedy action when difficulties occurred. Realistically, Stamp could not be controlled and was only finally stopped following protests from the circuit.

The evidence, certainly based on Petty, is that Stamp ceased to itinerate not because of his total abstinence advocacy but because as an administrator he was utterly incompetent and out of control. That both the Revs. Samuel Smith and James Austin could play a leading role in the Teetotal Movement without seemingly incurring Connexional wrath is further evidence that this was not the cause of Stamp ceasing to itinerate. Nevertheless, the view has continued that Stamp was expelled for this teetotal advocacy. When writing the history of Louth Methodism, Leary and Robinson state that Stamp was excluded from the ranks of the preachers for his radical teetotalism and then go on to express some surprise that when the Rev. Adolphus Beckerlegge²² came to the circuit, he was responsible for producing a Louth Primitive Methodist circuit Tee-Total Preacher's Plan in 1839.²³ The evidence for Stamp's expulsion points elsewhere and blaming it on his teetotalism became a popular myth.

Meanwhile, with Stamp's departure, Sheerness again returned to the Hull Circuit and then in 1843 the four Kent missions of Sheerness, Ramsgate & Margate, Maidstone, and Canterbury were transferred to the General Missionary Committee. Nevertheless, Primitive Methodism would never be strong in Kent; the damage had been done.

II

Stamp now moved to Hull, where he preached and lectured on teetotalism. In the port town he had some sympathetic support, helped

²² Rev. Adolphus Frederick Beckerlegge (1798-1866: em1828), Louth Circuit, 1838-1839; prior to his becoming a Primitive Methodist Minister he had been the curate of St Ives, Cornwall.

²³ Leary; Robinson (1976) pp.18-19.

by the allegation that he had been expelled for his teetotal views without being given a hearing by the Connexion, who should have been in debt to him, presumably because of his success as a revivalist. The allegations were made from public platforms and received coverage in the local *Temperance Pioneer* and the *Temperance Weekly Journal*, one of the editors of the latter being Jabez Burns who was an ex-travelling preacher.²⁴ A defence fund was set up to support Stamp, who now seems to be being promoted as a martyr for the total abstinence cause. Without doubt there was opposition within Hull Primitive Methodism to Stamp's teetotal views. Whereas the Bemersley Bookroom was the power base for Hugh and James Bourne, Hull was that for William Clowes and there was continuing tensions between the Bournes and Clowes, Bemersley and Hull.²⁵ Part of the differences between them was that Clowes did not support the total abstinence position but Hugh Bourne did. Thus, given the Clowes' dominance of Hull Primitive Methodism, it is understandable that allegations circulated regarding Stamp's expulsion for his advocacy of his total abstinence position, rather than his disastrous administrative abilities. Stamp went into print with a pamphlet, *Defence*,²⁶ which attacked Clowes, John Flesher²⁷ and certain laymen²⁸ and in response Flesher was assigned the task of dealing with the press.²⁹ Inevitably a secession of some twenty or more supporters took place in the town. Initially they met in the Fetter Lane Chapel and the Moxon Street Sunday School until the end of 1841 a privately built chapel was opened in South Street. For a short time the work seemed to prosper and sinners were converted but Stamp did not possess those abilities needed to manage the discordant elements that

²⁴ If it is correct that Jabez Burns had been in the itinerancy, which branch of Methodism was it?

²⁵ See Frank Baker, 'James Bourne (1781-1860) and the Bemersley Book-Room', *WHSP* 30 (1955-56) pp.138-150 and 'John Flesher and the Bemersley Book-Room', *WHSP* (30) (1955-56) pp.171-179.

²⁶ Other known works by stamp are *The Female Advocate*; *The Messenger of Mercy* (1842), and *The Mystery of Man's Future – two sermons*; there is also a possibility he published *All Alive! A revival letter*.

²⁷ The Rev. John Flesher (1801-1876; em1882)served in the Hull Circuit 1822 to 1842 and then was the Connexional Editor, 1842 to 1852. An ally of Clowes against the Bournes, he imposed a managerial discipline on the Connexion.

²⁸ Although it is not known who these leading laymen were, it is possible that they included the Hodge brothers – Henry (1821-1889), John and Samuel – who from 1826 had built up an oil seed business in Hull.

²⁹ Kendall vol. I (nd) p.456

were collected within his society. Once again history repeated itself, as would subsequently happen again in Leeds, and South Street Chapel was soon sold. It now passed into the hands of the Methodist New Connexion who appointed the Rev. John Nelson³⁰, a former Primitive Methodist itinerant, in the hope that his former popularity in Hull would be advantageous but the congregation also soon dwindled.³¹

Many of those who had left Primitive Methodism now returned, although not back to the historic West Street Chapel but took a room in Nile Street and began a Sunday School in the Wilberforce Rooms. Although it was claimed that the former seceders took this room because West Street Chapel was full, it is also possible that they wanted some independence from those in the Hull Society with whom they disagreed on teetotalism. This would lead to growth in Hull Primitive Methodism as in 1849 the congregation formed the nucleus of Great Thornton Street Primitive Methodist Chapel.³² Amongst those who seceded from Primitive Methodism to support Stamp was Lincolnshire-born William Locking who, aged twenty-two, came to Hull about 1832 and under his sister's influence joined the Primitive Methodists, his name being placed on the prayer leaders plan in 1835 and subsequently becoming a local preacher. A teetotaler, he became a trustee of South Street Chapel but later reunited with the Primitive Methodists, joining Great Thornton Street Chapel and deeply regretting his actions.³³ Stamp, after a brief success in the town, left Hull about 1845 and moved to Leeds.

³⁰ Rev John Nelson (1798-1869, served in the Primitive Methodist ministry 1823 to 1837, in its Hull Circuit 1823-8 and 1829-31, and from 1838 in the Methodist New Connexion, in their Hull Circuit, 1845-6.

³¹ South Street Chapel, later used by the Wesleyan Reformers and Baptists from 1866, closed in 1903 and was subsequently demolished. Neave (1991) p.19

³² The premises taken in Nile Street was Trinity Chapel, opened by the Independents in 1827, used by the Baptists 1845-7 and the Primitive Methodists, 1847-9; it was briefly used by the Anglicans in 1856 and then by the German Lutherans in 1858; it was demolished and replaced by the present church in 1913. Great Thornton Street opened in 1849, was replaced after a fire in 1856, closed in 1937 and was demolished in the blitz. Neave (1991) p.29, 32

³³ Obituary to William Locking (d. 1880 aet80) by the Rev. George Lamb (1809-1886); em 1830), *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1882) pp.629-630. Lamb, Book Steward 1870-6 and President 1866 and 1884, served in Hull circuits 1845 to 1852, 1863 to 1869, and from 1878 to his death.

III

The Leeds Temperance Society was formed in September 1830 when its members pledged to voluntarily abstain from the use of distilled spirits and its original committee of twenty-five included Anglican, Baptist and Unitarian clergymen, as well as laity from East Parade Congregational Chapel. In its origin it was an anti-spirit society but in 1832 an attempt was made to introduce the teetotal pledge, soon after the first pledges had been signed in Preston. The struggle between temperance and total abstinence seems to have been mainly one between middle class groups and mainly an elite of working class men allied with some middle class radicals and Nonconformists. Finally in June 1836 the Leeds Temperance Society acquiesced and accepted the teetotal pledge. Amongst those who signed the pledge was Richard Bowman, a Primitive Methodist of Quarry Hill Chapel. Then in January 1837 four Primitive Methodist preachers signed the pledge, along with the Rev. John Cummins, assistant minister at Salem Independent.³⁴ Primitive Methodism was changing. Indeed as early as 1832 it had recommended temperance societies, and then in 1841 instructed that unfermented wine be used at communion.³⁵ It had been predicted that the introduction of the pledge would cripple the Leeds Temperance Society but within six months two hundred had signed. In reality the upper middle class members were defeated and left the society because they had a perception that it was extremism to let control pass to those more sympathetic to working class aspirations.³⁶ Nightly meetings began to be held by the Leeds Temperance Society mainly on chapel and Sunday school premises but the only Primitive Methodist premises used were at Lower Wortley, where a major secession over the issue would subsequently take place.

What now emerged at Leeds about 1840 was the Teetotal Methodist Society meeting in the former Particular Baptist Stone Chapel, opened in 1781 but vacated in 1826 for new premises in South

³⁴ It is presumed the four who signed were from the five Primitive Methodist itinerants stationed in Leeds Circuit, the superintendent being the Rev. A.F. Beckerlegge who had been in the Louth Circuit after Stamp and was a known teetotal advocate.

³⁵ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians; the temperance question in England, 1815-1872* (2nd ed., Keele, 1994) p.131.

³⁶ *Leeds Temperance Herald*, 7 January 1837; *Leeds Temperance Worker* 42 (1897) p.74-75

Parade and subsequently used by the Protestant Methodists and Wesleyan Methodist Association prior to the opening of Lady Lane Chapel in 1840. Prominent amongst the Society were two Primitive Methodists, William Brownbridge, an East Street shopkeeper, and his son, James, both having been amongst the first to sign the teetotal pledge in Leeds. Stamp seems to have been involved with this Society, which seems to have initially used premises in nearby George Street, but as in Hull it ceased to exist with many returning to Primitive Methodism. In 1856 the Leeds Temperance Society purchased the Stone Chapel premises and used them as a temperance hall until 1881.

IV

Stamp's presence in Leeds is generally shrouded in mystery, although there are hints. It is known that at one stage he remarried for in November 1845 it is recorded that Mrs. John Stamp spoke in the Wesleyan Sunday School at Fakenham in Norfolk.³⁷ Was Stamp now using Leeds as a base to travel around the country conducting revivalist services and advocating teetotalism?

Towards the end of his life Stamp moved to Manchester, living at 'Teetotal Cottage' in Deansgate. Here he began holding revival services in a whitewashed upper room in Peter Street provided with benches for a congregation that had seceded from the Barkerites. Stamp was their first minister and, as the room was crowded, there were soon plans to build a new chapel. Land was bought in River Street, off City Road, and the Congregationalist, George Hadfield³⁸ promised financial support but on 29 November 1847, before the foundation stone was laid, Stamp died and was interred in a private cemetery at Ardwick. The proposed chapel was not built and the congregation faded out of existence.³⁹ Here lies the paradox. John Stamp, a former Primitive Methodist itinerant, ended up with pastoral oversight of a congregation Barkerite in its origins; Joseph Barker, at his death, was a Primitive Methodist local preacher, having regained his Christian faith.

³⁷ Jim Baldwin, *Wesley's People: the Methodist Heritage of Fakenham* (Fakenham 2008) pp.10-11.

³⁸ George Hadfield (1787-1879), Manchester lawyer and radical Member of Parliament for Sheffield, 1852-1874.

³⁹ *The Manchester City News* (28 January 1905)

V

There is a postscript.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, with Primitive Methodism committed to teetotalism⁴⁰, Stamp was perceived as a pioneer of that movement within the Connexion and perhaps with a touch of nostalgia was also looked on as a revivalist they could once again do with; his administrative failings were recognised but these were now seen as secondary to his success as a revivalist and teetotal advocacy. One of those who looked back to Stamp as his model was the Rev. Joseph Odell,⁴¹ revivalist and temperance advocate, influenced by and active in the Holiness Movement. He wrote a pamphlet *No 2 Lamp of Consecration* about John Stamp and argued that 'a man should preach to save men, and failing this, he is a total failure.'⁴² It is not certain that this pamphlet is the same as *All Alive! A revival letter by John Stamp*, which was reprinted by Joseph Odell, or whether it is a separate pamphlet. From 1880 to 1905 Odell ministered in Birmingham and, concerned with a falling Connexional membership in the 1880s, established 'The Evangelists' Home' in 1887; in this there was an echo of the work of the Rev. Thomas Champness⁴³ in Wesleyan Methodism and what is today Cliff College. The expanded work resulted in the Conference Hall, Birmingham being opened in 1894 and here Odell exercised his ministry but on his leaving the city in 1905, decline set in and it closed in 1915; meanwhile the Evangelists Home had closed in 1904. The Connexion did not give its formal support to the Evangelists Home and significantly neither did its leading philanthropist, Sir William Hartley.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, considerable support did come from

⁴⁰ By 1882 the Bookroom was publishing books advocating teetotalism, such as Thomas Whittaker's *Red Lights on the Steps of the Sanctuary; or the reasons why religious people should be abstainers* (London, c1880-5); Whitaker (1831-1902. em1851) was President of the Conference, 1880.

⁴¹ Rev. Joseph Odell (1846-1923; em1866); President of the Conference, 1900.

⁴² Robert Hind, 'The connexional Outlook', *Aldersgate Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1901) p.155.

⁴³ Rev. Thomas Champness (1832-1902; em1857).

⁴⁴ Sir William Pickles Hartley (1846-1922), Everton jam manufacturer and President of the Primitive Methodist Conference, 1909. see A.S. Peake, *The Life of Sir William Hartley* (London, 1926).

another leading layman, William Beckworth,⁴⁵ of Leeds.⁴⁶ What is certain is that both Stamp and Odell had something in common - they operated semi-independently on the edges of Primitive Methodism or, to put it another way, the Connexion could not fully contain them. There was also an echo of Stamp the chaotic chapel builder in that Odell's Conference Hall only had a short life.

In writing of Stamp, Odell placed him as a pioneer within Primitive Methodism both of the Holiness Movement and Odell's own evangelists, although Odell tended to have an extravagant writing style and made claims that could not be really justified:

He lived at least fifty years before his time and was the victim of a transition period.⁴⁷ He blundered in chapel-building and battled for Temperance, when "Gospel temperance" was thought to be rank blasphemy in the Churches . . . his remarkable talents, his resources of intellectual and spiritual wealth were of that unique order, that required a definite line of labour - the line of the evangelist. Instead of that he found himself in chapel-building efforts and financial straits. Added to this was an apparent extravagance of language upon the drinking habits of Christian men, and proposals of a kind entirely too drastic . . . were he living now, and such are needed now, we should see him the first Evangelist of Primitive Methodism - the man our churches need.⁴⁸

Odell saw himself as Stamp's spiritual descendant and Kendall accepted this claim as far as it related to Odell's evangelical gifts but also argued that Odell did not inherit Stamp's talent for mismanagement.

Kendall's own assessment of Stamp is arguably more objective:

John Stamp was more than a rhetorician or Temperance orator - he was a doubly-born evangelist; endowed by nature and qualified by grace to convince and convert men. This was his call, his forte, his business, and he should have been kept *to* it and kept *from* anything to do with bricks and mortar, and promissory notes and balance sheets. Instead of that - and therein lay the tragedy - he was sent to distant Kent, made

⁴⁵ William Beckworth (1840-1911), Hull-born Leeds tanner and local preacher.

⁴⁶ Colin C. Short, *Joseph Odell and 'The Evangelists' Home'* (Englesea Brook, 2001) *passim*.

⁴⁷ This is also the view of a modern historian. See Obelkevich (1976) pp.250-251.

⁴⁸ Kendall vol. 1 (nd) p.458, citing John Stamp, *All Alive!*, as reprinted by Odell.

superintendent of a station that embraced half a county, allowed to build chapels, hire rooms and engage a little corps of helpers who continued, in spite of all, to believe in him, so great was his magnetism. In short, he was put into a position in which his talent for mismanagement, which was quite as remarkable as his other talents, could be put out to usury . . . The tragedy worked out its own sad and inevitable dénouement . . . There can be little doubt that at this day [ie c1905] our Church would be glad to have half a dozen men with the evangelistic gifts of John Stamp [but we should not] assume that that a man richly endowed in one direction must necessarily be a man of “all the talents”.⁴⁹

For the historian the only certain is that nothing is certain. Stamp, cast out of Primitive Methodism officially for mismanagement, half a century later was looked upon as a great evangelist that the church could then have used, and yet today Methodism has forgotten him. As for the church, perhaps the lesson Primitive Methodism needed to learn was that a collective ‘ministry of all the talents’ was needed and not all the talents could be found in one person.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Making of Methodism, by Barry W. Tabraham (Second Revised and Enlarged Edition: Epworth Press, 2010, pp. 250, £16.99, ISBN 978-0-7162-0612-5).

Barrie Tabraham is to be thanked for this new and extensively expanded edition of his popular introduction to Methodism. At 250 pages it comes in at almost double the size of the first edition, and much useful material has been added. The first edition came in for some unduly harsh criticism, including in the pages of the *Proceedings* (vol. 50, February, 1996, 152-3), but as long as this book is read as intended by the author, as a general introduction for those new to the history of Methodism, rather than as a detailed study that engages closely with the scholarly literature, readers need not go too far wrong.

⁴⁹ Kendall vol. 1 (nd) p.457.

This edition has a healthy mix of historical and more theological sections. Seven chapters cover the history of Methodism from John Wesley himself right down to the present day. However, the focus here is very narrow; this is a book about Methodism defined in the strictest of terms, it is about John Wesley's brand of English Methodism. Those expecting to find a more varied account of the birth of Methodism that pays due attention to the varied nature of early Methodism and to its geographical diversity will still need to look elsewhere. Maybe the book would have been more accurately titled: 'The Making of English Wesleyan Methodism' ? There are three more theological chapters, interspersed between the narrative chapters, which deal with the distinctives of Wesley's theology. These chapters focus on issues relating to authority, particularly the Wesley Quadrilateral, the order of salvation and the means of grace. All three are effective, if somewhat simplified, introductions to some of the key elements of John Wesley's thought.

This new edition also has the advantage of three useful appendices. A glossary of terms is a helpful tool for those who might find some of the theological and administrative terms used so freely by Methodists slightly confusing. Tabraham's bibliography is particularly useful, containing not only guidance on further reading, but also comments on each of the recommended texts, although it must be said that some of these opinions are a little idiosyncratic! The guide to study and reading at the end of the book perhaps shows where Tabraham sees the primary usefulness of this volume: for those on adult education courses, or for use within church based study groups. Tabraham rounds off his discussion with some brief reflections on whether Wesley's spiritual vision has relevance in the twenty-first century, a more heavily freighted question than can be dealt with effectively in such a short postscript, perhaps?

DAVID CERI JONES

NOTES AND QUERIES

1588 HYMN AND PUNCTUATION. Part 2

In her hymn on the first matter of belief in the Apostles' Creed, better known as "All Things Bright and Beautiful" (H & P 330), Cecil Frances Humphreys (later Mrs Alexander) wrote one verse which has fallen out of favour, partly through bad punctuation leading to a distortion of meaning. That verse is:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.

The biblical reference is to Luke 16, verses 19-31 and the historical reference is to the Irish Famine of 1847-1848 when, in one notorious incident, a rich man was murdered at his gate by his enraged poor tenants. Line 3 reminds us that, whether a person is high or lowly, it is God who has made them and in that respect they are equally his creatures; and line four accepts that God manages and cares for them in whatever condition of life they are to be found. But the *Companion to Hymns and Psalms* (p. 213) tells us that the omitted verse is:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high or lowly,
And ordered their-estate.

In this very different version, line 3 tells us that God made some people high and some people lowly, suggesting in line 4 that God had commanded their condition to be what it is. And all for the want of a comma! The lack of it in the *Companion* suggests that the decision to omit this verse, as with the decision to omit it from many modern hymn books, is based on an expectation that the verse means something different from what Miss Humphreys originally wrote when teaching her Sunday School and God's children the Apostle's Creed in Ireland during the troubled 1840s.

EDWARD ROYLE