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# Proceedings of the **Wesley Historical Society**



# THE WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

was founded in 1893 to promote the study of the history and literature of early Methodism. Over the years the range of its interests has been enlarged to include the history of all sections of the Methodist Church which were united in 1932, other Wesleyan and Methodist Connexions and United Churches which include former Wesleyan or Methodist denominations.

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# Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society

*Editors*

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Deacon Dr Ronald Aitchison

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*John Wesley's Chapel, The New Room, Bristol, Broadmead New garden courtyard entrance.*

*Photograph by Inseon Yoo, Courtesy of the Trustees of John Wesley's Chapel. The New Room. The Wesley  
Historical Society Annual Lecture and Annual General Meeting will be held here Saturday 30th June 2012.*

*Full details on page 190*

have the same assurance that all Things would work together [p2] for my Good, which I have that they will for yours & my Sister's! Certainly she who believes a particular Providence, has no reason to be frighted [sic], either at the air or the Prince of it.<sup>12</sup> My Br. [John Wesley] & I have many things to hear & say; nor is it in the Power of even Jeffrey himself to deter us from coming as soon as Providence permits.<sup>13</sup> In the mean time you will let us hear from you as often as you can. Our heartiest love attends to all.

I am  
Your ever obliged &  
affectionate brother  
Ch[arles] Wesley

I believe I told you Mr Morgan was sent for home.<sup>14</sup> Thereby hangs a tale of which more hereafter. – If you have any pupils to send, pray send them to my brother. For my part, *Omnia habeo neque quidquam habeo - nil cum est, nil desit tamen.*<sup>15</sup>

I dare say Jeffrey can't fright my sister from her hours of retirement. It would be worth his while to station half his legions with you, to carry that point. But the prayer of faith can vindicate that sacred time, as it did in my Mother's case, from his disturbances.

To  
The Revd. Mr Wesley  
At Tiverton  
Devon.<sup>16</sup>

ANTHONY TEDESCHI

<sup>12</sup> Paraphrased from Ephesians 2: 2: 'Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of this air, of the spirit that now works on the children of unbelief'.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey was a poltergeist said to have haunted Epworth Rectory, Lincolnshire, and first sighted in December 1716. The Rectory was the home of the Wesley family. See Hattersley, *A Brand from the Burning*, pp. 35–7.

<sup>14</sup> Presumably Richard Morgan, Jr., second son of Richard Morgan, Sr., and brother of William Morgan (1712–32), a founding member of the Holy Club, Christ Church, Oxford, with John and Charles Wesley, who showed the brothers the importance of ministry work in prisons. Richard Morgan, Jr., was sent as a pupil to John Wesley after the death of William, despite his father's reservations about the 'unnatural influence of the Oxford Methodists'. Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Methodist Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 30; Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley*, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> 'I have everything, though nothing; nought possess, Yet nought I ever want'. From 'The Eunuch' by Terence, Act II, line 243. See T. B. Harbottle, *Dictionary of Quotations (Classical)* (London: Sonnenschein & Co., 1906), p. 196.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Wesley was headmaster of Blundell's School, Tiverton, in Devon, at the time he received this letter. The school was founded in 1604 through the bequest of Peter Blundell (ca. 1520–1601), a wealthy Tiverton clothier. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

## Demography and the Decline of British Methodism<sup>17</sup>

### I. Nuptiality

That British Methodism has experienced steep decline during the course of the twentieth century, and at a faster pace than some comparable mainstream denominations, is a truism. It can be demonstrated through any number of performance measures, although membership is the indicator most often cited. Before the First World War aggregate Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist members in Great Britain peaked at 853,300 in 1906, and there were still 838,000 at Methodist union in 1932. By 2010 membership stood at just 238,000. These are all net figures, the balance of sundry inflows and outflows.<sup>18</sup> However, a major factor in this declension was Methodism's reducing ability to attract new members, both absolutely and relatively; whereas they represented 4.7 per cent of all members in 1932, the proportion in 2010 was only 1.3 per cent. Moreover, throughout the twentieth century such growth as occurred within Methodism was increasingly likely to be autogenous rather than allogenuous,<sup>19</sup> that is, dependent upon recruitment of the children of existing members rather than from adherents or external sources. As Yalden has shown, adherence was weakening as a Free Church phenomenon during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,<sup>20</sup> while Methodist oral testimony has affirmed the centrality of birthright allegiance during the period 1900-30.<sup>21</sup>

This growing reliance upon the recruitment of members' children presented two important challenges to Methodism, neither of which has been adequately recognized, still less addressed, by the Methodist Church nor studied by historians. First, it raised questions about the degree of success in transmitting the faith from one family generation to the next, which social scientists such as David Voas are now beginning to quantify in the British context, although there is as yet no specifically Methodist exemplar. Second, it focused attention upon the Church's ability to sustain itself through procreation by its current members. Put simply, did Methodists have enough children to renew the Church's membership and, especially, to compensate for natural losses through death? Self-evidently, assuming no other significant source of growth, a Methodist couple would have had to have two children to replace their own

<sup>17</sup> The author is indebted to Professor David Voas (University of Essex) and Dr Conrad Hackett (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life) for their helpful comments on drafts of this essay. The second part of this study will appear in a later number of the *Proceedings*.

<sup>18</sup> Particularly studied by Clive Field, 'Joining and leaving British Methodism since the 1960s', in Leslie Francis and Yaacov Katz (eds), *Joining and Leaving Religion* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), pp. 57-85. For the Second World War, see Clive Field, 'Puzzled People revisited', *20th Century British History*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2008), pp. 460-2.

<sup>19</sup> These concepts are explained and illustrated in Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 8-9, 79-84, 118-20; pp. 81-2 consider them in relation to Methodism.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Yalden, 'Association, community and the origins of secularisation', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 55, no. 2 (April 2004), pp. 296-305.

<sup>21</sup> Clive Field, 'A sociological profile of English Methodism, 1900-1932', *Oral History*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1976), p. 78.

presence in the Church, and even more, if we factor in some leakage of their family from the faith.

Against this background, this article, and a further one to follow in this journal, summarizes what is currently known about Methodist demography. It has to be admitted that we shall be working in fairly uncharted waters, and that the Methodist evidence base is far more fragmentary than for the Quakers, the subject of the most significant monograph to date on the historical demography of British religion.<sup>22</sup> Given the present state of knowledge, it will also be difficult to make too many hard-and-fast comparisons between Methodism and other British denominations. Although analogies with society as a whole can more often be drawn, even here the statistics may be difficult to standardize. Essentially, therefore, what is offered is a case-study of how British Methodism has exhibited, and responded to, key demographic changes during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Fertility is obviously determined by a wide range of physiological and social circumstances, several of which are generic or random in their occurrence and operation, and thus not especially susceptible to logical or measurable denominational variations. For instance, it does not seem inherently plausible to suggest that sub-fertility will disproportionately affect Methodist as opposed to other couples. So, we will be concentrating in parts I and II on four facets of the question which could have been influenced by choices made by individual Methodists, and which may have affected their reproductive behaviour. Two concern nuptiality (dealt with in part I). How many Methodists married, and at what age did they marry (bearing in mind that, according to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century calculations, family size was reduced by 0.25 to 0.33 children for each year that a marriage was postponed)?<sup>23</sup> The other two issues are Methodist family size, and the indirect evidence for family planning within Methodist marriages; these are considered in part II. Part III will review the evidence about Methodist mortality.

### *Incidence of marriage*

John Wesley wrote two pamphlets setting out the case for celibacy as the ideal state for believers,<sup>24</sup> even though he himself contracted a disastrous marriage in 1751. Present-day historians have tried to unpack his teachings on this matter and relate them to the practice of eighteenth-century Methodists, although they have mostly

<sup>22</sup> Richard Vann and David Eversley, *Friends in Life and Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Clive Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London, 1850-1920' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), p. 286.

<sup>24</sup> John Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1743), *Thoughts on a Single Life* (London: sold at the Foundery, 1765).

deployed qualitative evidence.<sup>25</sup> Unsurprisingly, on this imprecise basis, they have failed to reach agreement, Abelow, for example, arguing that ‘Wesley got nowhere in his long campaign to induce celibacy in the Methodists’, while for Lawrence ‘many Methodists demonstrated repeatedly that they were reluctant participants in the ritual of marriage ...’, with ‘celibacy, temporary or lifelong ... a valued and possible role’.<sup>26</sup> Fortunately, we now have two sets of quantitative data which can help settle the debate, the first relating to the itinerant preachers entering before 1791. Lenton, updating Myles’s early estimates,<sup>27</sup> has shown that 64.6 per cent of these men were married, a surprisingly high proportion considering the physical and economic challenges of the evangelistic life and Wesley’s ambivalence towards marriage.<sup>28</sup>

As for rank-and-file Methodist members, an extensive analysis of extant circuit registers for 1759-1823 (summarized in Table 1) concluded that ‘the number of single persons in Methodism seems to have been significantly smaller than in the adult population as a whole, the proportion of married individuals correspondingly greater, and the number of widowed fairly similar.’ In the aggregate, three-quarters of Methodist members were either married or widowed, rising slightly from 74.0 per cent before 1781 to 76.9 per cent after 1800, the equivalent figure for adults aged 20 and over in England and Wales in 1851 being 70.7.<sup>29</sup> The predictable circuit-level variations apart, the major discrepancy was between the sexes, women accounting for 61.9 per cent of single Methodists, 51.2 per cent of married, and 75.9 per cent of widowed. The proportion of single and widowed Methodist women was well in excess of secular norms, perhaps adding credence to Malmgreen’s interpretation whereby ‘for men, joining the Society apparently formed part of a “settling down” process, whereas for women, religious commitment may more often have represented an act of independence, part of a prelude, or postlude, to marriage and family responsibilities.’<sup>30</sup> It should be remembered, of course, that all these data are a snapshot at one point in time, when the relevant membership register was drawn up; the number of Methodists

<sup>25</sup> Henry Abelow, ‘The sexual politics of early Wesleyan Methodism’, in James Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (eds), *Disciplines of Faith* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 8-99 and *The Evangelist of Desire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 49-73; Bufford Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1996); Henry Rack, “‘But, Lord, let it be Betsy!’”, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 53, no. 1 (February, 2001), 1-13; Anna Lawrence, “‘I Thought I Felt a Sinful Desire’”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, vol. 85, nos. 2-3 (Summer-Autumn, 2003), 177-93 and *One Family under God* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 133-86.

<sup>26</sup> Abelow, *The Evangelist of Desire*, p. 63; Lawrence, “‘I Thought I Felt a Sinful Desire’”, 186, 192-3. Lawrence argues that the situation changed from the late eighteenth century, after which ‘Increasingly, marriage was a normative choice, even for preachers.’ Lawrence, *One Family*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> William Myles, *A Chronological History of the People called Methodists* (third edition, London: sold by the author, 1803), p. 341.

<sup>28</sup> John Lenton, *My Sons in the Gospel* ([Wolverhampton]: Wesley Historical Society, 2000), pp. 21-2 and *John Wesley’s Preachers* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp. 89-93, 427.

<sup>29</sup> The figure was even higher – 79.7 per cent – for the Hull Primitive Methodist Circuit in 1832-38; Stephen Hatcher, ‘The Origin and Expansion of Primitive Methodism in the Hull Circuit, 1819-1851’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1993), vol. 2, p. 512.

<sup>30</sup> Gail Malmgreen, ‘Domestic discords’, in Obelkevich, Roper and Samuel (eds), *Disciplines of Faith*, p. 60.



marrying over the course of a lifetime would have been much higher, at least reaching and probably surpassing the national nuptiality rate of around nine-tenths.<sup>31</sup>

Not only had Wesley's people voted with their feet against his pro-celibacy stance, but his preachers and successors spoke out against it. 'It must be the will of God that persons in general should marry', reflected the Wesleyan minister Jabez Bunting in 1803, 'every person is providentially bound to marry, if he cannot plead some special ground of exemption.'<sup>32</sup> Another Wesleyan preacher, John Stephens, agreed, denouncing celibacy as a contravention of the divine will and as 'one of the crying vices of our age and country . . . equally inimical to religion – to good morals – to public spirit – and to human comfort,' which ran the risk of exposing its practitioners 'to commit offences against society which must not be mentioned in this place.'<sup>33</sup> In an increasingly anti-Catholic age, these sentiments were greatly fuelled by the association of celibacy with Popery, leading the author of one Methodist marriage manual to devote six pages to refuting the Catholic position that the celibate state was holier than the marital.<sup>34</sup>

There were, in fact, a number of such manuals, all promoting the normality and divine purpose of marriage, as well as providing sundry practical tips on entering into and conducting a successful marriage. Perhaps the most influential of these was by Joseph Bush, a Wesleyan minister, which went through seven editions between 1863 and 1901.<sup>35</sup> Although they were in no senses official publications, and there do not seem to have been any substantive connexional declarations on marriage prior to Methodist union in 1932, such statements were arguably unnecessary. For a consensus about the theology and primacy of marriage could be found in the marriage liturgies of the various Methodist denominations.<sup>36</sup> When the reunited Church issued its first declaration on the subject, in 1939, it was unequivocal in proclaiming that 'marriage is to be regarded as a normal vocation for men and women'.<sup>37</sup>

The climate of nineteenth-century Methodism was thus decidedly in favour of marriage. But what was the reality on the ground? Unfortunately, the obvious

<sup>31</sup> For details and further commentary on the foregoing paragraph, see Clive Field, 'The social composition of English Methodism to 1830', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, vol. 76, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 158-62, 175 and 'Zion's people', *Local Historian*, vol. 40, nos. 2, 3, 4 (May, August and November 2010), 104.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Percival Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting, D.D.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1859-87), vol. 1, 150-1.

<sup>33</sup> John Stephens, *A Sermon on the Advantages which Man Derives from Woman* (North Shields: printed by W. Barnes, 1806), pp. 15-16. This passed through five editions by 1836.

<sup>34</sup> William Unsworth, *The Marriage-Knot Wisely Tied* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1892), pp. 203-8.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Bush, *Courtship and Marriage* (London: sold by John Mason, 1863). Kenneth Brown, in *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 176, dates the first edition to 1847. However, no trace of this can be found in specialist bibliographies (such as George Osborn's *Outlines of Wesleyan Bibliography* and Kenneth Rowe's *Methodist Union Catalog*) or library union catalogues. Since Bush was only born in 1826 and did not enter the ministry until 1852, 1847 seems an unlikely date.

<sup>36</sup> Conveniently summarized in David Chapman, *Born in Song* (Warrington: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2006), pp. 197-217.

<sup>37</sup> *A Declaration of the Methodist Church on the Christian View of Marriage and the Family* (London: Methodist Church Temperance & Social Welfare Department, [1939]), pp. 9, 14.

source of evidence is problematical. Although the Marriage Act (1836) meant that Methodists (and Nonconformists generally) could legally get married in their own chapels (previously, under the Marriage Act (1753), all but Quakers and Jews had to wed in the Church of England), state records of the solemnization of marriages in places of worship (maintained by the Registrar General in England and Wales) are not a reliable mechanism for calculating Methodist nuptiality.

Chapels had first to be registered for this purpose, the process for which was relatively bureaucratic and expensive, with eligibility confined to separate buildings. Even after a license had been granted, the presence of the civil registrar was still required at Free Church weddings until the Marriage Act (1898) (for which the Wesleyan Robert Perks had been a prime mover),<sup>38</sup> involving yet more cost and inconvenience. It thus often proved easier either to get married in the parish church (which was probably the preferred Wesleyan option), with the added advantage of a 'proper' ambience for the occasion (including the all important central aisle), or to elect for a civil ceremony in a registry office followed by a religious service (which had no legal status) in the chapel. It would appear that it was only after the First World War that most Nonconformists married in chapel and that a majority of chapels were licensed to conduct weddings. In the case of Methodism just 55.6 per cent of all its certified places of worship in England and Wales were licensed for marriages by 1924, 57.9 per cent of Wesleyan, 47.4 per cent of Primitive Methodist and 65.0 per cent of United Methodist chapels. The proportion rose steadily after the Second World War and was 87.8 per cent in 2007.<sup>39</sup>

In one sense, these points are somewhat academic so far as the nineteenth century is concerned, for the Registrar General did not actually begin to publish distinct statistics of Methodist marriages until 1919 (hitherto, they had been bundled into a category of 'other denominations'), and then only spasmodically, until 1970, when an annual series commenced. The absolute number was relatively constant at around 16-17,000 in England and Wales between the 1920s and 1980s (apart from a dip in 1976-77), after which it declined dramatically, dropping below 10,000 in 1997. In 2007 (the last year reported) it stood at 3,730, representing 1.6 per cent of all marriages and 4.7 per cent of religious marriages (well down on 5.6 and 7.3 per cent respectively in 1919). Relative proportions throughout the twentieth century are shown in Table 2. It should be noted that the Methodist Church's own data, only available from 2002, are not directly comparable, since they include blessings and are very rounded. The Church recorded 4,000 marriages and blessings in 2010.

More fundamentally, it is impossible to determine a precise Methodist population with which marriages in Methodist places of worship can be meaningfully compared. Parties to such marriages could be – depending upon the period – varying

<sup>38</sup> Denis Crane, *The Life-Story of Sir Robert W. Perks, Baronet, M.P.* (London: Robert Culley, 1909), pp. 206-8; Robert Perks, *Sir Robert William Perks, Baronet* (London: Epworth Press, 1936), pp. 121-2; David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> The Registrar General maintained the lists of both certified and licensed places of worship. Numerical summaries were published in successive editions of *Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales* and Office for National Statistics, *Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics (Series FM2)*.

combinations of Methodist members, adherents or persons on the community roll, and 'outsiders', some of the last group with vestigial ancestral links with Methodism and some with little obvious connection. During the second half of the twentieth century, the greater willingness of Methodist ministers to remarry divorcees in church than clergy of other denominations (notably the Church of England) did much to attract 'outsiders' and thereby to stop Methodist marriage numbers from collapsing sooner. As early as 1952, when divorce was still fairly uncommon, more marriages in Methodist churches involved at least one divorced party than all marriages nationally (12.0 versus 11.5 per cent), the norm for religious marriages alone being exceeded by a factor of six, with Methodist ministers officiating at 41.3 per cent of religious marriages involving divorcees.<sup>40</sup> The position for 1974-2007 is set out in Table 3. At the peak, in the 1990s, over three-fifths of weddings in Methodist churches involved at least one divorced party. The proportion has since fallen, doubtless because of the growing appeal of ceremonies in approved premises (such as hotels and historic buildings) which have been licensed from 1995, but first marriages for both parties still remain a minority in Methodist churches. Another pointer to the non-Methodist provenance of many couples recently marrying in Methodist churches is the high incidence of cohabitation; between 2001 and 2007 no fewer than 76.5 per cent gave identical residential addresses on the register.

For all these reasons, we must look elsewhere for evidence of the marital status of Methodism in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of the ministry, there is no doubt that social propriety may have been a driver to marriage, as well as denominational expectations. Certainly, any bachelor minister, such as Fred Chudleigh of the Wesleyan London East End Mission, would be the subject of endless speculation as to his reasons for not marrying.<sup>41</sup> Although the claim in 1891 that 99 per cent of Wesleyan ministers were married was probably an educated guess,<sup>42</sup> modern research has confirmed that it was not that wide of the mark. In a sample of Methodist ministers and lay officers drawn by the present author from the 1913 edition of *The Methodist Who's Who* and *Who's Who in Methodism, 1933*, just 3.0 per cent of all ministers were unmarried, albeit the proportion rose over time (to reach 3.7 per cent among the cohort born in 1871-90), with United Methodists being rather less prone to marry than Wesleyans (Table 4).<sup>43</sup> These rates can be compared with between

<sup>40</sup> Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales, 1952, text, p. 252.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Burnett, *Chudleigh* (London: Epworth Press, 1932), pp. 75-7.

<sup>42</sup> *Proceedings of the Second Oecumenical Methodist Conference . . . 1891* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1892), p. 288.

<sup>43</sup> In general, *The Methodist Who's Who* was the basis of the cohorts for 1831-70 and *Who's Who in Methodism* of the cohorts for 1861-1900. The 1891-1900 cohort was excluded from the present analysis on the grounds that late-marrying Methodists might have distorted the figures. All British Methodists in *The Methodist Who's Who* were included but only surnames A-G in *Who's Who in Methodism* were used. The laity in this analysis comprised men drawn from Registrar General's social groups I-III (professional/higher managerial, intermediate non-manual, routine non-manual/skilled manual occupations). Hardly any laymen from RG IV and V (semi-skilled and unskilled manual) were listed in these directories.

one in eight and one in ten of the male population aged 45-54 at each census between 1871 and 1921.

Further validation comes from Brown's work, which mainly used obituaries for a sample of Methodist ministers who died in 1851-55, 1871-75, 1891-95, 1911-15, 1931-35, 1951-55, and 1971-75. His data are somewhat confusingly presented, but, on one reading, they appear to show that, over this long period, the proportion of unmarried ministers was 2.7 per cent for Wesleyans, 5.9 per cent for Primitive Methodists, and 4.2 per cent for United Methodists. It is hard to detect clear chronological trends, apart from some small peak in the unmarried for men entering the ministry between 1860 and 1909. Especially interesting is the number of men marrying twice and (for Wesleyans entering before 1899) thrice, suggesting that there were few long-term ministerial widowers.<sup>44</sup>

Table 4 shows a broadly similar pattern for Methodist 'lay officers' born in the nineteenth century, with a mean of 3.5 per cent unmarried, and only minimal variations, the most conspicuous being the relatively larger number among United Methodists and the professional and higher managerial class (Registrar General group [RG] I). These officers would almost certainly not have been a cross-section of the Methodist community, being skewed towards older age cohorts, upper social groups and – most notably – men. Slightly more representative, perhaps, were local preachers. Sixteen per cent of a random sample of 1,055 from *The Methodist Local Preachers' Who's Who, 1934* were single and 84.0 per cent married or widowed, with no major occupational differentials.<sup>45</sup> Another survey of lay preachers in 2000 reported that 11.7 per cent were single, 75.3 per cent married, 3.4 per cent separated or divorced, and 9.6 per cent widowed.<sup>46</sup> But even local preachers were not necessarily typical of genuinely grass-roots Methodism, as reflected in the penumbra of attachment stretching from members at the inner core through church attenders to professing Methodists at the periphery.

As regards membership, we have only a few localized studies. One of the best of these was of two Wolverhampton Methodist churches in the early 1960s, where 26.6 per cent of members were single (23.1 per cent of men and 28.8 per cent of women), 64.9 per cent married, and 8.5 per cent widowed.<sup>47</sup> For Methodist churchgoers we are better served, through the Church Life Profile, which enumerated adults aged 15 and over at worship on or around 29 April 2001. This revealed that 13 per cent of Methodist congregants were single (a few of them cohabiting), 62 per cent married (the overwhelming majority still in a first marriage), 4 per cent separated or divorced,

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Social History*, p. 172.

<sup>45</sup> The sample is described and partly analysed in Clive Field, 'The Methodist local preacher', in Geoffrey Milburn and Margaret Batty (eds), *Workaday Preachers* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995), pp. 231-5, 240-2. However, some of the data in this article derive from new analysis.

<sup>46</sup> *Methodist Church Conference Agenda*, 2002, pp. 422-3; Methodist Church, *Over to You, 2002* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2002), pp. 65-6.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis Burton, 'The Social Stratification of two Methodist Churches in the Midlands' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1972), p. 77.

and 20 per cent widowed. Of those living as couples, three-quarters reported that their spouse attended the same Methodist church.<sup>48</sup>

For professing Methodists, many of them no longer directly involved in the life of the Methodist Church, the principal source is the merged dataset from the British Social Attitudes surveys, 1983-2008, which interviewed over 75,000 Britons aged 18 and above, including almost 2,000 Methodists (Table 5). Overall, 11.2 per cent of Methodists were single (compared with 18.5 per cent of the population as a whole), 2.5 per cent cohabiting (7.4 per cent), 65.0 per cent married (58.7 per cent), 5.2 per cent separated (7.5 per cent), and 16.1 per cent widowed (7.9 per cent). The number of married Methodists reduced over time, particularly associated with a corresponding increase in the separated, and, in terms of churchgoing frequency, was actually lowest among most regular worshippers (albeit still in line with the Church Life Profile).

Nevertheless, Methodism remains a relative haven for the married and once-married. Thus, in the most recent surveys (2000-08) 62.4 per cent of Methodists were married, against 54.8 per cent of all adults (the latter down 12 points over 1983-89). This perhaps epitomizes the effectiveness of the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage but also the concentration of Methodists in older cohorts brought up to view marriage as the norm for human relationships. The same skewed age profile probably also helps to explain why Methodism appears to act as a magnet for the widowed; whereas 2.7 per cent of all adults in 1983-2008 claimed to be Methodists, for the widowed it was 5.4 per cent (and, at the other end of the spectrum, for cohabittees it was only 0.9 per cent). The Methodist widowed were likewise the most regular attenders, 48.3 per cent of them going to church monthly or more often, compared with 43.0 per cent of the single, 41.0 per cent of the married, 34.3 per cent of the separated, and 28.6 per cent of those who were living together.<sup>49</sup>

### *Age of marriage*

Throughout the nineteenth century Methodists offering published advice to those contemplating marriage consistently advocated circumspection and prudence. Marriage was not to be entered into lightly, and the ground had to be carefully prepared, not least in terms of physiological maturity and financial readiness. 'Look before you leap' was the general thrust of a Wesleyan tract from 1840, stressing the need for adequate money to be in hand to feed future children, and warning that early and improvident marriages led to misery.<sup>50</sup> Priest Peck, a Wesleyan minister, thought that the best age to marry was 21-26 for men and 20-26 for women, dismissing earlier marriages as often 'the effect of a childish passion, wholly unrestrained by prudence and consideration'.<sup>51</sup> Peter Featherstone, another Wesleyan itinerant, cautioned young

<sup>48</sup> Phillip Escott and Alison Gelder, *Church Life Profile, 2001: Denominational Results for the Methodist Church* (New Malden: Churches Information for Mission, 2002), pp. 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> For further analysis and commentary, see Clive Field, 'The People called Methodists today', *Epworth Review*, vol. 36, no. 4 (October, 2009), 21, 26-7 and 'Zion's people', 105-6.

<sup>50</sup> *Counsels and Cautions on the Subject of Marriage* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1840), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Priest Peck, *Marriage* (Tadmorden: printed by S.W. Walton, 1857), pp. 17, 32-3.

ladies in 1861: 'Encourage not the advances of any man who has not a fair prospect of securing you a home and a maintenance', reminding them of the adage 'before you marry, be sure of a house wherein to tarry'.<sup>52</sup>

Two years later, another Wesleyan minister, Joseph Bush, told young men that they should not even consider courtship until they had 'a fair prospect and a firm purpose of developing courtship into marriage within a reasonable time . . .' 'One who lays siege to the heart of a woman ought to have both the means and the will to make her his wife'.<sup>53</sup> He rather implied that 25 was a suitable age for male courting, a position which he still held in 1901, when he further suggested that, because women lived longer than men, it would also be wise for a man to choose a partner slightly older than himself.<sup>54</sup> John Maynard, a Bible Christian minister, reiterated much of this advice about the prerequisites for marriage in his equally long-lived manual, which passed through five editions between 1864 and 1899. Not only had 'all the necessaries, and at least some of the comforts of life' to be in place before couples wed, but it was essential that physiological maturity should have been reached, which he reckoned to be 25-30 years for men and 20-25 for women.<sup>55</sup>

Thomas Blanshard, Wesleyan itinerant, agreed: 'First see your way to a cage before you procure a canary. It is exceedingly unfair to take up a young woman's time when you have neither the intention nor the ability to make her your wife.' 'Get a few pounds saved beforehand for wedding expenses, household furniture and other necessaries, and thus see the end from the beginning.'<sup>56</sup> William Unsworth, another Wesleyan preacher, likewise argued that men should postpone marriage until they were 23 or 24, to enable them to get into 'fitting economic circumstances'. 'Young men must be fairly freighted for courtship and marriage or the matrimonial voyage of life will be a miserable one, if it does not result in the unfortunate shipwreck of earthly and heavenly interests.'<sup>57</sup> Edward Simons, a Wesleyan minister writing in 1897, was even more specific, proposing 24 for men and 21 for women as the ideal age for marriage.<sup>58</sup> As late as 1920, James Learmount, a popular Congregational minister, was advising readers of the Wesleyan connexional magazine that: 'There is such a thing as love at first sight; but there ought never to be marriage at first sight. Men and women should wait and see if their love will stand the test of time and reflection . . .'<sup>59</sup>

So, a broadly consistent picture emerges from this Methodist pastoral literature, urging on the Methodist people a prudential approach to courtship and marriage. But

<sup>52</sup> Peter Featherstone, *The Influence and Power of Woman* (London: J. Mason, 1861), p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Bush, *Courtship*, pp. 5-7, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Bush, *Before Marriage and After* (seventh edition, London: Charles H. Kelly, 1901), pp. 5, 9-10, 21.

<sup>55</sup> John Maynard, *Matrimony* (second edition, London: George John Stevenson, 1866), pp. 67-75 and *Happy Wedded Life* (fourth edition, London: John Kempster, [1878]), pp. 65-73.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Blanshard, *Courtship and Marriage* (Leeds: printed by Charles Goodall, 1873), p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Unsworth, *Marriage-Knot*, pp. 80-3, 159-64, 174-7.

<sup>58</sup> Edward Simons, 'Look before you leap', *Christian Miscellany and Family Visitor*, new [fourth] ser., vol. 8 (1897), 33.

<sup>59</sup> James Learmount, 'Love, courtship, marriage and married life', *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, vol. 143 (1920), 314.

how far were such homilies heeded in practice? Certainly, in the case of the ministry there are clear indications of deferred marriages, but this was initially a function of the physical and financial hardships of the itinerant life and latterly of the progressive formalization of denominational requirements that ministers should not marry until the completion of their probation, an event which was in turn delayed by the incremental implementation of residential training at theological college. In the eighteenth century the mean age of a preacher's first marriage was 31.3,<sup>60</sup> and it was only slightly lower (and rising) during the second half of the nineteenth, with an average of 28.8 or 29.4 for Wesleyans alone.<sup>61</sup> As for the laity, some qualitative insights have been newly offered in an overview of Methodist family life, which provides various examples of long courtships,<sup>62</sup> and in a case-study of the Wesleyan Lancashire courtship of David Whitehead and Betty Wood in the 1810s. The latter is significant for the prominent role played by religious motivations in the courtship and by the fact that the power levers in it were very much held by Wood.<sup>63</sup>

Until recent times, quantitative data for the Methodist laity can only really be found in Methodist marriage registers, while noting our previous caveats that not all Methodists necessarily married in a Methodist chapel and that some who did wed there may have had relatively weak associations with it (although this will have been mitigated in the long nineteenth century by a strong tendency towards Methodist intermarriage).<sup>64</sup> The most systematic investigation so far has been undertaken on the registers of 39 chapels in metropolitan London between 1841 and 1930, especially for 1901-30.<sup>65</sup> The mean age of first marriage for metropolitan Wesleyan grooms grew from 25.5 in 1841-70 to 26.4 in 1871-1900 to 27.3 in 1901-30, broadly on a par with the increase for all English and Welsh grooms, from 25.9 in 1851-55 to 27.4 in 1926-30. For Wesleyan brides there was a similar trend (from 24.9 in 1841-70 to 25.6 in 1871-1900 to 26.6 in 1901-30), but it outstripped what was happening in society as a whole; where the rise was from 24.7 in 1851-55 to 25.5 in 1926-30. There were especially notable reductions in the proportion of London Wesleyan brides marrying under the age of 21 (which had peaked at 14.6 per cent in the 1870s) and between the ages of 20 and 24 (from 50.0 per cent in 1841-70 to 37.1 per cent in 1901-30, the latter figure well below the secular norm).

The more detailed picture for 1901-30 (Table 6) shows the mean age of first marriage rising decade by decade for London Methodist brides and grooms in the aggregate and for Wesleyans in particular, albeit the pattern for Primitive Methodist grooms and United Methodists was less consistent. The possibility must be entertained that the trend may have been conditioned by circumstances affecting life in the capital,

<sup>60</sup> Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers*, pp. 99-100, 428.

<sup>61</sup> Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London', p. 280.

<sup>62</sup> Jacqueline Williams, 'Methodist Families, c. 1850-1932' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2003), pp. 219-24; Lawrence, *One Family*, pp. 158-86 on Methodist conceptions of marriage.

<sup>63</sup> Steve King, 'Love, religion and power in the making of marriages in early nineteenth-century rural industrial Lancashire', *Rural History*, vol. 21, no. 1 (April 2010), 1-26.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, 'Methodist Families', 234-5; Field, 'Sociological profile', 77.

<sup>65</sup> The following is drawn from Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London', 277-81.

where Methodism was (in any case) comparatively weak. However, a small-scale study of 13 non-metropolitan Methodist marriage registers reveals a similar increase throughout 1901-30, even though the mean age of first marriage for Methodist brides (25.7 over the three decades, moving from 25.4 in 1901-10 to 26.1 in 1921-30) and grooms (26.9, rising from 26.5 to 27.4) was lower than in London.<sup>66</sup> Occupational differences between London and other parts of the country may explain this discrepancy. In the metropolis, the principal variation by social class was the tendency of Methodists in the professional and higher managerial group (RG I) to marry very much later than their co-religionists, two years later than the next social group in 1901-30. This feature had also been very marked for London Wesleyans in 1841-1900. Methodists in intermediate non-manual occupations (RG II) likewise wed slightly later (by 0.8 years in 1901-30) than those in routine non-manual or skilled manual employment (RG III); these two social classes were the mainstay of most Methodist congregations in the twentieth century.<sup>67</sup>

For more recent decades, we have the age distribution of brides and grooms marrying in Methodist churches in England and Wales (Table 7). Unfortunately, the figures are not confined to first marriages for both parties and are thus liable to distortion by the increasing incidence of marriages of divorced persons (as discussed above), many of them probably involving non-Methodists. Nevertheless, deferred marriage is implicit in the data for brides and grooms under 30 years, who were presumably the least likely to be already divorced. Whereas in 1975-80, 68.0 per cent of grooms in Methodist churches had been aged 16-29, this was true of only 30.2 per cent in 2001-07; for brides the fall was from 78.9 to 42.3 per cent. Although there has been a similar shift nationally, it has been less accentuated than in Methodist marriages. For instance, between 1999 and 2007, 47.8 per cent of all brides married under 30, 5.5 per cent more than was the case with marriages in Methodist churches.<sup>68</sup> Such deferral of marriage had implications for Methodist fertility, which will be explored in part II.

CLIVE D. FIELD

<sup>66</sup> The study covered 1,435 grooms and 1,513 brides for ten Wesleyan, two Primitive and one United Methodist chapels located in various parts of England and Wales. Use was made of transcripts of registers published by the Eureka Partnership, Glamorgan Family History Society, Gwent Family History Society, Morley and District Family History Group, North Meols Family History Society, Northumberland and Durham Family History Society, and Wakefield and District Family History Society.

<sup>67</sup> Field, 'Zion's people', 292-302.

<sup>68</sup> The 30-49 cohort has been sub-divided since 1996. For marriages in Methodist churches, the mean distribution between 1996 and 2007 has been: grooms - 30-34 (22.8 per cent), 35-39 (16.0), 40-49 (16.8); brides - 30-34 (19.7), 35-39 (12.8), 40-49 (13.5).



**Table 1****Marital status of Methodist members in England, 1759-1823 (percentages)**

	single	married	widowed
<b>Date</b>			
Before 1781	26.1	63.1	10.9
1781-1800	24.6	64.7	10.7
After 1800	23.1	68.6	8.3
<b>Region</b>			
Southern England	25.7	63.9	10.4
Central England	22.1	67.6	10.3
Northern England	25.6	64.1	10.3
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	21.5	72.8	5.7
Women	27.0	59.1	13.9
<b>All</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>65.1</b>	<b>10.3</b>

SOURCE: Clive Field, 'The social composition of English Methodism to 1830', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, vol. 76, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 161. N = 23,128 members.

**Table 2****Marriages in Methodist churches in England and Wales as a proportion of a) all and b) all religious marriages (percentages)**

	all marriages	all religious marriages
1919	5.6	7.3
1924	6.0	7.9
1929	5.6	7.6
1934	5.3	7.3
1952	4.8	6.9
1957	5.0	6.9
1962	4.9	6.9
1967	4.8	6.9
1971-80	4.1	7.9
1981-90	4.9	9.4
1991-2000	4.2	9.5
2001-07	2.0	6.1

SOURCE: *The Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales*; Office for National Statistics, *Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics (Series FM2)*.

**Table 3**
**Previous marital status of brides and grooms marrying in Methodist churches in England and Wales, 1974-2007 (percentages)**

	1974-80	1981-90	1991-2000	2001-07
First marriage for both parties	54.1	41.4	36.1	43.8
One party divorced	34.9	43.1	44.1	34.7
Both parties divorced	7.0	12.8	17.7	19.2
Other	4.1	2.7	2.1	2.3

SOURCE: *Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics (Series FM2)*. N = 430,719 marriages.

**Table 4**
**Methodists in Great Britain born in 1831-90 who were unmarried (percentages)**

		ministers	laymen
<b>Date of birth</b>	1831-50	1.4	3.5
	1851-70	3.4	3.8
	1871-90	3.7	3.2
<b>Denomination</b>	Wesleyan	2.6	3.3
	Primitive	3.5	3.0
	United	4.1	6.9
<b>Social class</b>	RG I		4.9
	RG II		3.0
	RG III		3.8
<b>All</b>		<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>

SOURCE: Clive Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London, 1850-1920' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), 275. N = 1,728 ministers and 1,488 laymen (RG I-RG III only).

**Table 5****Marital status of professing Methodists in Great Britain, 1983-2008 (percentages)**

	single	cohabiting	married	separated	widowed
<b>Survey decade</b>					
198-89	12.4	1.1	67.9	2.3	16.3
1990-99	10.8	3.6	65.6	5.2	14.8
2000-08	10.9	2.2	62.4	7.2	17.3
<b>Churchgoing</b>					
Monthly or more	11.6	1.7	63.9	4.2	18.7
Less often	12.5	2.6	65.9	6.3	12.7
Never/practically never	9.6	3.4	66.0	5.3	15.7
<b>All</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>16.1</b>

SOURCE: Unpublished analysis of the merged dataset for the British Social Attitudes surveys, 1983-2008, courtesy of Professor David Voas. N = 1,994.

**Table 6****Mean age at first marriage of brides and grooms marrying in London Methodist churches, 1901-30**

	Wesleyan	Primitive	United	all
<b>Grooms</b>				
1901-10	26.9	25.9	27.3	26.8
1911-20	27.4	27.4	27.7	27.5
1921-30	29.3	26.5	26.9	27.6
All	27.3	26.8	27.3	27.2
<b>Brides</b>				
1901-10	26.2	25.2	27.5	26.1
1911-20	26.5	26.1	26.6	26.4
1921-30	27.7	26.7	26.7	27.2
All	26.6	26.1	26.7	26.5
<b>Social class (grooms)</b>				
RG I	30.1	28.8	26.1	29.5
RG II	27.6	26.4	27.7	27.5
RG III	26.8	26.1	27.0	26.7
RG IV	26.5	27.7	28.6	27.0
RG V	28.3	26.2	23.7	27.2

SOURCE: Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London', p. 279. N = 1,981 grooms and 2,344 brides.

**Table 7****Ages of brides and grooms marrying in Methodist churches in England and Wales, 1975-2007 (percentages)**

	1975-80	1981-90	1991-2000	2001-07
<b>Grooms</b>				
16-19	4.2	1.9	0.5	0.5
20-24	36.7	26.8	13.7	9.0
25-29	27.1	28.9	27.6	20.7
30-49	25.4	35.9	49.6	57.4
50+	6.5	6.5	8.5	12.4
<b>Brides</b>				
16-19	17.1	8.2	2.4	1.5
20-24	44.1	39.8	23.6	16.3
25-29	17.7	24.0	29.4	24.5
30-49	16.2	23.6	38.9	48.9
50+	4.9	4.4	5.7	8.8

SOURCE: *Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics (Series FM2)*. N = 414,923 marriages.

**2012 ANNUAL LECTURE, AGM, &  
SUPPORTING PROGRAMME  
Saturday 30th June 2012**

***JOHN WESLEY'S CHAPEL - THE NEW ROOM  
THE HORSEFAIR, BRISTOL***

**Morning Programme**

**10.15am**

On arrival Tea and coffee available from the 'Coffee Morning' event

**10.30am**

A tour of the New Room

**11.00am**

A tour of Charles Wesley's House (admission charge £5)

**12.15pm - Lunch Break**

Either bring your own food or purchase sandwiches from nearby shops to eat in the New Room

**Afternoon Programme**

**1.00pm**

The Annual General Meeting

**2.30pm**

**The Annual Lecture**

Chaired: Dr Gary Best (Warden of John Wesley's Chapel-The New Room, former Head of Kingswood School and author of *Charles Wesley: A Biography*)

**‘PAST AND PRESENT: TAKING THE LONG VIEW OF METHODIST  
AND ANGLICAN HISTORY’**

(The lecture will take the form of a comparison of Methodist and Anglican church growth and decline in the earlier nineteenth century and later twentieth century).

**Lecturer: Professor John Wolfe** (Open University) (Author of *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1825-60* (1991); *God and Greater Britain. Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (1994); *Great Deaths, Grieving, Religion and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (2000); *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chambers and Finney* (2006).

Full details may be had from Dr John A Hargreaves, 7 Haugh Shaw Road, Halifax, HX1 3AH. E-mail: [johnahargreaves@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:johnahargreaves@blueyonder.co.uk).

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Amanda Porterfield (ed.), *Modern Christianity to 1900, vol. 6, A People's History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010, pp. xiv + 348, Paperback, £23.99. ISBN 978-0-8006-9724-2).

A significant trend within contemporary historical research is to present 'a history from below', and consider the viewpoint of the 'common man'. This book, volume six of a seven volume series of a people's history of Christianity, claims to do just that: 'to explore the opinions and insights of the laity, the ordinary faithful, the people', to consider 'their religious lives, their pious practices; their self understandings as Christians', rather than present 'a study of the "great" deeds of "great" men' (p. xi).

After a brief introduction in which Amanda Porterfield, the editor, sets the context by considering 'the globalization of Christianity in the modern era' (p. 8), other American writers, Carlos Eire, Peter Gardella and John Corrigan, examine 'the most basic aspects of people's lives – death, sex and capitalism . . . and how Christian people relied on religious beliefs and practices to manage them' (p. 21). In chapter four Ronald Numbers considers how the Church, reluctant to relinquish a literal belief in the Genesis account of creation, found it difficult to come to terms with the discoveries of 'vulgar science' (p. 113). H. B. Cavalcanti, Vera Shevzov, Douglas Winiarski and Ava Chamberlain offer case studies highlighting 'regional variants' of Christianity: American missions in Brazil, the use of icons in Russia as aids to piety, conversion experiences and domestic piety in New England. In subsequent chapters Marilyn Westerkamp and Charles Lippy focus on issues relating to women and gender, particularly the decline of the prejudicial belief that women were inherently more carnal and less spiritual than men, and the abolition of male priesthood in some churches leading to a greater degree of gender equality. In the concluding chapter Cheryl Kirk-Duggan discusses slavery, and highlights how Christians used the Bible to argue that slavery was part of the natural order, and how many slaves found comfort in identifying with the suffering of Jesus, and with the Jews in the Exodus, as seen in the lyrics of the Negro spirituals.

Although interesting, informative and well presented, the book was however disappointing for two main reasons. First, despite the book's promise 'to sketch out a new, populist narrative, one that features the views and attitudes of the common folk' (p. 113), the bulk of the text referred only to familiar and well known figures such as Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, Mary Baker Eddy and so on, but made little mention of ordinary Christians. Second, although the book is described as a history of 'Modern Christianity', it focuses almost totally on *American* Christianity with few references, except for sections on Russia and Brazil, to the Church elsewhere. Useful accounts were given of 'the New England Puritan community'; the 'American protestant revival' (p. 105); 'African American women' (p. 275); 'American mission societies' (p. 277); itinerant circuit riders; 'popular preachers such as baseball player



Billy Sunday' (p. 289); and how 'African American spirituals emerged as a distinctive form of Christian practice among African American slaves' (p. 317), yet very little was said about Christianity worldwide. Even the chapter on Brazil concentrates on 'the importation of American business practices and strategies for economic development' in that country (p. 23). As such the book would be better named 'Modern American Christianity to 1900'. The book was also marred by certain inaccuracies chief amongst which is the date of Charles Wesley's death, given as 1778 instead of ten years later (p. 52), and the incorrect reference to the Methodist founder as 'the unmarried, deeply pious John Wesley' (p. 74).

Although limited in scope mainly to American Church history, and unsuccessful in its aim to provide a 'popular history', the book, written in an appealing, accessible style, with endnotes, suggestions for further reading, several colour plates and numerous black and white illustrations, is still a useful and informative read.

SIMON ROSS VALENTINE

Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (eds), *Methodism and History: Essays in Honour of John Vickers* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 2010, pp. xxvi + 211. Paperback, £10.95. ISBN 978-1874677-11-6).

Anyone with an interest in Methodist history will be aware of the considerable contribution that John Ashley Vickers has made to Methodist scholarship and historiography. As well as indexing the first fifty volumes of the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, thus making them readily accessible to the general inquirer, John's publications include the standard biography of Thomas Coke and an edition of Coke's Journals; numerous pieces on local Methodist history (particularly of the counties of Hampshire and Sussex, and cities such as Canterbury and Chichester) and many biographical sketches of Methodist worthies in different journals, newspapers, and encyclopaedias including the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) and the *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (1995). In *Preaching from Hymns* (2002) John, discussing homiletics not history, offered advice to preachers in how to use hymns in new and innovative ways. Although this would bring a smile to John's face, mention must be made of the life of John Wesley that he wrote in 1977 for the Ladybird series of books. His magnum opus however must be the *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, which, edited by John, was published in 2000. To the great satisfaction of students of Methodist history generally, this dictionary, an inexhaustible resource of Methodist biographical detail, was made available online in 2008. With these, and other publications by John in mind, Edward Royle justifiably states that John 'has been one of those many artist-craftsmen who have contributed to the great mosaic that constitutes our understanding of the history of the nation' (p. 14).

In recognition of John's scholarly work and publications, only a small amount of which is mentioned above, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings have edited this collection of essays on 'the development of Methodist historiography in the second half of the twentieth century', the period during which 'John Vickers has been active and increasingly influential in the field' (p. xi). As well as being a 'personal appreciation of JV', honouring his 'breadth of interests and scholarship', this book however also acknowledges his 'service to others'; his gentlemanly and courteous manner, and his willingness to respond 'with warmth and encouragement to an interested inquiry' (p. xii). Having worked with John on various contributions for the *DMBI*, (both of us sharing an interest in early Methodism, particularly John Bennet, the pioneer Methodist preacher), I personally came to know something of John's meticulous care and courtesy in dealing with those he corresponded with. Similarly, while writing the booklet on William Sangster for the series of monographs entitled 'People called Methodists', which John edited, I experienced John's affability and patience. As such, as Brian Beck remarks: 'this volume is being published as a tribute to a man loved and respected, not only for his encyclopaedic knowledge of Methodist history, but also for his modesty and warm friendliness' (p. iii).

Following a 'Foreword' by Brian Beck, an 'Introduction' by the editors and a personal appreciation of John Vickers by Dorothy Graham, in the first essay Richard Heitzenrater considers 'recent developments in the age of digitization and computerization', both of which can be 'the bane and the curse of the inquirer in the process of looking for the "real" John Wesley' (p. 7). Mindful of the 'digital dizziness' that researchers may face in a 'digital electronic age', Heitzenrater discusses the use of electronic databases; CD Roms; ECCO (Eighteenth Century Collections Online) and specific deposits of Methodist source material such as those at Duke University, North Carolina, and John Rylands Methodist Archives, Manchester. With similar insight and learning Edward Royle, in considering the 'writing of local history in Methodism', reminds us of the value of 'the circuit safe, the local record office' and 'the local studies library and local newspapers' as invaluable sources for research (p. 19). Stressing the need for 'critical awareness', he considers the Census of Religious Worship of 1851; clerical Visitation Returns; and, although noting their limitations due to their 'anti-establishment flavour' and their 'patchy geographical coverage' (p. 21), newspaper censuses, particularly that of 1881. In the third essay Timothy Macquiban reflects on 'history from the underside' and highlights how traditional history presents the story of the 'powerful rich', while the poor, kept 'distant and dependent', remain as 'anonymous statistics or names'(p. 43). In looking at history in this way, Macquiban acknowledges how John Vickers 'in his contributions to biographical works' has helped us to recover 'Methodist voices from the underside and to give proper weight to personal and social history in evaluating the place of Methodism within society' (p. 53).

Other essays in this book are equally as informative. Kate Tiller considers 'the place of Methodism: a study of three counties in 1851', namely Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. Using detailed returns for individual places of worship she takes the opportunity to 'explore Methodism in time, in place and

landscape, and in local cultural and social settings' (p. 55). Clive Field writes about 'Methodism and the Building Society Movement in England and Wales', a subject 'wholly ignored in Methodist historiography and', as he remarks, 'systematically studied here for the first time' (p. 93). Rejecting the claim that 'Methodists were involved with building societies right from the outset', Field describes the earliest Methodist building societies from the 1830's, and Methodist involvement in non-Methodist organisations, including an interesting note to 'Margaret Thatcher's Wesleyan grocer father . . . a director of the Grantham Building Society' (p. 116). John Pritchard comments on 1913, the centenary year of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, the first Conference of the Wesleyan Laymen's Missionary Movement, and a year in which Methodist missions made advances in Africa, China and elsewhere. The changes in missiology are discussed: the emphasis on indigenus, and not just expatriate missionary activity; the changing perception of mission 'as the task of the European/American' (p. 160) and 'mission in reverse', the realisation that 'Christianity's centre of gravity has shifted dramatically from its traditional heartlands to the south' (p. 161). In the final essay of the book Charles Yrigoyen Jr., evaluates 'American Methodist historiography since 1950', and 'its contribution to our knowledge of American Methodism' (p. 168). Yrigoyen Jr. laments however, although this subject is 'a historical gold mine' in which much 'excavation has taken place, there is clearly much more to accomplish' (p. 184).

With a useful appendix (compiled by Field and Hilary Campbell) which provides a bibliography of the principal writings of John Vickers, illustrating, not only his 'encyclopaedic knowledge of the highways and byways of Methodist history' (p. xii), but also his invaluable contribution to historical scholarship over more than fifty years, as the editors state: 'it is hoped this [book] will not only honour John, but continue his service to scholarship' (p. xi).

SIMON ROSS VALENTINE

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