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Proceedings

OF THE

Wesley Historical Society

Editor: E. ALAN ROSE, B.A.

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THE BIBLE CHRISTIANS IN BIRMINGHAM

Outline History

BY the 1890s the Bible Christians were established in the south and south west and south Wales. There were also outposts in Lancashire, Cumbria, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire (Cleveland), and County Durham.¹ By the 1890s all branches of Methodism except the Bible Christians and the Independents were in Birmingham, the Wesleyans with nine circuits, the Primitives six, the New Connexion two and the United Methodist Free Churches, three.

On Sunday 1 July 1894 the Bible Christians began their work at a chapel in Priestley Road, Sparkbrook, purchased, with the manse next door, from the Baptists.² The services were led by J. Hallett, a layman engaged as a Connexional Evangelist.³ By the end of August

¹ T. Shaw *The Bible Christians 1815-1907* (1965) R Thorne 'The Last Bible Christians; their church in Devon 1907' *Trans. Devon. Ass.* 107pp. 47-75 (1974-5). O. A. Beckerlegge 'The Northern Bible Christians' *Proceedings* xxxi pp. 39-43. Beckerlegge needs updating which will be done for Durham and Northumberland in C. C. Short *Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists*, (1995). For the foundation of the Durham mission: *Durham County Local History Society Bulletin* 47 December 1991, C. C. Short 'Bible Christians in Durham. ...' Reference - Short *Durham* are to the former work.

² Sparkbrook Union Baptist Church: registered from 1891 (worship Register 32519; V.C.H. of Warwickshire. Vol 7, City of Birmingham). In the 1892 *Birmingham News* Religious Census, 27 November 1892, there were 142 at 6.30pm, and seating for 300.

³ *Minutes of Conference 1894*, President's Circular, Resolution XXXIII reveals Hallett's engagement and conditions of employment. In 1898 he moved to Holsworthy. No Christian name has appeared for J. Hallett.

the Rev William Babidge had joined Hallett. Babidge reported to the *Bible Christian Magazine*,

Since conference the building has been renovated ... and other alterations carried out by our friend Mr John Heal, a Birmingham builder, who was connected with our church at Hartland many years ago. The formal opening services were held on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, October 21st, 22nd and 23rd when Rev F W Bourne preached three times on the Sunday to large congregations, spoke on the Monday evening and lectured on 'Billy Bray' on the Tuesday afternoon.⁴

The Birmingham Circuit was formally established on Sunday 11 November, with Priestley Road Bible Christian Church formed ..

.. when 40 adults received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and were enrolled as members. Several were received on trial at the same time. Dozens of young people have been converted, and these are meeting every week in two Christian Endeavour Societies. God is still blessing our work and souls are being saved. Our open air services too have yielded good results.⁵

Early next year a second society appeared, at the Board School in Elkington Street, Aston. However this was not a new society; Babidge in the *Magazine* recorded ..

.. it was started by Mr Alfred Allcock about five years ago and was worked by laymen down to October 1894 when Bro Hallett and I took charge of the service alternately on Sunday evenings. The Mission was formally taken over by us in the new year, Mr Allcock, the late superintendent, and Mr Bayliss, the secretary, being elected Society Stewards and the Committee formed into an Elders' Meeting. With the new year a morning service was begun, a Sunday School was started and the Adult Bible Class reorganised, the result being the congregations and offerings have considerably increased.... A good many persons have been converted and already we have a membership of between 30 and 40.⁶

The third society, in Prince Albert Street, Small Heath, in what is now

⁴ *Bible Christian Magazine* (BCM) 1894, p.768. Frederick W Bourne, Book Steward and Editor, and from 1866 to 1901 Connexional Treasurer, was the effective financial manager and chief executive of the Connexion. His popular book *The King's Son*, has been in almost continuous print since 1871.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *BCM* 1895, p.257.

Bordesley Green, was another take-over in March 1897. Babidge wrote to the *Magazine*:

Public services, in connection with the purchase of a valuable property at Small Heath in this city, and the taking over of the mission which has been carried on in an Iron Church which forms part of the property, were held on Sunday and Monday, March 14th and 15th.

The sphere is a large one, the district comprises 70,000 inhabitants, consisting chiefly of the working class, and is rapidly growing; not only is there no plethora of church or chapel accommodation, but a decided lack.⁷

Babidge implied that it was largely unchurched territory. Yet six years before, Rev Joseph Odell had been sent to Small Heath to form a new Primitive Methodist circuit there. Odell ran the 'The Evangelists' Home,' a school for lay evangelists in Birmingham, similar to the Wesleyans' 'Joyful News Training Home and Mission,' although never officially part of Primitive Methodism.⁸ In the 1890s these evangelists were very active in the city, and had established a society in Small Heath in 1891-2. A chapel was erected in 1893 at Yardley Green Road, now in Bordesley Green. Thus in 1897 the Bible Christians were not moving into virgin ground; the Primitives were there in strength. It is surprising that the Bible Christians became established in Small Heath, for the two branches rarely existed in strength alongside each other; perhaps taking over an existing society made the difference. The ex-Bible Christian society survived until 1960.

The fourth chapel came from yet another take-over: Addison Road in King's Heath, a developing suburb to the south of the city. Again it was a former Baptist chapel, '... a new and pretty Iron Church, which will accommodate about 250 persons, ..'⁹ it was purchased in 1897 and quickly assimilated.

The three societies annexed represent an unusual approach to church planting. There is no evidence that these societies had previously conceived of themselves as Bible Christians, nor how contacts were made. Moreover to what extent the Priestley Road

⁷ BCM 1897, p252.

⁸ See the brief note, which needs to be corrected in some points, C. C. Short, 'Joseph Odell and "The Evangelists' Home,"' *Bulletin* of the WHS West Midlands Branch, Vol.6 No.4 Autumn 1994 pp52-56.

⁹ BCM 1897, p.380.

Baptist congregation was absorbed is unclear: the language used of that purchase is different from the others, where the implication is that the societies came too. This is one way of rapidly establishing a presence; it would be interesting to know how, if at all, a specific Bible Christian loyalty developed. The rapid expansion led to early optimism, yet that turned to realism in 1897, when Babidge reported .. 'Our Birmingham mission costs a large sum to maintain it, but it will eventually pay'.¹⁰ All its life the circuit received a large missionary grant, for Babidge's hope was never achieved; the work was to be encumbered with property debt to the end.

In August 1897 the memorial stones of a new Aston 'schoolchapel' were laid at the corner of Elkington Street and Miller Street, to be opened in 1898. Only £266 of the £1378 cost had been raised; the financial burden of new and unpaid-for chapels was accumulating.¹¹

Rev G. W. B. Linton, who had been the pastor of the Small Heath mission¹² joined Babidge and Hallett in 1897 as a Bible Christian minister. Clearly this was part of the agreement that brought the Small Heath society into the Connexion. Yet perhaps Linton failed to understand itinerancy, for on being stationed at Liskeard in 1898, he resigned. He was still petitioning in 1899 for furniture at Small Heath which he regarded as his.¹³ Yet this was a small hiccup, for the station was well staffed. John Dale, President in 1902, was pastor in 1898, followed in 1899 by John Honey, who stayed four years, and had been President in 1878. William Rodda arrived in 1900, and stayed six years.

Towards the end of the century the Sparkbrook/Priestley Road work began to struggle. In 1899 it was reported that 'Priestley Road ... has suffered by diminution since the erection in the immediate neighbourhood of a great Mission Hall with ample resources.'¹⁴

¹⁰ BCM 1897, p.57.

¹¹ BCM 1897, p.636.

¹² Type-written booklet, 50th anniversary of Bordesley Green Methodist Church (ex Small Heath BC), 1956. Birmingham City Archives MC76/40.

¹³ *Minutes of Conference 1899*, President's Circular, Resolutions X and CLII.

¹⁴ *Minutes of Conference 1899*, Missionary Society Report p.13. When Beckerlegge, op cit, quotes the same passage he adds, "(presumably the Wesleyan Central Hall)." The original Central Hall, opened in September 1887, seems unlikely. It was in Old Square, about 1 1/4 miles away in a direct line. The only apparent 'great Mission Hall' in the immediate neighbourhood is The Friends Hall and Institute on Oughton Place, now Oughton Road about 200 yards west of Priestley Road.

Nevertheless, the building was refurbished soon after, and the society did survive into United Methodism.

The Missionary Society Report for 1899 included an account of the mission; that year all three staff changed.

After the loss of 47 members through discontinuance it is gratifying to find that, including members on trial, there are only eight fewer than a year ago. The agents when they entered on their work found much to discourage, and some cause for disappointment and even surprise. In one instance where a church of three score members was expected the work had to be commenced almost anew. Generally throughout the mission, although much work has been done and a few persons have been gathered, the success is small and the task a very difficult one.¹⁵

A fifth society and chapel was added in the new century. A site was purchased at the junction of Farcroft Avenue and Westbourne Road in Handsworth in 1900. This was the first and only work that the Birmingham Bible Christians attempted on a virgin site. Handsworth was a growing, prosperous suburb and offered the Bible Christians an opportunity to develop new expansive work in Birmingham. Potentially it was a bold stroke full of possibilities. In preparation services began in autumn 1901 at an unidentified preaching place.

Memorial foundation stones were laid in July 1902 by John Luke the President, and F. W. Bourne, with Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist, Methodist New Connexion, Congregationalist and Baptist representatives present; afterwards they all decamped to Asbury Memorial Chapel.¹⁶ In May 1903 Luke Wiseman of Birmingham Central Hall opened the 500-seat chapel with end gallery. There was also a 350 capacity Sunday School. It was the Birmingham Bible Christian Mission's largest chapel, and clearly equipped to be a major expansion. The *Magazine* reported that the Farcroft estate consisted of 2000 homes, '..... a large number of which are already built and ours is the only place of worship on the estate. There are only three churches within the half mile.'¹⁷ Yet membership

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ BCM 1902, p.491.

¹⁷ BCM 1903, p.339.

never reached a successful figure. Already by 1904 the Chapel Committee was reporting to Conference ..

.. we have added to our liabilities £4350. There are signs of a hopeful character in connection with our work in the city of Birmingham but the responsibilities are heavy and somewhat serious.¹⁸

In fact Farcroft Avenue was a financial disaster (total cost was £4500), adding to the property liabilities of the mission.

The religious event of the new century was the Welsh Revival of 1904.¹⁹ Its influence was felt throughout the UK, stimulating the growth of English Pentecostalism. The Durham Bible Christians experienced its effects;²⁰ yet reports from Birmingham do not reveal any awareness of debt to the Revival. The only possible trace is a brief *Magazine* reference to a big revival at Handsworth in 1905.²¹ Yet the new members figures show no trace of any startling increase. Over the period they are:

'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06
71	35	40	63	56	53

The final Birmingham chapel was a new one at Small Heath. Plans for a new chapel had been drawn up in 1901, yet the church anniversary in December 1904 was still being held in the old iron building on Prince Albert Street. The preacher, the Rev William Baulkwill, Connexional Treasurer 1902-6 and President in 1904, challenged the society to get on and build the new one. They took the challenge. A new building on the corner of Prince Albert Street and Little Green Lane was opened in March 1906 by Mrs Barrow Cadbury.²² It was the last development in the circuit before the 1907 union.

¹⁸ *Minutes of Conference* 1904 p80, Report of the Chapel Committee. All the societies are referred to, and all in hesitant terms.

¹⁹ J. Penn-Lewis *The Awakening in Wales* Overcomer, Poole nd (apparently 1905 or soon after; this edition late 1980s); W. J. Hollenweger *The Pentecostals* (1972).

²⁰ Short *Durham*.

²¹ *BCM* 1905, p.233

²² *BCM* 1906, p.231. Mrs Barrow Cadbury was the wife of a grandson of the founder of Cadbury's, who himself became Chairman in 1922; Barrow Cadbury had subscribed to the building. There are intriguing business connections with the Birmingham BC work, the most eminent being the Cadbury and Tangye connections (see further note 29). Other names include Councillor Joseph Malins, Grand Chief Templar of England (a clue?), and J. H. Gibbs Esq. of Coventry.

Whence did they come ?

Shaw suggests that Bible Christian circuits remote from their heartland arose as the Connexion sought west country migrants.²³ That is undoubtedly true. The work in Cumbria, Durham, and Cleveland, was to west country migrants to the coal and iron mines. Shortlived missions in Ayrshire and at Chesterfield were among west countrymen drawn to the collieries. The longer-lasting, but failing, work at Cramlington in Northumberland was to Tamar Valley men imported as colliery strike breakers.²⁴ When the Bible Christians arrived in Blackburn, there were west country colliery strike breakers in the area.²⁵ The Bradford Bible Christians were weavers from Wellington in Somerset.²⁶ The claim has substance; but was it true of Birmingham ?

The June 1878 Barrow & Bradford District Meeting had noted .. 'Pressing calls for a minister came from Bishop Auckland, Birmingham, Manchester & other large centres of population'.²⁷

²³ T. Shaw op cit p.59: 'In almost every case the opening came through the removal of West Country Bible Christians to these places.' He notes the Priestley Road refurbishing by an ex-Bible Christian builder from Hartland (p60), identified by Babidge as John Heal.

²⁴ See Short *Durham* for Durham and Northumberland, which includes brief references to Cumbria, Cleveland and Chesterfield. For Ayrshire see C. C. Short 'The Bible Christians in Scotland' *Proceedings* xlviii Part 3 October 1991 pp91-94.

²⁵ C. C. Short 'The Black Jacks' *The Trevithick Society Newsletter* No.29 May 1980; the only survey I know of strike breaking, and that very brief.

²⁶ Thorne op cit p57.

²⁷ BCM 1878 p382, autumn District Meetings Report. The quotation continues, "Oh ! for men and money. May the Lord open the hearts and pockets of our rich friends so that we may be able to enter these large fields the Lord is opening to us." Bishop Auckland, although not far from the Durham Mission, which was centred upon Murton near Sunderland, never received Bible Christian ministry. West country migrants often formed religious societies, and then sought ministry from the Bible Christians. In this way they arose in Chesterfield (Short *Durham* and J. Kirsop *Life of Thomas Henry Carthew* (1897) and in the 1820s in north Northumberland (Short *Durham*). No trace of Bible Christians in Birmingham has been found in 1878. Yet in 1888 a Marroway St Chapel was registered for Bible Christians (V.C.H. op cit p467; Worship Registration 30926; NGR SP 04678740). Directories list a 'Bible Christian Mission Hall' from 1888 until 1902, when it was registered as a Salvation Army citadel. The area is about a mile from Tangye's Cornwall Works, and was being built in 1888; names of residents do not betray west country origins. The building is now Church of God Holiness, and extended; the old part has a re-inscribed plaque. Probably the society was an independent meeting using an obvious name, yet it is just possible that it was founded by ex west country Bible Christians working at Tangye's. However no 1878 'call' would have come from Marroway Street; the area was still fields !

That seems to imply Bible Christians in the city, yet nothing was done, and no further call came. Presuming that the coming to Birmingham was in response to a call seeking Bible Christian ministry, what sort of migration might have prompted a Bible Christian response in 1894? Not mining migration nor strike breaking in Birmingham. The presence of Tangye's Works (see below) makes other west country migration possible, but the chapels were in the wrong place. A suggestion that names at Addison Road came from the Forest of Dean, another area of Bible Christian Methodism, was incorrect, and the history of the chapel was against it. So,.. whence cometh they ?

In February 1900, John Honey, Pastor of the Birmingham Mission, wrote to the *Magazine* ..

Of the 500,000 - comprising the population of this city there must be a good many who were once members of our Churches, Sunday Scholars, and sons and daughters of Bible Christian homes. Where are they? Exclusive of the ministers and their families, we have about a dozen persons only who were connected with our people before coming here, and now worship with us in our four chapels. Will the readers of this letter send me the names and addresses of their friends who reside in Birmingham that we may invite them to a Re-union of Bible Christians on Easter Tuesday, April 17th.²⁸

There was then no 'heritage constituency' among the Birmingham Bible Christians: the work was founded on Brummies and is an exception to Shaw's general theory.

That was probably just as well, for the migrant mission failure rate was high. The Durham Mission struggled because it *was* founded on west country migrants. Second and third generations were no longer west countrymen, and the Durham Bible Christians lost their constituency. The relative prosperities of the two missions is extreme; no one of the quality of Barrow Cadbury would have looked at the Durham Mission: the (relative) success in Birmingham was probably due to the indigenous constituency. There were also vast social differences between County Durham, and Handsworth, although less perhaps between Durham and Small Heath.

²⁸ BCM 1900, p.277.

Some west countrymen were attracted. John Heal, from a Bible Christian background at Hartland in north Devon, renovated Priestley Road chapel and quickly became a local class leader. At the first anniversary of Priestley Road, Sir Richard Tangye, the Cornish founder of Tangye's engineering works, at Soho, sent a donation, with a note — 'informing us that his uncle's uncle, William O'Bryan was the founder of the Bryanites or Bible Christians.'²⁹ Soho is near Handsworth, and when the Handsworth chapel was opened, the *Magazine* noted 'There is a large Cornish element in this neighbourhood, due to the close proximity of Messrs Tangye's works.'³⁰ Yet there was no west country presence elsewhere in the circuit.

For the Bible Christians came to Birmingham in response to the Forward Movement. Begun in Wesleyan Methodism in 1875 in order to bring Methodism into the city centres, the Forward Movement operated with new styles of mission, new premises and with social welfare an important part of the agenda. The movement gave birth to the large Wesleyan inner city missions such as the Birmingham Central Hall. It was such a marked success that the other branches sought to jump on the band wagon, the Bible Christians not excepted. Their resources were less, and much of their work was in the countryside, although there was the mission at Bradford.³¹ However, in September 1888 they took the bull by the horns and began a mission at Blackburn in Lancashire. The first annual report so thrilled the 1889 Conference, that the *Magazine* reported, 'Several resolutions, carrying out the recently-adopted policy of expansion in large towns, were adopted with great heartiness. It was resolved to open causes at Sunderland, Gravesend, Barry (near Cardiff) and Ilfracombe.'³² The 1889 resolution was not enough for some of the

²⁹ *BCM* 1895, p.257. Sir Richard was a Quaker, and William O'Bryan's mother was a Quaker; this may be a clue to the link, although 'uncle's uncle' implies a brother or sister to O'Bryan himself in the Tangye line. The Cadburys were also Quakers.

³⁰ *BCM* 1903, p.527.

³¹ The BC work in the north east and Cumbria was not urban: the societies were in industrial villages. Most of the South Wales circuits were in industrial communities rather than urban centres. There was BC work in London and in Plymouth of course.

³² *BCM* 1889, p.550. The Bible Christians were in Sunderland from January 1890 to September 1895; the work at Ilfracombe was only small, although persisting until 1936; at Barry little effective was achieved, although a society was passed into United Methodism.

ministers. John Dymond, who had been President in 1879, wrote, 'We have cause for gratitude for this 'forward movement,' but when shall we open Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham .. '?³³ The Connexional Missionary Committee's response was in employing J. Hallett in 1894 to send to Birmingham. Manchester and Liverpool never received any attention.

The Dissolution of the Circuit

After the 1907 union of the Bible Christians, the United Methodist Free Churches and the Methodist New Connexion the Birmingham churches and circuits were slowly rationalised. There were seven United Methodist circuits in Birmingham:³⁴

Origin	Circuit	Chapels	Ministers	Members
UMF	Birmingham North	1	1	434
	Birmingham South	2	2	294
	Gravelly Hill	1	1	104
MNC	Birmingham First	3	2	487
	Birmingham Second	4	2	646
	Handsworth	1	2	129
BC	Birmingham	5	3	331

The Bible Christian membership was 14% of the total, although contributing 29% of the chapels and 23% of the ministers. However only Addison Road, King's Heath was more than two mile from the nearest U.M. chapel.

Compared to other Bible Christian mission work outside their normal homeland, this was a reasonably successful circuit that was passing to the united church. A similar table showing other Bible Christian circuits in 1906 is as follows:³⁵

³³ Shaw, op cit, p61.

³⁴ Data from the 1906 *Minutes of Conference*, p96, Report on Union. The Bible Christian membership figure might be compared with the annual returns: .. 1905: 316; 1906: 326; 1907: 324.

³⁵ Ibid

Circuit	Places	Ministers	Members
Bradford	1	1	94
Barrow	1	1	165
Dalton in Furness	2	1	110
Millom	2	1	275
Bolton	1	1	88
Blackburn	2	1	176
Sunderland	4	1	187
Cleveland	3	1	66

In these terms only Millom and Birmingham can claim to have been worth the effort.

Yet in reality the Bible Christians' attempt to enter Birmingham on the wave of the Forward Movement - and it is on that criterion that the work must be assessed - had been a failure. Their entry had been described³⁶ as exhibiting, 'zeal and fidelity,' but when qualified with, 'which will warrant and command success,' it was inaccurate, for zeal and fidelity alone were not enough to command the success which the Bible Christians sought. The circuit did useful work, but was a minority in the city. The impression gained from the reports to the *Magazine* and to the Connexional Missionary Committee is of a circuit with an evangelical priority, but without a clear insight into the social and city work that the Wesleyan Forward Movement achieved. Indeed the premises and situations did not enable such work. Hugh Price Hughes's remark that, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save society as well as to save individuals; indeed you cannot effectively save the one without the other.'³⁷ was not understood by the Bible Christians. Further they failed to grasp a fact appreciated quite quickly (if not painlessly) by the Wesleyans, that the style of ministry needed for the success of the Forward Movement meant driving a coach and horses through the itinerancy.

³⁶ *United Methodist Free Church Magazine*, quoted by Babidge in *BCM* 1896, p94: '... the Bible Christians ... under the direction of their Home Executive, selected a locality, purchased a hall capable of seating three hundred persons, and began to work with a zeal and fidelity which will warrant and command success.'

³⁷ Quoted eg in R. Armitage *Mission in the Second City, The History of the Birmingham Methodist Central Mission, 1887-1987* (1987) p.3..

Wesleyan Luke Wiseman at the Birmingham Central Hall stayed twenty-six years; the Birmingham Bible Christians had five pastors in thirteen years, and only two stayed as long as four years. The impression is that the Bible Christians came into Birmingham with the country perspective that was the feature of much of their work anyway. Or perhaps indeed, they never really asked themselves what the Forward Movement meant for a Connexion of their character.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of the Bible Christians' role, in United Methodism the circuit was only slowly dispersed. Priestley Road went first, sold in 1909 to the reorganised Mormons who moved from a chapel further up the road. Elkington Street, Aston is in the United Methodist Directories for 1910 but not 1912.³⁸ In 1911 the former Bible Christian Small Heath, King's Heath and Farcroft Avenue chapels joined ex-UMF chapels at Muntz Street in Small Heath and in Washwood Heath Road to form the Small Heath and Farcroft Avenue Circuit. In 1923 Farcroft Avenue was moved into the Villa Road Circuit in Handsworth, and its former circuit became simply the Small Heath Circuit. Villa Road was an ex-MNC single church circuit formed in 1903. After 1932, the churches were shuffled again. In 1934 Addison Road went to the (ex-Wesleyan) Moseley Road Circuit and the two Small Heath chapels (BC and UMF) became part of the Small Heath and Washwood Heath Circuit, which included Primitive Methodists and Wesleyans. Farcroft Avenue moved again in 1936, when it united with ex-PM Rookery Road, Handsworth, which then became a single church circuit; Farcroft Avenue closed. Bordesley Green chapel, ex-BC Small Heath, closed in 1960. Addison Road carried on until August 1992, by which time it was in the Birmingham (Moseley Road and Sparkhill) Circuit.

³⁸ As the chapel registration was not surrendered until 1925 (V.C.H. *op cit*) the building may have been purchased by another denomination.

Appendix

1. Statistics

	Full Members	SS scholars		Full Members	SS scholars
1895	90	166	1902	259	717
1896	110	258	1903	283	854
1897	130	520	1904	308	999
1898	189	546	1905	316	1161
1899	172	444	1906	326	1245
1900	198	452	1907	324	1260
1901	243	528			

2. Summary of chapels and preaching places.

[NGR is the eight figure National Grid Reference; WR is the Worship Register number where known; UM is the United Methodist Church of 1907; MC is the 1932 united church.]

>> ***Priestley Road chapel***: NGR: SP 08258520.

Baptist from 1891 at latest (WR 32519); BC in 1894 (WR 47978); UM in 1907; Reorganised Mormon in 1909; Churches of Christ in approx.1938, until at least 1956. Site redeveloped as housing.

>> ***Aston Board School*** preaching place: ***Elkington Street***: NGR: SP 07408850.

Independent from 1890; BC in 1895; relinquished in 1898. Site an industrial estate.

>> ***Aston, Elkington Street school-chapel***: corner of Elkington Street and Miller Street: NGR: SP 07408837.

BC in 1898 (WR 36346); UM in 1907; BC ceased between 1910 and 1912; chapel registration not surrendered until 1925; possibly became part of a school. Site an industrial estate.

>> ***Small Heath chapel (1): Prince Albert Street***: NGR: SP 09778647.

Independent mission, dates not traced; BC in 1897; continued in use as school room after (2) opened, to 1956 at least; date of closure unknown. Site semi-derelict open space, once a car park.

>> ***Small Heath chapel (2)***: corner of Prince Albert Street and Little Green Lane: NGR: SP 09758650

New BC building in 1906 - drawing in *BC Magazine* 1905, p36 (WR - two

are quoted; one may be (1): 39452, 41862); UM in 1907; MC in 1932; closed in 1960 and became a Cash & Carry centre; demolished 1980s. Site part of industrial premises.

>> *King's Heath, Addison Road chapel*: NGR: SP 07658150

Baptist 1894, unregistered; BC in 1897; UM in 1907; registered 1927 (WR 51059); MC 1932; closed 1992. Still stands (March 1993) on Addison Road.

>> *Handsworth meeting place*: location not known.

Used from 1901 to 1902.

>> *Handsworth, Farcroft Avenue chapel*: in the north west corner of the junction of Farcroft Avenue and Westbourne Road: NGR: SP 03739006.

BC in 1903 (WR 38967); UM in 1907; MC in 1932; sold 1936. Demolished. The site is now houses; the location is taken from an unnamed chapel on an undated street map (probably of the 1920s), but corresponds well with the architect's sketch of the chapel in the *BC Magazine*, 1903, p480.

COLIN C. SHORT

(The Rev Colin Short is a minister in the Kidderminster circuit)

SHORTER NOTICES

Halls of Zion: Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Norfolk by Janet Ede, Norma Virgoe and Tom Williamson (Centre for East Anglian Studies, Norwich, 1994, pp 69, £6.95, ISBN: 0906219 35 3)

Norfolk's chapels are as much a part of the county's landscape as its medieval wool churches but they are under greater threat. This booklet is the result of a survey of surviving chapel buildings and consists of a gazetteer with a well-selected series of illustrations and an explanatory text to set the context. The gazetteer is arranged by parish but alas! the captions for the illustrations do not provide this information. Some terms, such as 'Free Church' are used too loosely and some chapels built after 1932 are still labelled 'United Methodist'. Nevertheless, this is a useful addition to the growing literature on chapels and their architecture.

D. C. DEWS.

THE GREATEST ITINERANT

Francis Asbury 1745-1816

IN the grounds of Drew University there is the statue of a robust rider astride an exhausted horse. The head of the horse droops with weariness, and its legs buckle under the burden of the rider it bears. Implacable resolve radiates from the rider's hat set squarely on the erect head, the erect, straight back, straight legs jutting aggressively forward in the stirrups, and the right hand clasping a bible to his left breast. The inscription on the base of the statue reads:

Francis Asbury
1745-1816
Methodist Preacher
Itinerant Preacher¹

The exhaustion of the horse symbolises the 275,000 miles travelled by Asbury between 1771-1816. The bible symbolises the 16,500 sermons he preached - mostly in out-of-the-way places to small congregations. The implacable, aggressive resolve was needed to sustain Asbury on an annual circuit which took him from Maine to Virginia, through the Carolinas, wading through swamps, swimming the rivers that flow from the eastern slopes of the Alleghenies to the Atlantic, on down to Georgia, back to North Carolina, through the mountains to Tennessee, three hundred miles and back through the unbroken wilderness of Kentucky, back again to New York, to New England, then from the Atlantic to the Hudson, over a rough road, mountainous and difficult, on to Ohio.²

The robust frame was indispensable.³ Of the 737 Methodist Preachers who died between 1784 -1842 '203 were between 25

¹ James Lewis. *Francis Asbury: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1927), photograph opposite p.112.

² Halford E. Luccock & Paul Hutchinson. *The Story of Methodism* (New York. 1926) p.235

³ Thomas Coke's first impression of Asbury on meeting him at Barret's chapel in Delaware was - 'after the sermon a plain, robust man came up to me in the pulpit and kissed me ...' J. W. Etheridge. *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke, D.C.L.* (1860), p.110

and 35 years of age and 121 between 35 and 45.... Of 672 of those first preachers.... two thirds died before they had been able to render twelve years of service! Just one less than 200 died within the first five years!"⁴ In terms of brute facts alone Francis Asbury merits the undisputed title of the Greatest Itinerant for having out-travelled, out-preached, and out-lived not only most of his contemporaries but also his successors as well.⁵

The man who performed such heroic feats of physical labour was born at Hampstead Bridge, near Birmingham on August 20 or 21, 1745. His parents were respectable godly people who practised family prayers. He became awakened to his need for salvation in 1758. He began to worship at the parish church in West Bromwich under the ministry of the evangelical vicar, Edward Stillingfleet whose preaching on the need for vital, inward religion stimulated Asbury to seek out the Methodists at Wednesbury. He was impressed with the extempore prayers and sermon of the preacher, and the devout manner in which the people worshipped and sang. In 1761 Alexander Mather generated a remarkable holiness revival at Wednesbury brought about by the novel device of transforming the exclusive Society meeting at the end of the preaching service into a open prayer meeting conducted by his wife.⁶ There were rowdy, undisciplined scenes of popular revivalism which outraged the respectable members of the Society but Asbury says: 'I was then about fifteen; and young as I was, the word of God soon made deep impressions on my heart, which brought me to Jesus Christ, who graciously justified my guilty soul through faith in His precious blood; and soon showed me the excellency and necessity of holiness.'⁷ He began to preach locally in 1762 and in

⁴ Luccock & Hutchinson. *The Story of Methodism*, p.229

⁵ John Wesley is estimated to have travelled over 200,000 miles and to have preached over 40,000 sermons. [Henry Rack. *Reasonable Enthusiast*. (1989), p.535] Wesley travelled for 52 years whereas Asbury travelled for 45 years and over rougher, more demanding terrain than that traversed by Wesley.

⁶ Thomas Jackson (ed). *The lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, II*, (1866), pp.179-181

⁷ Lewis, *Francis Asbury*, p.46

1767 he began his career as travelling preacher on the Bedfordshire Circuit.⁸ In 1771 he volunteered for service in the North American Colonies.

Methodism was barely five years old in America. In 1766 the Irishman, Robert Strawbridge, had introduced it to rural America at Sam's Creek in Maryland and Philip Embury, another Irishman, to urban America at New York.⁹ Asbury's predecessors - Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor - had settled down to urban ministries in New York and Philadelphia which was not, as Asbury saw it, the Methodist plan to have 'a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity.' Asbury left an ailing Boardman to his friends in New York and went off into the countryside to establish 'a round.'¹⁰ Thus began the American career of the Greatest Itinerant. And there is not a lot more to be said about his life except that he kept on travelling! During the War of Independence he took refuge in the English stronghold of the Delmarva Peninsula. He never took the oath of allegiance to the United States! He lived through two great revivals of religion between 1784-1790¹¹ and 1797-1804.¹² The nett result was that when he went to America in 1771 there were twelve preachers and 1,200 Methodists, and when he died in 1816 there were 695

⁸ He then served Colchester -1768, Bedfordshire - 1769, and Wiltshire South -1770. [K. B.Garlick. *Mr. Wesley's Preachers 1739-1818* (1977), 6]. He showed his mettle on this unrewarding circuit set in staunch Dissenting territory when he took on the redoubtable William Norman, the leader of the Portsmouth Society, who had 'seen off' several of Asbury's predecessors. Asbury stood firm and insisted on the observance of the Methodist Discipline - not Norman's. [John Vickers. 'Early Methodism in South-East Hampshire']

⁹ Russell E. Richey. *Early American Methodism* (Indiana University Press, 1991), 24.[But see Richey pp.99-100 & G. P. Baker. Editor. *Those Incredible Methodists* (Baltimore, 1972), pp.2-21 for the southern claim that Strawbridge preceded Embury as early as 1761.]

¹⁰ Lewis. *Francis Asbury*, p.29 [The importance of Asbury's influence in setting an example of tireless itinerancy at the very beginning of his American ministry can hardly be overestimated. If Methodism had lost its itinerant feature at this early period, the whole movement could not have succeeded as it did in America. William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (1923), p.67]

¹¹ In 1790 14,356 members were added which was the membership in 1784. William W. Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (1923), p.119

¹² 'These eight years were the most prosperous in the history of the Church thus far, surpassing in numerical gains any equal period. They ended with more than a hundred and fifteen thousand (115,411) members, and four hundred preachers.' Abel Stevens, *History of American Methodism* (1839), p.423

¹³ Davies et al *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Volume I* (1965), p.68

preachers and 214,000 Methodists.¹³

It was neither the thirst for honour nor the lust for money which drove him to his heroic feats of physical labour, although he was accused of coveting both. It was the essential, non-sectarian evangelical ambition 'to live for God and to bring others to do so.'¹⁴ Nevertheless he had power conferred upon him. Between 1777- 1780 a faction of the Preachers wanted to take the power to ordain and to administer the Sacraments into their own hands in defiance of Wesley's original intention that Methodism remain within the Anglican fold and leave such matters to the Anglican priesthood. When persuasion failed Asbury asserted his authority and informed the dissenters that they would no longer be regarded as Methodists unless they agreed to suspend all action until Wesley's guidance on the matter could be obtained. The dissenters came to heel and the Conference requested Asbury 'to ride through the different circuits and superintend the work at large.'¹⁵ In December, 1784 he was ordained on the three successive days December 25 - Deacon, December 26 - Presbyter, and December 27 - Superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America.¹⁶ Although John Wesley had decreed that Asbury be ordained joint Superintendent of American Methodism along with Thomas Coke, whom Wesley had himself ordained to the office, Asbury was ultra careful to obtain the approval of his fellow preachers to the appointment.

In 1787 Asbury's title was changed to that of Bishop. Wesley was furious. 'How can you, dare you suffer yourself to be called 'bishop'?' he wrote.¹⁷ Frank Baker reckons that Wesley 'thought

¹⁴ Luccock & Hutchinson. *The Story of Methodism*, p.151

¹⁵ G. P. Baker (Editor). *Those Incredible Methodists* Baltimore, (1972), pp.54-56

¹⁶ Etheridge. *The life of the Rev Thomas Coke*, p.114 [Asbury was ordained by Thomas Coke, two other ordained presbyters, and, at Asbury's request, by his friend Philip William Otterbein, a pietistic German Reformed minister in Baltimore]

¹⁷ John Telford, Editor. *The Letters of John Wesley*, VIII (1931), p.91 quoted in Frank Baker. *John Wesley and the Church of England* (1970), p.271. Wesley had been snubbed by the American Preachers. He had decreed that they hold a conference on a date of his choosing, and that they ordain Richard Whatcoat as another Superintendent, and that Freeborn Garrettson be ordained as Superintendent of the work in Nova Scotia. Their response was to declare their independence of his authority by omitting his name from their Minutes (though it was restored in 1789), in not ordaining Whatcoat (though he was ordained as joint superintendant with Asbury in 1800), in ordaining Garrettson only as a presbyter, and in promoting Asbury to Bishop!

of the bishop as a special officer of the church... his essential function was to superintend, to oversee, to ensure that all was done decently and in order.' Wesley preferred 'Superintendent' to 'Bishop' because the title did not convey the idea of a special transmitter of spiritual grace through the rites of confirmation and ordination; and it did not carry, as one American Preacher put it in 1784, 'a disagreeable savour' of an ecclesiastical aristocrat who was 'a curse to the people.'¹⁸

Asbury's duties as Bishop were: (i) to preside at Conferences, (ii) to ordain, (iii) to station the Preachers. Between Conferences he had the power to veto nominations for ordination, to expel preachers, to hear appeals. And that is what Asbury did on his ceaseless journeyings - he ensured that all was done decently and in order. He informed Nelson Reed, the presiding elder of the Baltimore district in 1791, 'We must keep good order and close discipline.'¹⁹ In 1806 Asbury chaired a Quarterly meeting in Ohio. He told them about the revivals taking place throughout the Connexion, and exhorted them to lead clean, decent, pious lives, but the core of his address was the importance and nature of the Quarterly Conference in the system of the Methodist Discipline and their need to 'feel the highly responsible station' which they filled as members of the meeting.²⁰

Asbury was expected to exercise enormous authority and was criticised for doing so. 'Ah, Francis was born and nurtured in the land of kings and bishops, and that which is bred in the bone, is hard to be got out of the flesh'²¹ wrote James O'Kelly, his most severe critic. Kelly spoke truer than he knew. The War of Independence did not lead to an immediate change in the nature of colonial society. The new State constitutions still reflected the eighteenth century beliefs that political rights should be confined to property holders, and 'the revolutionary leaders did not seek to create a new social order. All of them... accepted that class distinctions were natural and inevitable. They made no attempt

¹⁸ F. Baker, p.272

¹⁹ E. T. Clark, et al, Editors. *Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 3 (1958) p. 101 quoted in G. P. Baker. *Those Incredible Methodists*, p.80

²⁰ Lewis. *Francis Asbury*, p.183

²¹ 'Richey. *Early American Methodism*, p89

to redistribute wealth or to promote social equality.²² O'Kelly wanted the Preachers to have the right to appeal to Conference against what they felt was an unjust appointment. Asbury stayed away from the vote and left Coke to preside over the deliberations. 'I have never stationed a preacher through enmity or as a punishment' wrote Asbury to the Conference.²³ They agreed with him and rejected O'Kelly's proposal. American Methodism was not ready for Republicanism. If American society in general made a conservative response to the fact of independence then it is not surprising that American Methodism made the same response. There was the added fact that the strength of Methodism was concentrated in the Delmarva Peninsula where 31% of the Methodist membership was to be found in 1784.²⁴ The Delmarva Peninsula was overwhelmingly English in character. And a considerable number of Methodists from the economically declining peninsula joined the westward migration over the Appalachians to the Ohio country in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.²⁵ These pioneers also sought security and stability in traditional institutions.²⁶ In these circumstances Asbury's autocracy can be understood as his unabashed English exercise of supreme authority within an English speaking community accustomed to deference to such authority.

Asbury wielded supreme authority but he was no tyrant. Coke declared: 'I exceedingly reverence Mr. Asbury; he has so much wisdom and consideration, so much meekness and love; and under all this, though hardly to be perceived, so much command and authority.'²⁷ It was Asbury's consideration and love that came through most strongly. William M'Kendree - who was to play Jabez Bunting to Asbury's John Wesley - was

²² Maldwyn A. Jones. *The Limits of Liberty: American History 1607-1980*. (1988), pp.58 & 63

²³ Lewis. *Francis Asbury*, p.131

²⁴ William H.Williams. *The Garden of American Methodism: The Delmarva Peninsula 1769-1820* (1984), p./59

²⁵ Williams, pp.72-72

²⁶ see Alice Cowan Cochran. *Miners, Merchants and Missionaries: The role of Missionaries and Pioneer Churches in the Colorado Gold Rush and its Aftermath, 1858-1870* (Scarecrow Press, 1980), pp.ix-x, 10-50 against claims that 'frontier environments forced pioneers to change their social organizations and to create unique social institutions.'

²⁷ Etheridge. *The life of the Rev. Thomas Coke*, p.111

precocious enough to support James O'Kelly even though he was a mere probationer at the time. When O'Kelly's rebellion failed M'Kendree found that 'instead of breaking out like a tyrant [Asbury] proposed us all for deacon's orders.'²⁸

The pioneers on the western frontier did create a significant new religious institution - the Camp Meeting. Although it began among the Presbyterians in Kentucky in 1801²⁹ it was adopted so enthusiastically by the Methodists that it came to be regarded as their peculiar province largely because of its rowdy, undisciplined character. The camp meeting was essentially field praying since religious hysteria could break out and interrupt the preachers at any time - or even pre-empt their speaking. Rowdy, undisciplined prayer was the democratic, egalitarian voice of the people. Anyone could shout and say whatever came into their heads irrespective of sex, age, education, wealth or class. Where the Presbyterians turned away from the camp meeting 'over the issue of emotionalism and physical phenomena'³⁰ Asbury embraced and encouraged the movement³¹ for it was in such a revival at Wednesbury that he had experienced salvation and put on the road to entire sanctification.

Early American Methodism, under the superintendence of Francis Asbury, secured its identity in post Independent America by 'being a force for democratization and proponents of an egalitarian gospel while building a singularly undemocratic, episcopal, and preacher-dominated polity.'³²

CHARLES H. GOODWIN

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²⁸ Robert Paine. *Life and Times of William M'Kendree, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Volume I*, (1874), p.60

²⁹ *Methodist Magazine* 1803, pp.86-88 & 271-272

³⁰ Iain H. Murry. *Revival and Revivalism. The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750 - 1858* (1994), p182

³¹ In 1802 Asbury wrote to Thornton Fleming of the Pittsburg District, 'I wish you would hold camp meetings..... this is field fighting, this is fishing with a large net.' G. P. Baker, *Those Incredible Methodists*, 91

³² Richey. *Early American Methodism*, xv

2: THE MALDWYN EDWARDS TRILOGY

WHEN I was a history student at Cambridge in 1950, I recall devouring the three books by Maldwyn Edwards, which gave me a bird's eye view of Methodist history which I could focus more clearly later. Edwards wrote with verve, style and fervour and considerable historical acumen. Research since has been immense, so where do these important books stand now?

The first book is *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century. A Study of his Social and Political Influence*. (Allen and Unwin 1933. Revised Epworth 1955). Following W. J. Warner's *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (1930), Edwards marks a break with the period of denominational triumphalism. This is not a biography but a survey of Wesley as a political and social thinker. 'Whatever he may have wished, he left a most powerful, selfconscious body able successfully to withstand the shock of his death and able to effect a final, painless extraction from the church'. (pp 13-14). 'Painless' might now seem bland but it was amazing how much of the skeleton of Wesley's system survived. Edwards reveals Wesley as a Tory¹ of a high church style (like his father) loving the poor desperately, never judging them as deserving their fate, disciplining them to some extent but never allowing them any political power. He was a monarchist, though prepared to judge monarchs like Elizabeth I 'as just as Nero and as good a Christian as Mahomet' and Catherine the Great 'What a woman... but still God is over all'.² His view of political authority determined his final attitude to the American Revolution after an early support for the rebels, making him appear to some 'a passionate hireling of the court'. The alliance with Dr. Johnson, well described by Edwards, is typical. In similar vein was Wesley's approach to the '45 Rebellion and the Wilkes affair - (cf *Free Thought on Public Affairs* [1768]). Yet he was also concerned for human liberties.

On the French Revolution and possible parallels in England, Edwards rejects the idea that Methodism prevented revolution though he asserts that 'Wesley diverted seething unrest into peaceful channels at a most critical period of our history'. (p 82) ...'Wesley did not avert a revolution in England for whether he had lived or not that would never have happened

¹ For Toryism. L. Colley. *In Defiance of Oligarchy*. (1982) cf J. D. C. Clark. *English Society 1688-1832*. (1985) pp 216-247.

² *Standard Journal* V. p.257 (April 29 1768), VIII p 97 (Sept. 20 1790).

but it can legitimately be argued that because of his work and influence the impact of the Revolution was softened and England was less disturbed'. (p 96). The literature on this event which never happened is immense³ but it is significant that Ian Christie vindicates Edwards, whom he quotes, and it is certainly one view still worth arguing. Certainly the conservative cast of Methodism (rather than 'Tory') and its pietistic approach to politics cannot be gainsaid but it did not appear an ally of authority to those in power like Bishop Horsley or Lord Sidmouth.

On Roman Catholic Relief, Edwards spotlights Wesley's antipathy to 'Rome', a view followed up recently by David Hempton and others in contrast to those who attempt to make Wesley an ecumenist.⁵ Edwards is astute enough, too, to cover his flanks by showing Wesley's use of Roman Catholic writers and theology (*After Wesley* p.112). Wesley clearly supported the Anti-Slavery Movement, was deeply involved in education and various humanitarian reforms though a debate between him and E. P. Thompson on Smuggling would have been interesting! Attempts recently to make Wesley either into a social pioneer or some kind of 'liberation theologian' before his time have largely broken down. The rather more reserved view of Henry Rack is probably right with the German Manfred Marquardt now replacing Edwards, in this area.⁶ It is notable that in this book Edwards appears less eulogistic of Wesley than in his slightly old-fashioned chapter in the first volume of the *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*.⁷

The second book followed quickly. *After Wesley - A Study of the Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Middle Period 1791 - 1849*. (Epworth 1935). This was Edwards' doctoral thesis owing much to the guidance of Norman Sykes. In 1935, paralleling E. R. Taylor's *Methodism and Politics*

³ J. M. Turner. *After Thompson - Methodism and the English Working Class. An Essay in historiography*. Halifax Antiquarian Society 1989. J. D. Walsh. 'Elie Halevy and the Birth of Methodism'. *TRHS* 1975. vol.25 pp 1-20
E.G. Rupp. *Religion in England 1688-1791*. (1986) pp 449ff.

⁴ I. R. Christie. *Stress and Stability in late Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Reflections on the English avoidance of Revolution. (1984). M. I. Thomis and P. Holt. *The Threat of Revolution in Britain 1798-1848*. (1977). W. R. Ward. *Faith and Faction* (1993) pp 264 ff.

⁵ D. Hempton. 'John Wesley and England's ancien Regime.' in S. Mews (ed) *Modern Religious Rebels*. (1993) pp 36-55. D. Hempton. *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850*. (1984) pp 33 ff. Ibid. 'Religion in British Society 1740-1790'. in J. Black (ed). *British Politics and Society from Walpole to Pitt 1742-1789*. pp 201-221. E. Duffy (ed). *Challoner and his Church*. (1981) pp 90-111. cf J. A. Newton. 'The Ecumenical Wesley'. *Ecumenical Review* vol. 24 No 2 April 1972 pp 90-111.

⁶ T. Runyon (ed). *Sanctification and Liberation* (1981) pp 9-63. M. Marquardt. *John Wesley's Social Ethics* ET (1992) H. D. Rack. *Reasonable Enthusiast*. (1989). pp 343 ff.

⁷ R. E. Davies and E. G. Rupp (Eds). *HMCGB* vol. 1 (1965) pp 35-80.

1791 - 1851, this was a pioneering book. Recent research has, I think, undermined very little save for the stress on the dominant Toryism and the 'underlying Liberalism' which exaggerates the explicit 'Tory' rather than conservative element in Wesleyanism. Bunting now appears almost an 'old Whig' rather more subtle politically than he is depicted by Edwards. John Kent and David Hempton, in different ways, have shown how the Peel Administration (1841-6) saw Wesleyanism as somewhat anti-Tory over Education, the Maynooth Grant etc.⁸ Detail also needs watching - one example is the Leeds Organ Case of 1827. Close scrutiny of primary sources shows how complex this was especially when it is realized that the Leaders' Meeting was a *circuit* rather than a local affair. Dr. Margaret Batty's recent research now sets this right.⁹ Just occasionally Edwards can be guilty of carelessness. For instance what does 'In England Calvinism meant the rise of modern commerce' (p 88) actually mean? Patrick Collinson has shown the conservatism of much Puritanism, and historians rarely take the so-called 'Weber-Tawney' thesis as seriously as some sociologists do.¹⁰ A somewhat naughty footnote about a certain Janet Davis (p.155) visiting Jabez Bunting to plead for the Tolpuddle Martyrs appears to be unsupported by any evidence.¹¹

There is much valuable material here still especially on the style of Methodist social influence - Edwards was not as romantic as Wearmouth; on the Sidmouth Bill of 1811 which might have poleaxed local preaching, again Dr. Batty is the best authority here;¹² the style of liberalism which fostered individualism, a view which could lead to that of Semmel, who sees Methodism as far more potentially democratic than do many including Edwards.¹³ On antislavery agitation, the social composition and spread of Methodism, education, Edwards anticipates the later work of Clive Field and Robert Currie.¹⁴ On the whole, also, he pointed to an

⁸ John Kent. *The Age of Disunity*. (1966) pp 44-145. D. Hempton. *Methodism and Politics* op cit. pp 149 ff. J. M. Turner. *Conflict and Reconciliation*. (1985) pp 113-145.

⁹ M. Batty. *Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878*. (1993) ch. 9.

¹⁰ P. Collinson. *The Religion of Protestants*. (1982) Ibid. *English Puritanism*. Historical Association 1983. cf J. M. Turner. 'Religion and Capitalism - a Continuing Debate.' *Epworth Review*. vol. 9 No. 1. Jan. 1982. pp 57-65.

¹¹ J. Marlow. *The Tolpuddle Martyrs*. (1974) p. 127.

¹² Batty op cit. pp 51-3, 110-113. Note the role of Allan. D. Hempton. 'Thomas Allan and Methodist Politics 1790-1840.' *History*. 67 No 219. 1982. pp 13-31.

¹³ B. Semmel. *The Methodist Revolution*. (1974)

¹⁴ R. Currie. *Methodism Divided*. (1968) pp 85-140. Ibid. 'A Micro-Theory of Methodist Growth.' *Proceedings* 36. (1967) pp 65-73. C. D. Field. 'The Social Structure of English Methodism.' *British Journal of Sociology*. vol. 28 No. 2. June 1977. pp 199-225.

objective and positive evaluation of the role of Jabez Bunting which came with John Kent and W. R. Ward.¹⁵

The third book *Methodism and England - A Study of Methodism in its Social and Political Aspect during the period 1850-1932* (Epworth 1943), a wartime production, is the largest and most far ranging of the three. It was only superseded by the third volume of the *History of the Methodist Church* in 1983 which covers the same period. Edwards begins with another assessment of Jabez Bunting and then moves to the Year of Revolutions of 1848. Few now, I think, would accept his assertion that Wesleyanism saved Britain from revolution then. 'The strongly conservative policy of the Methodist Church had a tremendous effect in sobering and steadying the working classes....Why were so many workers so little disturbed by the prevailing discontent?... the greatest single reason is that they were under the influence of the Methodist Church'. (pp 45-7). This is to 'out Thompson' Thompson! Eric Hobsbawm is surely right to say that Methodism was not strong enough to effect social change either way.¹⁶ In any case economic prosperity was the key factor in bringing about an age of equipoise. Edwards oddly underplayed the role of Primitive Methodism in the growth of working-class radicalism then and later. In social thinking Edwards shows the move from *laissez-faire* to collectivism, making points recently propounded theologically by Boyd Hilton¹⁷ although Hilton largely ignores dissenting and Methodist thinking. The summary of Methodist writing and scholarship is astute with great hope of a post second war boom in Methodist publishing which alas was a cruelly false hope when a devastating economic blizzard hit Methodist publicity in the 1970s.

More controversial is the chapter on the great Methodist obsession - drink! It seems rather dated now, though no one need underestimate the effects of alcoholism, but prohibition was an unlikely option which some Methodists supported.¹⁸ A chapter on the 'service of the child' gives proper due to Thomas Bowman Stephenson. Politics then fills the scene - a sparkling and still pertinent chapter on Hugh Price Hughes with much material from Edwards' hero Samuel E. Keeble who lived to hail Attlee's government.¹⁹ One almost feels that to Keeble a Methodist Tory is some

¹⁵ W. R. Ward. *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829* (1972)

Ibid. *Early Victorian Methodism. The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858.* (1976)

¹⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm. 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution'. in *Labouring Men.* (1964) *Ibid.* *Primitive Rebels.* (1974) Ch. 8. cf H. J. Perkin. *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880.* (1969) esp. pp 196-207; pp 340-407.

¹⁷ B. Hilton. *The Age of Atonement.* (1988)

¹⁸ G. T. Brake. *Drink, Ups and Downs of Methodist Attitudes to Temperance.* (1974)

¹⁹ M. L. Edwards. S. E. Keeble. (1949) M. S. Edwards. S. E. Keeble, *the Rejected Prophet.* WHS (1977)

kind of traitor (p.183). The lively analysis of the Forward Movement and the Nonconformist Conscience can be filled out with the stern critique of John Kent and the milder assessment of David Bebbington and James Munson.²⁰ There are gaps in Edwards' account - it seems very Wesleyan, there is little mention of the contribution of Methodists to local government or the contribution of big business²¹ - the Ranks, Hartley, Ferens, Morel et al and we might ask if Hugh Price Hughes was really more significant than John Scott Lidgett in Methodist history.²² But the book is packed with shrewd comment and detail, a good read. History should be for the ordinary reader if it is to survive and there is more personal comment here than in an official history like *The History of the Methodist Church*

Maldwyn Edwards was a working Methodist minister (1903-1974) - Central Hall Missioner, Secretary of a Department, Chairman of the South Wales District but throughout he maintained a standard of historical writing and scholarship which was equal to many a professional historian with supposedly much more time for research and writing.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER

²⁰ John Kent. 'Hugh Price Hughes and the Nonconformist Conscience.' In G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh. *Essays in Modern English Church History*. (1966) pp 181-205.
D. W. Bebbington. *The Nonconformist Conscience*. (1982). J. Munson. *The Nonconformists*. (1991)

²¹ D. J. Jeremy. *Capitalists and Christians* (1990).

G. E. Milburn *Piety, Profit and Paternalism. Proceedings*, 44 (1983) pp 45-92.

²² R. E. Davies (Ed). *John Scott Lidgett. A Symposium*. (1957)

BOOK REVIEWS

Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society, 1740-1890 by David Hempton and Myrtle Hill (Routledge, 1992, pp.xiv + 272, £40.00, ISBN 0 415 07823 7)

'Why did I first think of being a preacher? Was it because I thought myself in every respect qualified? Far from it, but I believed I should perish if I did not preach the Lord Jesus.' These words of Matthew Lanktree, for over forty years a Methodist itinerant in the north of Ireland, are deployed by the authors to demonstrate the dynamism without which evangelicalism could not have put down roots in Ulster. Because they could equally have been uttered by a preacher in England, or indeed in many other places at the opening of the nineteenth century, they illustrate one of the themes of this book, that the evangelicalism of the province was intrinsically no different from the movement elsewhere. Yet, as David Hempton, professor of modern history at Queen's University, Belfast, and Myrtle Hill, a tutor in economic and social history at the same institution, convincingly argue, the circumstances of that

unique corner of the world turned its popular Protestantism into the central ingredient of the 'garrison mentality' of modern Ulster.

The evangelicalism that came to the province, carried by the Moravian John Cennick in 1746, was part of the awakening that swept the European world in the early eighteenth century. The ambition of the early preachers was to bring the gospel to the whole of Ireland. Before the end of the century, however, the movement had become embroiled in a battle for souls with the Roman Catholic Church in the rural areas of south Ulster. The French Revolution, swiftly followed by the Irish rebellion of 1798, created suspicions of Catholic disloyalty, the Protestants tried to educate the peasantry out of their superstitions and the Roman Catholic hierarchy became defensive. The evangelical impulse was successfully integrated into the life of the churches and a Protestant/Catholic stand-off emerged.

What was the Methodist part in the process? John Wesley, who first visited the island in 1747 and returned a further twenty times, adopted a strategy of permeating the gentry and garrison in Ireland. At first Ulster was not the main target: in 1760 only one-tenth of Irish Methodists were in the province. By 1815, however, two out of three lived north of a line from Sligo to Dundalk. Two areas proved particularly receptive to the Methodist message, the 'linen triangle' south-west of Belfast and a rectangle centred on Enniskillen. In both there were settlers of predominantly English origin; and in both there were many who were economically independent of their superiors. In an admirable summary of the reasons for Methodist growth Hempton and Hill add the cheapness of the itinerancy, the home-based class system, the tendency of love feasts to stimulate revival, Irish-speaking evangelists, the appeal to women, the adaptation of motifs from folk culture, sectarian tension and, unblushingly yet subtly, the power of prayer. Methodism played a full part in the articulation of popular anti-Catholicism, a point that goes a long way towards explaining the strength of the phenomenon in English Wesleyanism. The demand for the right to administer the sacraments came to a head later than across the Irish Sea, and when it was granted, in 1816, it occasioned a schism among 'Church Methodists' who wished to retain their identity as members of the Church of Ireland. The themes of clerical professionalism, elaborate buildings and emigration from Ireland receive only a tantalising mention, but Hempton has touched on such topics in his previous articles. Methodists proved flexible in adapting to urban conditions in the burgeoning city of Belfast, and participated, though less fully than the Presbyterians, in the excitements of the Ulster revival of 1859. But the chief importance of Methodism was as an exemplar of conversionist zeal that was copied by the other denominations.

This sophisticated study blends its religious themes into their social and political contexts with great panache. The book is firmly based on an extensive range of manuscript sources inside and outside Ulster, and shows a mastery of the relevant secondary literature. It never loses sight of the concrete circumstances in which ordinary people lived their lives. In a footnote, for instance, the significance of divisions within Presbyterianism is vividly brought out by a brief account of a trial in 1827 for assault during a brawl between

partisans of opposing candidates for a contested pulpit (p. 206 n. 72). The role of women is explored in a whole chapter, which concludes that, while their role was severely circumscribed, they made an enormous contribution to evangelicalism, particularly in the home. This book is not the place to look for analysis of theological currents among Ulster Protestants, but sufficient is said to make the central disputes intelligible. The final chapter, on the Ulster Protestant mind, reveals the extent to which the attitudes of the late twentieth century were already in place by 1869. In that year, when Irish disestablishment apparently threatened the security of Protestantism, Methodists were already joining a united front for resistance. The response to the Home Rule proposal in 1886 was even more intransigent. Yet, as the authors of this penetrating work point out more than once, responsibility for the religious conflict of Northern Ireland should not be laid on evangelicalism itself. Evangelical Protestantism may have exacerbated tensions, but the seeds of the problem were sown long before the appearance of the movement, in the settlement patterns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

D. W. BEBBINGTON

Purge this Realm, a life of Joseph Rayner Stephens by Michael S. Edwards (Epworth Press 1994. pp 219. £12.50. ISBN 0 7162 0497-5)

'Down with the throne and down with the altar itself - burn the church down with all rank, all dignity, all title, all power unless that dignity, authority and power will and do secure to the honest industrial effort of the upright and poor many a comfortable maintenance in exchange for his labour'. This was Joseph Rayner Stephens in typical style in 1839. He was a son of Joseph Stephens the formidable ally of Jabez Bunting, superintendent in Manchester at the time of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. Joseph Rayner followed his father into the Wesleyan ministry with an interesting second appointment pioneering Methodist work in Sweden. Establishment became anathema to him and in 1834 at Ashton-under-Lyne he espoused the disestablishment of the Church of England. This brought down on him the wrath of Conference already in the grip of the Warrenite controversy. Forced to resign, Stephens became an independent minister with 'Stephenite' chapels in the Ashton-under-Lyne/Salybridge area and a great following among the cotton workers of South East Lancashire.

Stephens supported opposition to the hated Poor Law Act of 1834 with its grim principle of 'less eligibility'. He was an ally of John Fielden, Richard Oastler and Parson Bull and others to secure a Ten Hour or even Eight Hour day in the mills and the Chartists (though he never was technically a Chartist), espousing for a time violent tactics as a last resort. It was a romantic Tory radicalism with the slogan (borrowed from Oastler) of 'the Altar, the Throne and the Cottage', with a nostalgic myth of an England gone for ever, combined with a genuine mission alongside the poor. Stephens was in prison for his violent speeches in 1839 but after the Hungry Forties continued a quieter

ministry of preaching and journalism based on Stalybridge. Another great burst of strident political activity came with the Cotton Famine of the early 1860s which Stephens blamed squarely on overproduction not the American Civil War.

The story is full of paradox. Stephens raised the 'Condition of England question' but his answers to it tended to be erratic. Thus Shaftesbury and Free Trade (presumably the anti-Corn Law league) were condemned along with the mill owners. Stephens does not fit any simple categories. Cobbett-like he espoused the working man's meeting house, the English pub. He hated women working in the mill, 'the Altar, the Throne and the Cottage' can look very like G. K. Chesterton's romantic Catholicism enshrined in the hymn 'O God of earth and altar' (HP 426). The life of the mills in the later nineteenth century has recently been brilliantly evoked by Patrick Joyce in *Visions of the People* (CUP 1991) with the romantic element analysed in *Democratic Subjects* (CUP 1994). Even the hated Poor Law became a pointer towards care for the sick and elderly poor which would have surprised Stephens, who belonged to the age of industrial chaos.

Michael Edwards has produced a first-class biography using a mass of local Lancashire materials not least in teasing out who the 'Stephenites' actually were, giving a picture of a genuine People's Church, though it must be said it depended far too much on one man to survive him. With fine illustrations, including portraits, this book is rightly commended by Professor John Kent who comments, 'His actions in the 1830's and his angry pity in the 1860's, helped to foster those links between some middle class Christians and some trade unionists which formed part of the background of the Labour Party'.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER

The China Experience, A study of the Methodist Mission in China, by Geoffrey R. Senior. (WMHS publications, 1994, pp.3, 86, £3.50 ISBN 1 85852 029 0)

When, after the Opium Wars in the last century, China was forced to open its doors to foreign traders, Christian missionaries from many lands followed, free to travel and preach where they chose, in the once-forbidden land. British Methodism began work in seven widely separated areas, the Wesleyans in three Districts between South and Central China, the Methodist New Connexion in North China, the United Methodist Free Churches in two Districts on the Eastern seaboard, and the Bible Christians in the far South West. Geoffrey Senior devotes his first chapter to brief, but well-balanced summaries of the development of these Missions up to the year 1920. The next two chapters describe how the intense Chinese nationalism of the following decade expressed itself in militant anti-foreign agitation, and how, as a result, benevolent missionary paternalism was forced to begin a process of devolution of authority to the Chinese Church. Chapter 4 tells of the impact of the Sino-Japanese war, when six of the seven Districts were occupied, their missionaries interned, congregations scattered and institutions closed or forced to trek

hundreds of miles westward into free China. Scarcely had the war ended and rebuilding commenced, when, in a bitter civil conflict, the Nationalist government was eventually overthrown by the Communists. Chapter 5 records the painful process by which the Chinese Church, ready or not, had to assume full responsibility for all aspects of the work and sever entirely its connections with the Mother Church.

In the final chapter, Mr. Senior discusses the theological and practical considerations that the China Experience has provoked. Here are lessons to be learned concerning the relationship between older Churches and emerging Churches. There are implications for all Churches in Mr. Senior's analysis of the aim of Chinese Christians to be a 'Three Self Church', that is, self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, and the China Experience has still something to teach about the relationship of institutions, educational and medical, to the work of evangelism.

The story is vividly told and well illustrated from contemporary records, letters and diaries. For the scholar it is an invaluable summary of development, from foreign Mission to Chinese Church, while the general reader will find it a gripping narrative of modern discipleship in the face of adversity. Additional notes and references follow each chapter. There is a map of the seven Districts at the beginning, and a selected bibliography at the end of the book.

R. KEITH PARSONS

A Bibliography of Lincolnshire Methodism by J.S. English (From Author 1, Dorton Avenue, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire DN21 1UB, 1994, pp 67, £4.95, ISBN: 0 9523725 0 9)

There is a certain euphony about the place names of Lincolnshire - Hacconby, Hardwick, Healing, Hogsthorpe - and these and many more are included in this very welcome addition to the bibliography of Methodist local history. For (too) many years the reviewer has been compiling a similar work for Dissent and Methodism in Devon - Hartland, Hemyock, Holsworthy, Honiton - and he examined this volume with particular interest and approval.

It is a very workmanlike A5 production divided into General, Places, People, Families and so on with an author index at the end. For local history the most obvious and accessible arrangement is a topographical one and very sensibly John English has made 'Places' his largest and most important section, from Alford to Wrawby. However the reviewer will not be the only would-be user who is innocent of knowledge of both of these places (and all the ones in between) and such as he faces a potential difficulty. By repute Grimsby is a place of substance but what is (or are) Great Tows? In other words what is a 'place'? Here no definition is offered but local bibliographers would be well advised to arrange each 'place' entry under a town or civil parish and state that they have done so. In so doing they link their work with a widespread if not universal system of referencing printed and manuscript materials in libraries

and archives.

It is a good practice in engineering drawing to give one and only one reference to an important dimension but should this be true of bibliography? If this practice were followed, one and only one entry would refer to Kendall's two volume *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (1905) with a note along the lines of 'many references to places in Lincolnshire, some extensive.' Here a multi-entry policy is adopted and Kendall and his relevant pages appear under many place entries but is this indexing or bibliography? This is the fascination of compiling a bibliography, there are no rules, only examples and any pattern can be adopted provided it is consistent, explained and accessible to those, like the reviewer, who are not familiar with the area.

Can the genius of a place as big as a large county be traced in its sons and daughters? Can Devon be judged by Joanna Southcott or Isaac Foot? John English gives us food for thought in his 'Individual Lincolnshire Methodists' section. What about Henry Bett 'the last of the Wesleyans', although John Kent's WHS Lecture placed that mantle on Bunting. Not to mention Hannah, Jackson and Watson or indeed Sir Henry Lunn and Sir Robert Perks, the last being the legal adviser to the Metropolitan Railway. Kilham comes in this section but the Wesleys have a section all of their own which is surprisingly short. Once again the author does not define his terms, for does a Lincolnshire Methodist imply birthrights or will merely living or ministering in the county do? The late Ken Garlick once counselled the reviewer to prize biographies for the unique information they contain and the author has opened a rich vein in his 'Individuals' section. No doubt Thomas L. Lidgett was a nonentity but he was the author of *The Life of Thomas L. Lidgett one of Lincolnshire's best known men, written by himself*. Devon can field such adopted eccentrics as James Lackington but we will have to look to our laurels against competition such as the worthy Lidgett!

ROGER THORNE

Travelling Man. A Tribute to the Life and Ministry of The Reverend Dr Arthur Skevington Wood by P. Taylor and H. Mellor (Cliff College and The Wesley Fellowship, 1994, pp 125. £4.50, ISBN: 1 898362 05X; 0 9516332 36).

This is a wholly appropriate tribute to an outstanding personality. A 48-page summary of his career is followed by a theological assessment by the Principal of the Nazarene College, Manchester, who highlights what he believes were ASW's three key doctrinal emphases: holiness, revival and a very balanced treatment of a Second Advent. The book concludes with two essays by the Doctor on Sanctification and Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation and a hitherto unpublished sermon on the Resurrection. A short bibliography of ASW's writings reveals the fact that his main concern was Christian biography and the history of revivals. A complete bibliography would be difficult to compile, for many of Dr Wood's essays are to be found tucked away in all sorts of places: he wrote for example, for the *Churchman's Magazine*, the

organ of the Protestant Truth Society. Additionally some of his work appeared posthumously and we still await the contributions he made to Blackwell's Biographical Dictionary of the Earlier Evangelical Movement.

The present reviewer's mother was in Dr Wood's father's form at Ashbourne Grammar School and she recalled 'Mr William' as 'nice, learned and a bit old-fashioned'. In the son these qualities were also conspicuous. ASW's niceness verged on the saintly, his scholarship was breathtaking, while his rather intellectual conservative evangelicalism, it must be said, puts him in the afterflow of Drs Rigg and Pope and the whole ethos of nineteenth-century Wesleyanism rather than the world of charismatic renewal which was strange to him and not altogether amenable. Bill Davies' appointment was ASW's successor at Cliff probably marks a sea-change in Methodist Evangelicalism. But this does not detract from the significance of one who in an age of spiritual confusion was for ever recalling the Methodist people to their historic roots.

IAN SELLERS

THE ANNUAL LECTURE

will be delivered in Brentry Methodist Church, Bristol

on

Monday, 26 June 1995 at 7.30 pm

by

The Rev Tim Macquiban MA

'Practical Piety or Lettered Learning: Objections to Methodist Ministerial Training in the Early Nineteenth Century'.

Chairman: The Rev A. Raymond George MA BD.

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

**Please notify the General Secretary of your intention to be present.*

Travel Directions: By car:

1. From Gloucester M5/M4. Exit at Junction 17. Take A4018, signposted 'City Centre - Clifton'. At 3rd roundabout turn left into Knole Lane. At Elf petrol station, turn right into Lower Knole Lane, take left-hand fork into Epworth Road. Church is on the right.

2. From City Centre take A4018 signposted 'Clifton, M5'. When road becomes a dual carriageway, turn right at first roundabout signposted 'Southmead, Filton' into Knole Lane, then as above.

By public transport: Train to Bristol Temple Meads. Two bus stops within 100 yards of church. Bus Nos 1 or 77 (frequent service).