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JOHN LEWIS, PIONEER OF FAIR ISLE METHODISM

Today's visitors to the Fair Isle, almost midway between Shetland and Orkney, may travel by a reliable ferry or fly in to the modern airstrip. A mere three miles long, one mile wide, world-famous for its distinctive patterned knitwear, the island now belongs to The National Trust for Scotland.¹ With safe harbours, decent if narrow roads, land worked with tractors, electric power from diesel- and wind-generators, a good school, community centre, hostel, and outstanding Bird Observatory, Fair Isle is the home of choice for about seventy residents.

How very different for the Revd John Lewis in June 1824, as he shakily stepped ashore on Fair Isle, Bible and Wesley's Hymn-Book to hand, eager to proclaim the gospel to its 350-plus inhabitants, mostly very poor.

'Let us try to open new places' - The Shetland Mission, 1822

Less than two years before Lewis arrived, in August 1822, Dr Adam Clarke presided for the third time over the annual Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, held in London at Wesley's Chapel, City Road. A report from the Revd Dr Daniel M'Allum told how preaching by a zealous layman, John Nicolson² had created several Methodist classes in his native Shetland. It concluded that 'a Methodist Preacher may well be usefully employed in this part of the world', where 25,000 islanders were served by twelve Church of Scotland ministers, an ailing Independent minister with a scattered flock of 150, and a Baptist pastor and 45 Baptists in south Mainland 'who bear an excellent character'. 'The

¹ See Cathy Stout and Betty Best, *Fair Isle* (Edinburgh 1988), the NTS official guide.

² See J. Austen, 'John Nicolson, Pioneer of Methodism in Shetland', *Proceedings*, XIX pp.126f; H.R. Bowes, 'The Launching of Methodism in Shetland', *Proceedings*, XXXVIII pp.136-146.

poor people themselves besought it [a Methodist Mission] as a boon from heaven.³

At this period the 1820 'Liverpool Minutes' were taken very seriously as a practical programme for 'the extension of the work of God':

In every Circuit, let us try to open new places . . . let every Methodist Preacher consider himself as called to be, in point of enterprize, zeal, and diligence, a Home-Missionary, and to *enlarge* and extend, as well as to *keep*, the Circuit to which he is appointed.⁴

Thus in October 1822, with both Conference blessing and detailed guidance from the President, two missionaries duly arrived in Lerwick: the Lancastrian, John Raby, 32, and Cornishman, Samuel Dunn, 25. Month after month the *Methodist Magazine* carried extracts from their personal journals, vivid accounts of tedious rounds in the islands, hardships endured, and the quite remarkable response in many places, especially in Lerwick and south Mainland.⁵

Almost at once the President was busily seeking additional preachers. One such was the Revd John Lewis, born in 1788 at Holyhead, Anglesey. A vigorous pioneer missionary in Nova Scotia from 1814 to 1820, he returned to England and the Brough Circuit, where he met and in April 1822 married Mary Benson of Great Salkeld, near Penrith. So as Raby and Dunn arrived in Shetland, the newlyweds were settling into their new circuit in Garstang, Lancashire, where their baby boy Robert was born in March 1823. Two months later they received a letter from Dr Clarke:

My Dear Brother Lewis,

I want two additional missionaries for the Shetland Isles, to assist Mr. Raby and Mr. Dunn. Will you, in the name of the Lord, be one of the two? and go to a place where the fields are already white to the harvest? It is probable your zeal cannot be more effectually employed, than in that place. Lay the matter before God, and let me know your mind.⁶

John and Mary must have packed and prepared to move with baby Robert and her sister Hannah Benson without delay, for his handwritten

³ *Methodist Magazine* 1823, p.109.

⁴ *Minutes of Conference* 1820, p.146. Emphatic italics as printed in the original.

⁵ See Adam Clarke, *Collected Works*. (London, 1837) Volume XIII, *Christian Missions*, edited by James Everett, includes a reprint of most of the Magazine reports, and extracts from some of Clarke's letters and private journal of his two trips to Shetland.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.174.

journal⁷ begins with details of their wearying coach journey to Edinburgh, where early in June they met Dr Clarke. After two tedious weeks of waiting for the Shetland packet to sail from Leith, then being becalmed in the Firth of Forth, came five turbulent days at sea, Mary and Hannah 'very sick' in the heavy seas between Orkney and Shetland. They passed Fair Isle at four in the morning, were in sheltered waters by noon, and at 4 p.m. were relieved to anchor safely in Bressay Sound, 27 June 1823.

'The hardest year of my life'

They first shared lodgings with Samuel Dunn in the island capital. A week after arriving, 3 July, John noted in his journal:

The School Master from the Fair Isle call[ed] here, but Mr Dunn took him to his own room, so I saw him not. He is to go home tomorrow. I think that one of us should go with him.⁸

But Dunn was preoccupied with securing land in Baker's Closs (Mounthooley Street) on which to build a chapel and large dwelling-house, as well as with caring for the Lerwick and other burgeoning societies, and fending off his many critics. Raby was now mostly busy in the north; and Lewis needed to adjust to island life and speech before he ventured very far from Lerwick. On short journeys with his wife or her sister, but more often travelling alone, John Lewis for a month or two ministered first in Lerwick and nearby communities in central Mainland, Bressay and Noss.

Soon he would trudge mile after mile through the grassy island hills, over peat moors, or cross stormy waters, on long rounds away from his Lerwick base. Being a methodical Methodist he went initially to the south, a route first taken by Raby. Next, to the West Side, to consolidate what John Nicolson began and Dunn had regularised, allowing the

⁷ Two ms volumes of Lewis' Journal are in the Shetland Archives, and are quoted here with the permission of the Archivist, Brian Smith. He has collaborated with the present writer to transcribe the full text, plus my introduction, comments and maps, and contemporary engravings based mostly on sketches by James Everrett; published in 2005 under the title *Two Calves in the House*. The journal sheds light on Lewis and 1820s Methodism, and with its frank account of living conditions in that period is a very important source of social history. Journal citations in this article follow as far as possible Lewis' unusual spelling and grammar, but his abbreviations are expanded and some punctuation is introduced.

⁸ *John Lewis' Shetland Journal*, Thursday 3 July 1823. From 1731 the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge provided a school at Gaila in Fair Isle. By 1824 the Schoolmaster used the kirk or his own house, and on Sundays in the absence of any Minister taught the catechism, read a sermon, or led praise from the Scottish Psalter.

energetic Cornishman to give hands-on supervision to chapel building. Lewis later pursued Raby's round through the North Isles of Unst and Yell, setting the Lancastrian free to 'enlarge and extend' the cause in the more promising region of Northmavine.

Such rounds, each of about twelve days away from home, followed by a day or two of rest, soon became his regular routine. He preached, ate what little was available, slept wherever he could, and often endured extreme cold, damp, hunger and weariness. He took heart that in most country places, day after day, people gathered gratefully to hear him expound the word of the Lord, occasionally in a parish kirk or an Independent or Baptist meeting-house, but most often in a schoolroom, cottage, barn, or in the open air, perhaps screened from the worst of weather by the gable end of the kirk or the rough shelter of a ship's sail. Some were indifferent, as he several times observed; and a handful were hostile and regarded the newcomers as unwonted heretics or unwanted rivals. But John was encouraged that a steadily growing number appeared to take his biblical message to heart, accepted his pastoral care and advice, and in several places class meetings were held whenever there was preaching.

Lewis returned from his first round of Northmavine to take part in the opening of the Lerwick chapel, 6 May 1824.⁹ His first year in Shetland almost complete, what he called 'the hardest year of my life' had also proved fruitful, for when he arrived in the islands there were less than a hundred meeting in class, but a year later 'about 360'.¹⁰

For ten years Dr Adam Clarke continued to take a keen personal interest in the Shetland Mission, urging: 'I would not have even the least of the Shetland islands unvisited.' 'Let not one inhabited rock be without a Methodist sermon.'¹¹ A few days after the Lerwick chapel opened, his misgivings about Dunn growing stronger¹², John went on another trip to the north which included his first visit to the island of Whalsay, then to Sumburgh in the extreme south-east, with another island visit in mind.

⁹ By the following November the adjoining Mission House was completed, large enough for two married preachers, their families and occasional visitors; it can still be seen today (2006) in Chapel Place.

¹⁰ *Journal*, 27 June 1824. Membership in 1824 was officially returned as 310, 75 of whom were On Trial, and rose steadily to 1,435 in 1831. A period of decline was followed by growth to peak of 2,015, so that in 1866, the year John Lewis died, Shetland had more Methodist members than in the whole of Scotland!

¹¹ *Christian Missions*, p.259.

¹² There is no hint in Dunn's *Journal* of the serious hostility that developed between him and John and Mary Lewis. John's private *Journal* shows that again and again they thought him arrogant, insensitive, uncooperative. Dunn preached on the Sunday night after the Lerwick chapel opening, and John noted: 'Mr D. did not please the people, but gave offence to many, and to me.'

Zeal to 'enlarge and extend' the work would take him back over 24 miles of dangerous waters, the Sumburgh Roost, to become the first Methodist preacher in Shetland's southernmost outpost, a visit not reported in the *Methodist Magazine*, mentioned only in passing in Adam Clarke's *Collected Works* but without date or details, and thus totally forgotten until John's Shetland Journal came to light in a south of England saleroom a few years ago.

'I do not like to be idle'

This journal reveals its author - like many ministers of his generation - as a purposeful, energetic workaholic. He gladly trudged many miles, to preach three or four times to the same or different congregations, and usually met the keenest hearers after each service for face-to-face conversation. We sense his zeal when, on Monday 31 May 1823, after a seven-hour walk from Lerwick to Dunrossness with three women for company, he was able to preach at Hardbrakes at 7, from Matthew 5.20: 'For I say unto you, That except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven'. His overnight stay was with a kindly Baptist, Charles Yonson. On Tuesday after preaching twice, fully expecting to sail to Fair Isle early next day, it was after midnight when he reached Virkie for only a few hours sleep.

Got up between 4 and 5, and got to the boat. After a long contes[t] they agreed on going off. The[y] began to load the boat. They had 4 horses, a mair and fold [*sic*], and a cow. Some of these they lead alongside and lifted them in, others they took up and carried in from the shore. One of the horses began to kick, but four men took his [*rectius* him] as they would a young calf and carried him into the boat. The[y] had no sooner got all in than what little wind there was died away, and the tide was nearly spent, so the thought was given up.¹³

Unwilling to spare a moment from his gospel labours, John went at once to Sumburgh House, where the welcoming family provided his breakfast at 10, and he read from the scriptures and prayed with them. He went on to Sumburgh lighthouse, of which his journal gives a unique account. There he 'conversed and prayed with Mrs L. Dined.'¹⁴

Returning to Sumburgh he preached in the home of a Mr Hughson 'who was very kind.' On Thursday and Friday he gathered hearers for sermons three times; then changed his plan for a further sermon on Friday, thinking the crossing to Fair Isle was imminent. It wasn't; and

¹³ *John Lewis' Shetland Journal*, Wednesday 2 June 1824.

¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

we sense his frustration as once more they waited for a favourable wind:

I have been kept here these four days doing nothing. In comparison there has been no wind since Monday, and that was a head, and it will not do to go. A fair wind and very good weath[er] which I hope God will soon grant. I do not like to be idle.¹⁵

'Ripe for harvist' - His ten days on Fair Isle

At long last, on Saturday, 5 June 1824, the wind was favourable, the cargo loaded again, and

By 7 o'clock we were all on board and underway. The morning very fine, wind fair but light. I did not feel pleasant in this sit[ua]tion: an open boat, only 22 feet keel, having [on] board a quantity of potatoes, oat meal, five horses, a fold [*sic*], a cow, some pigs, and 23 grown up persons and one child. About one third of the way a thick fog came on, so that no land was see[n], but they set their course by the compas, and altho there were various oppinions - some said that we were to[o] far the East, others that we were to the West, some said that we we[re] to[o] far and had passed the island, and some thought we had not come up to it - I was very sick, said nothing, but did not think that we had run our distance of 24 miles, but to our no small satisfaction we heard the breach on the shore right ahead, and soon saw the breakers on the rocks, and found that we had maid a very good landfall. A yoll¹⁶ came enquiring what news. I went by it ashore and landed on the Fair Isle in 7 hours from Sumbro'. It would have been a very pleasant passage had the weather been clear.¹⁷

The Fair Isle tacksman, James Strong (d.1829), had previously been a merchant in Leith. At his house, Da Auld Haa, Lewis settled his queasy stomach with kale soup, followed by tea, and was well enough to lead a service in the parish kirk for a congregation of forty at the most, with perhaps three Methodist hymns, for which he was probably his own precentor, singing a line at a time for those present to echo. His text was Hebrews 13.8, already expounded more than once on the Shetland Mainland: 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.' On Sunday he chose texts already used several times in Shetland:

Preached, Matthew 22.5, Luke 11.2, Psalm 142.4. The kirk was full morning and afternoon, but not in the evening. I questioned the young people and found many of them well informed in the word of God. The

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Friday 4 June 1824.

¹⁶ Yoal or yole, a small shallow fishing vessel with sail, usually rowed by three men each with two oars. And see note 29, *infra*.

¹⁷ *John Lewis' Shetland Journal*, Saturday 5 June 1824.

attention was middling in the congregation.¹⁸

Lewis preached twice each day he was on Fair Isle, again from texts already used in his Mainland ministry.¹⁹

His final entry for these ten days indicates that on six evenings after preaching, less formal sessions followed, with his younger hearers in mind. Though elsewhere his journal mentions quite lengthy class meetings, with counselling, teaching and exhortation, only here does he list those doctrines which he regards as distinct and important for the Methodist Mission:

After the evening preaching I examined the young people and children on different doctrin[es], and gave the best a few good tracts and single sermons as as rewards. I had meetings of the same kind six times in all, and proposed to them original sin, repentance, faith, justification, adoption, regeneration, and the witness of [the] Spirit, each of these the difined will, and proved them to be scriptural (doctrins) by sutable quotations. I belive that my visit will not be in vain. This young people are ripe for harvist.²⁰

In Fair Isle as elsewhere John clearly felt for ordinary Shetland folk and the poverty and insecurity which so many endured:

The people here are simmler in their habits to those in Shetland. Their houses are the same: peat fires on the hearth in the middle of the floor, pigs and calves all in the house, all dirty and filthy and evidently very lousey.²¹

Distressed to find such appalling living conditions, on the whole he cheerfully shared them, though months earlier he had admitted:

I am now very lowsey. I catch the monsters in my bosom and neck, and am very uncomfortable.²²

I have taken some mighty monsters off my flannel. These I got last night. This is the greatest cross I think I have to take up. May the Lord give me

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Sunday 6 June 1824.

¹⁹ A possible exception is John 3.14,15, with its resounding Arminian note, the offer of 'eternal life' to 'whosoever believeth'. After their initial welcome, he and his colleagues were now in conflict with the Calvinism of Established and Dissenting Churches. A later flurry of anti-Methodist pamphlets brought prompt rejoinders from Dunn of which Lewis wholly approved, but his Journal shows him very critical of their author on other grounds!

²⁰ *Ibid*, 13 June 1824

²¹ *Ibid*, 12 June 1824.

²² *Ibid*, 20 November 1823.

grace to be faithful.²³

Of far greater concern than any physical discomfort, however, was his disquiet that even the most devout of his hearers seemed content with mere respectability and conventional morality. They appeared to him to lack what he often calls 'vital, heart-felt religion'. Nevertheless both school and kirk had an important role in such an isolated, seemingly neglected place as Fair Isle:

It is three years since this island was visited by any minister. It has now 34 children unbaptised and 330 men women and children, in all 364, living on 109 marks of land. Some of the houses have four couple of married people in, but most of their meal comes from Orkney, and often they are with out any thing but fish.²⁴

Oral tradition says Covenanters had found refuge in Fair Isle, a feature said to favour Methodism. Strangely, John never mentions the island Schoolmaster whom he had glimpsed briefly in Lerwick with Samuel Dunn a year before. Nor after soup and tea provided by Mr and Mrs Strongs does he mention diet, a sign perhaps of further generous hospitality at Da Auld Haa.

His days were spent in visits to every family in turn. He prayed with those he met, 'left tracts in every house, and spoke to all about their souls.'²⁵ 'Visited all the houses in the large town, I believe 22 in all.'²⁶

Busy as he was, Lewis found time for a little sight-seeing. Disappointed that 'thick weather' prevented a clear view from Malcolm's Head, at least Shetland's coast 24 miles away was visible from Ward Hill at the north end of the island, and Orkney 30 miles to the south.

Next day Mr Strong got me a boat to go round the isle. The shores are very bould and the cliffs [*sic*] high, with many deep caves and natural arches. A good many birds. On one rock there we[re] 40 diving birds cot [*rectius* caught] in snairs laid for them by boys, who catch about as many every day through out the breeding season. I took 4 of them alive, and the men killed the others and left them for the boys. We saw a seal basking on a rock, but [it] plunged into the sea before we got very near.²⁷

Despite his crowded days he also spared time to write a letter to his

²³ *Ibid*, 25 November 1823.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 14 June 1824.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 10 June 1824.

²⁶ *Ibid*, Friday 11 June. In Shetland a 'toun' or 'tounship' (which originally referred to tenure of arable land) came to mean 'community'. By 'the large town' Lewis means the scatter of croft-houses in the most populous area in the south of the isle near Da Auld Haa and the South Harbour.

²⁷ *Ibid*, Wednesday 9 June 1824.

wife, taken to Lerwick by a fishing sloop that put in for water. Then came his final Sunday, with three services in the kirk.

I seldom saw greater attention. The people were all fixed and not a motion. I tould them that if there were any who wished privat conversation with me on spiritual subjects I would meet them in Mr Strong's house, but tould them that I wished none [*interlined in pencil*] to come but those concerned about their soul. I went into the room and it was presently filled. I had to get a larger room. 44 persons were present. I spoak to them all. Most were deeply affected. Some young men wept streems of tears, and confessed their sins, and said that their guilt was great. They promised to give their hearts to God and live to his glory. Some of the women seemed deeply convinced of sin. I hope that this meeting will not be with out its use.²⁸

Next morning, an hour after midnight, by the gentle light of the simmer dim, he and Mr Strong rose and 'the girl got me some tea'. At 2 a.m. they left for the Shetland Mainland in a sixareen.²⁹

The morning was delightfully calm. Many of the poor people came to see me off at this erley hour, maby 20 men and women. After we left the beach the[y] asended a hill to take their last fairwell of us. The tides boiled round the isle, and indeed the whole of the passage. It runs about 6 knots at the Niss, and 9 or 10 at spring tides. About 4 we had a light breez in our favour, but we still rowed, and continued [to] sail and row, untill we landed safly in Quendale Bay at 10, having maid our passage in 8 hours. I feel truly thankful to God for feeling Shetland ground under my feet. I did not like taking a passage in so small a boat (16 feet by 5th) over such a tremendous sea of such a distance as 24 miles from land to land.³⁰

'Enlarge and extend' - Fair Isle after John Lewis' first visit

John clearly intended this visit to be the first of many, but until his later journals are located we may never know how soon he or his immediate colleagues went again to the Fair Isle. He simply knew they would be welcome:

Mr Strong was very hospitable and kind. So was his wife. They gave me

²⁸ *Ibid*, Sunday 13 June 1824.

²⁹ *Ibid*, Monday 14 June 1824. Sixareens or sixerns were developed for haaf (i.e. deep water) fishing. Larger than a yoal, they were clinker-built, double-ended, with a rake in stem and stern, and thus named because six men rowed. Lewis often took a turn at the oars in the boats he used, at a time when Shetland had virtually no roads and 'the sea was the highway'. The even larger 'fishing sloop' he mentions relied on sail and was partly decked.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

or any one of the brethren an invitation to stop the winter with him, that he will give us a room to our selves, with board and washing free of expence. This is libral, but I could not promis his [*rectius* him] such a visit.³¹

From September 1824 Lewis made Bayhall at Walls his base, and his island visits included Papa Stour, Muckle Roe, Burra Isles, Trondra, and Foula. We know of a visit to Fair Isle by William Wears and Joseph Mortimer in April 1828,³² and also of its effect on the kirk session:

Owing to some divisive spirit having been introduced into the Island by Methodist Preachers, Three of the Elders, viz. Andw. Wilson Senr., John Irvine and Lau. Leslie thought proper to join their Society. The remaining members deemed it necessary [to appoint in their place] Jerom Williamson in Shirva, Andw. Leslie there, and William Irvine in Bousta.³³

In June 1830 Richard Tabraham went for ten days, took gifts of hymn-books and tracts, described dreadful storms and deaths, and reported that the population of about 300 included 47 Methodist members who met in three classes and also held prayer meetings. 'Many of them know the grace of God in truth.'³⁴ Later, James Catton³⁵ mentions visits by Lerwick ministers once or twice a year, weekly meetings led by two local leaders, and a society of 'about fifty'.

There were some links with Stronsay Methodism, and in 1836 Thomas Collins, whilst stationed in Orkney, spent 16 crowded days in the island, where appalling hunger led to letters in the Wesleyan press.³⁶

In 1841 the new tacksman, another Mr Strong, 'uncle of the non-resident proprietor', alleged neglect from 1838-41, saying that

the Methodist Ministers had visited the island three years ago & having gathered a congregation of 50 & placed it under the guidance of two leaders had never appeared on the island since.³⁷

From 1855 the Fair Isle Society was included in the Dunrossness

³¹ *Ibid*, 13 June 1824.

³² *Christian Missions*, pp.354, 357.

³³ Fair Isle Kirk Session Minutes, 1 September 1828 (Shetland Archives).

³⁴ *Christian Missions*, pp.427f, 431.

³⁵ James Catton, *The History and Description of the Shetland Islands* (Wainfleet, 1838). He was Chairman of 'The Shetland Isles District', 1832-35.

³⁶ *The Watchman*, 1836, pp.190, 246, 278, 365. S. Coley, *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Collins* (2nd Edition, London 1869).

³⁷ Revd George Griffin to Bishop James Kyle, 1841; in Scottish Catholic Archives, BL6/312/10.

Circuit. It's said the laird 'encouraged emigration'. Some families had moved to Orkney in the 1830s, but 148 islanders left their overcrowded isle for New Brunswick in 1862.³⁸ In 1866 a visiting School Inspector observed that Methodists who attended a two-hour service in the kirk were less staid than their neighbours:

There are some families of Methodists in the island, who were present, and interspersed the sermons with a running commentary of Scripture phrases, ejaculations, and groans, some of which were woefully misplaced, indeed ludicrously so.³⁹

It's uncertain just when the Methodist chapel was built, but the District Minutes of October 1884 noted it was 'beyond repair', and in 1886 it was rebuilt on the same site, and since electrification has been made most attractive.

Also overlooked until now was the initial visit by Lewis to the island of Whalsay; but Methodists never had a proper chapel there, and that cause lasted only as long as the Laird of Symbister, William Bruce, financed a series of five younger ministers for ten years, 1844-54. In contrast, Methodism continued in the Fair Isle, with occasional visits by Mainland ministers, but heavily dependent on lay leadership, not least the Wilson family who provided four or five generations of Local Preachers.⁴⁰

By 1901 the population was only 147 and still falling. For very many years, old hostility or rivalry in what became a dwindling but cohesive community has long since been set aside. From the 1930s or maybe earlier, a more tolerant, united congregation worshipped either in the parish kirk (newly opened in 1892, refurbished 1985) or the Methodist chapel on alternate Sundays. It is possible the kirk building may be further adapted for community use and occasional worship.

Pastoral responsibility today (January 2006) is divided between the

³⁸ J.R. Nicolson, *Shetland* (1972), p.90: 'the blackest day in the history of the island'. St John's, New Brunswick was well known to John Lewis during his Newfoundland ministry.

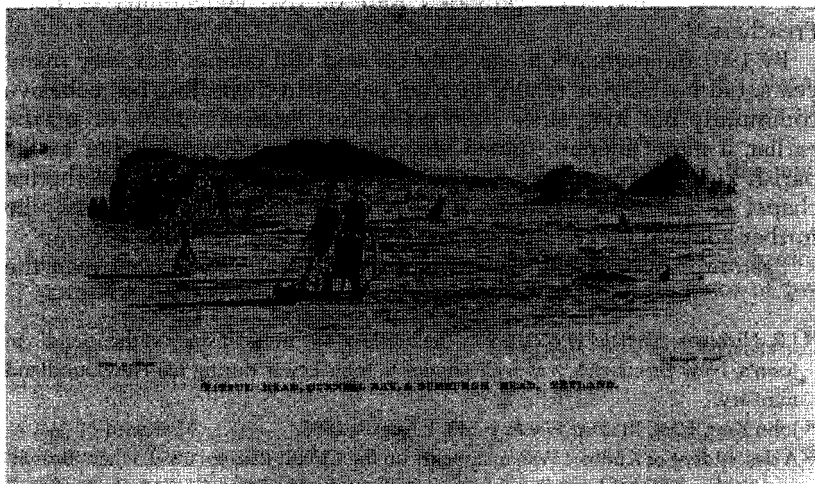
³⁹ John Kerr, *HMI*, In *Good Words*, p.543, 1 August 1886.

⁴⁰ A descendent of Andrew Wilson appears on the Circuit Plan for 1889, when 'Brown' and 'Wilson' took Methodist services on alternate Sundays. Five Methodist Local Preachers called Wilson are buried in the Fair Isle Cemetery at Utra: Stewart Wilson (b. ?1803, died in the pulpit 1875); his son Stewart Wilson *Junior* (Exhorter from 1893, LP 1904, d.1917); his nephew Robert Wilson (Exhorter from 1893, LP 1904, d.1905); Robert Strong Wilson, (LP 1904, d.1948); and James Wilson, J.P., (LP 1953, d.1994) Another R. Wilson appears on the Circuit Plan as a Local Preacher in 1910; and a family member is currently 'On Trial'. I am indebted to the Revd John Best and Mrs Betty Best for checking these and other details in this article.

Parish Minister of Sandwick (on Mainland) and the Revd John C. Best. In 1973 his wife became the Fair Isle District Nurse, and her husband, a Methodist Local Preacher since 1958, was ordained in 1992 as 'a Minister in Local Appointment'. He still serves in the 17th year of what is now effectively a District appointment. On alternate Sundays he and a Church of Scotland Minister who retired to Fair Isle lead public worship. A Kirk Elder, a Local Preacher 'On Trial' and two Methodist 'Helpers' assist them or cover absences. Episcopalian and Roman Catholic clergy also conduct extra services during their annual visits. The regular 'ecumenical' congregation includes Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians and others, but since 2003, all these services, regular or occasional, have been held in the Methodist chapel.

HAROLD R. BOWES

(The Revd. Harold Bowes is a retired methodist Minister, who served in Shetland 1956-60)



Sketch by James Everett, 1828

METHODIST INVOLVEMENT IN THE BRITISH ANNEXATION OF FIJI, 1874

The first European missionaries to Fiji landed on the eastern island of Lakeba in October 1835. William Cross and David Cargill of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), with the help of Tongan native teachers, worked hard to establish the Christian faith in Fiji, suffering much privation and hardship.¹ Their numerical success was slight, but like many pioneer missionaries they laid the foundations on which others were to build and, as more personnel arrived from Britain and Australia, new mission stations were established.

In due course, missionary influence did begin to grow, crucially by the 1854 conversion of Cakobau, chief of Bau and his military victory over his enemies the following year. The conversion of Fiji's premier chief was the culmination of the Wesleyan Mission's first twenty years in Fiji. Ian Breward has suggested that the sharp-witted Cakobau could see the way that the wind was blowing throughout the Pacific islands. Conversion was, he argued, a strategic move to retain power for himself and to preserve as much of traditional Fiji as was consistent with Christianity. Henceforth the increasingly powerful missions would be his allies.² Nevertheless it is more than likely that both expediency and belief were entwined in Cakobau's decision - human motives are infinitely complex and faith is not infrequently a genuine companion of circumstance.

In all events, Cakobau's new faith did come to have the hallmark of genuineness, since, even after his military victory and political dominance were complete, he underwent instruction leading to baptism in 1857 and adhered faithfully to the *lotu*³ throughout his life. Certainly the missionaries were among the prime beneficiaries in this 'mighty change'⁴ in Fijian religious practice as the paramount chief's faith was rapidly accepted by others. Indeed, by 1860 the mission had sixteen missionaries in Fiji, aided by 200 local preachers, and claimed over 9,000 members and 60,000 churchgoers.⁵ This was just a beginning. Understandably, the missionaries could hardly believe the apparent flood of Fijian faith that had been unleashed. But any euphoria on their part caused by the mass conversions following the establishment of Bau's

¹ For the pioneering stage of the Fiji mission see John H. Darch, 'Missionaries to the Cannibals: the establishment of the first European mission in Fiji, 1835-1843, *Trivium*, 17 (1982), pp.103-117

² Ian Breward, *A History of the Churches in Australasia* (Oxford, 2001) pp.62-3.

³ A Tongan word in use in Fiji. As a noun it meant 'Christianity', as a verb, 'to convert to Christianity'. In the south-west Pacific Methodism became known as the *lotu Tonga*.

⁴ A phrase attributed to the Revd James Calvert, missionary in Fiji from 1838.

⁵ Revd W. Wilson to Dr Hoole, May 1860. *WMMS Archives*, Various Fiji papers, 1858-60 file, quoted in W. D. McIntyre, *The Imperial Frontier in the Tropics* (1967), p.215.

hegemony over Fiji was misplaced. In due course the missionaries themselves came to realise this and a less triumphalist and more cautious approach received official sanction in the 1871 Annual Report:

It must be remembered that the Christianity of a large number is only nominal. 'Such an event,' (the conversion of a chief followed by his people) writes the missionary in Rewa, 'is spoken of as the conversion of thousands in a day, whereas it is nothing more than the opening of a door which we may enter, and entering begin to teach the first principles of Christianity'.⁶

Nevertheless, the impact of Methodism in Fiji should not be underestimated and is best seen in the only indicator of the depth of spirituality that can be measured - the way in which the Fijians treated one another. The inhumane customs of the country - cannibalism, strangulation of widows, endemic inter-tribal warfare, burial alive - went into sharp decline.

Having achieved sufficient strength and influence, and being the most powerful and most highly organised group of Europeans in the islands, the missionaries, with Cakobau's approval and confidence supported, and with a strict paternalism influenced, indigenous rule both at national and local levels, leading one twentieth-century historian to refer to a 'missionary kingdom'.⁷ Their influence, however, was increasingly undermined by unruly white settlers who arrived in Fiji in ever greater numbers in the 1860s. The settlers had no respect for missionary authority and no hesitation in exploiting the native Fijians. It was in this context that the missionaries looked to Britain to intervene to prevent disorder, anarchy and bloodshed.

After a well-orchestrated campaign both in Fiji and in London by Wesleyan Methodist missionaries and their supporters to annex Fiji to the British Empire, the Gladstone government responded by sending two commissioners to the islands to enquire and report. Commodore Goodenough and Consul Layard arrived on the island of Kadavu in December 1873. In their instructions from Colonial Secretary Lord Kimberley, the commissioners had been given a choice of four options to consider, one of which was outright annexation of the islands. The head of the Methodist mission in Fiji, the Revd Frederick Langham, expressed his approval of the commissioners:

Unquestionably they are the gentlemen for the work to which they have

⁶ WMMS *Annual Report* 1871, p.153.

⁷ W.P. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands* (Oxford, 1960), p. 137.

been designated, and I am satisfied that they will win the confidence of the entire community. Separately and unitedly, they are gaining golden opinions wherever they go, and whatever the nature of their report may be, I am sure their visit will be of incalculable service to the country ... We missionaries of course are delighted⁸

Certainly Goodenough, the senior of the two, had credentials to recommend him to the missionaries, and his visit to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society headquarters in Bishopsgate Street before embarking for Fiji could only have enhanced his reputation in their eyes. Goodenough and Layard made use of the services of Methodist missionaries as translators with Langham acting as translator in meetings with Cakobau and the other chiefs.

Langham had come to see annexation as the only way to bring the Pacific labour trade under effective control.⁹ Though annexation would not perhaps have been Langham's preferred option for the future development of Fiji, he was realistic enough to see its inevitability and was happy to accept and support it. If Langham took his time and carefully considered all the available options for Fiji's future before supporting annexation, it would appear that Goodenough and Layard did not. Whether Goodenough was influenced by the missionaries it is impossible to say, but it would appear that, ever the naval officer used to making quick decisions, he soon settled on annexation as the most desirable option. Having identified his objective he proceeded with military efficiency to achieve it. Within six weeks of the commencement of their work the commissioners were writing to Lord Kimberley, the Colonial Secretary, that 'even at this early period of our enquiry, the surest and best mode...' of proceeding was 'the formation of the Fiji group into a Crown colony...'.¹⁰

The tortuous turns and manoeuvres in the negotiations are ably chronicled and analysed in some detail elsewhere.¹¹ The part played in them by the missionaries on the spot, however, was small, except in their invaluable role as translators and possessors of local knowledge. Far, far more important was the part played by the missionary lobby in Britain,

⁸ Langham to M'Arthur, 13 February 1874. Enc. in Chesson to Carnarvon, 8 May 1874. CO 83/5. Colonial Office Files, Public Record Office, London.

⁹ The contracting (or kidnapping) of young men from the Pacific islands to work on the Queensland cotton plantations was major problem at this time.

¹⁰ Goodenough & Layard to Kimberley, 13 February (also 20 March) 1874. CO 83/5.

¹¹ See W.D. McIntyre, 'New Light on Commodore Goodenough's Mission to Fiji, 1873-74', *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand (HSANZ)*, X (1962), pp.270-288; Ethel Drus, 'The Colonial Office and the Annexation of Fiji', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XXXII (1950), pp.87-110; David Routledge, 'The Negotiations leading to the Cession of Fiji, 1874', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1(1974), pp.278-293.

led by William M'Arthur MP.¹² Goodenough and Layard knew full well that the House of Commons would have to have its say. It may be that this knowledge was instrumental in concentrating the commissioners' minds in favour of the annexation option, knowing this was the preferred option of the most organised and outspoken group of MPs at Westminster.

The pressure was kept up on the new government in London.¹³ On 7 March 1874 the Aborigines Protection Society sent a deputation (including M'Arthur) to Lord Carnarvon to present an address of congratulation to the new Colonial Secretary.¹⁴ William M'Arthur also wrote to Carnarvon on 22 May to urge annexation, enclosing both a letter from Langham to support this view and a copy of his own speech from the second Commons' Fiji debate.¹⁵ On 3 July, a larger deputation, including WMMS representation waited upon Lord Carnarvon. Along with M'Arthur, Drs Osborn and Jobson and the Revd W.B. Boyce were the Wesleyan representatives. They 'reminded his Lordship that the missionary had preceded the trader, and made the settlement of a white population possible and safe in what were once cannibal islands'.¹⁶

In the meantime Goodenough and Layard had obtained, on 20 March 1874, an offer of cession from Cakobau and the chiefs. In their report, Goodenough and Layard acknowledged the assistance of the missionaries, especially of Langham, and commented favourably on the contribution of the Methodist mission to the development of Fijian civilization.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they had failed to obtain a completely unconditional cession and this would be not be acceptable in London.

But because of a political crisis in London concerning the anti-ritualist 1874 Public Worship Regulation Act, Prime Minister Disraeli did not want to risk a meeting of his divided Cabinet and left it to Lord Carnarvon to resolve the problem of Fiji:

I must leave the matter entirely to your discretion. There is none of my colleagues in whom I have more confidence than yourself, and I always say that your administration of your office is most able.¹⁸

¹² Alderman William M'Arthur was Liberal MP for Lambeth and a prominent lay Methodist.

¹³ Gladstone's Liberal government suffered electoral defeat at the hands of Disraeli's Conservatives, who took office in February 1874.

¹⁴ Address of Congratulation accompanying deputation of Aborigines Protection Society, 7 March 1874. CO 83/5.

¹⁵ M'Arthur to Carnarvon, and encs., 22 May 1874. CO 83/5.

¹⁶ Thomas M'Cullagh, *Sir William M'Arthur, KCMG, a Biography* (1891) p.177.

¹⁷ Goodenough and Layard's report, 13 April 1874. *Parliamentary Papers 1874 XLV* [C.1011].

¹⁸ Disraeli to Carnarvon, 8 August 1874. Quoted in A. Hardinge, *Hardinge, Life of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, Fourth Earl of Carnarvon 1831-90*, 3 vols. (1925), II, p.74.

Whether taken in by the Prime Minister's flattery or not, Carnarvon now had a free hand to conclude the Fijian drama, and the final act was to be a short one. On 10 August the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Hercules Robinson was telegraphed to proceed immediately to Fiji and to obtain an unconditional offer of cession from the chiefs.¹⁹

With victory virtually within sight, and in order to keep Fiji in the forefront of public attention during the period of hiatus while Sir Hercules Robinson made his way to the islands, M'Arthur moved another motion in the House of Commons on 4 August 1874 calling for annexation of the islands.²⁰ Alexander Baillie-Cochrane, in seconding the motion, took the opportunity to praise the work of the missionaries, without whom the cession would not now be imminent: 'Nothing the Wesleyans might have done in this country in the past century could surpass the remarkable results of their efforts in Fiji'.

It was left to Gladstone to strike a sour note and he claimed that any talk of unanimity among the Fijians on this subject was 'a mockery'. Describing the report of the commissioners he had sent to Fiji as 'one of the most chaotic documents I ever read in my life', he warned of increased expenditure and the possibility of native wars as being the price that might have to be paid for Fiji. Turning to M'Arthur he paid grudging tribute to 'the real, but sadly deluded philanthropy of my hon. friend'. M'Arthur, who could afford to be magnanimous in his hour of victory, concluded by expressing his confidence in the government and withdrew his motion.

Sir Hercules Robinson arrived in Fiji on 23 September 1874. Within six weeks he obtained an unconditional offer of cession from Cakobau, had it ratified by the other chiefs, proclaimed Fiji to be British territory, hoisted the Union Jack and formed a caretaker government under Consul Layard.²¹

The first governor of the new Crown colony, Sir Arthur Gordon, son of former Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, and a friend and former secretary of Gladstone, arrived in Fiji on 24 June 1875. In fact, the new governor had not been allowed to leave London without being briefed by M'Arthur who not only saw Gordon twice in one day as a member of two separate deputations, representing the WMMS and the Aborigines Protection Society, but also 'had, in the interval between the two, some private conversation with Sir Arthur'.²²

¹⁹ Summary of telegrams from Carnarvon to Robinson. *Parliamentary Papers* 1875 LII [C.1114].

²⁰ *Hansard*, Third Series, CCXXI, cols.1264-1301.

²¹ See Robinson to Carnarvon, 3/11/16/17 October & 5 November 1874. CO 83/5.

²² Extract from M'Arthur's diary for 17 March 1875. Quoted in M'Cullagh, p.190.

Gordon's first impressions of Fiji were entirely favourable. Commenting to Lord Carnarvon on the Wesleyan missionary organisation he found in place on his arrival, Gordon wrote with admiration of the 'political significance ...[of] ... the really wonderful organization of the Wesleyan body here'. He continued:

I know nothing equal to it except the Jesuits. In every village there is a *lotu* teacher. The different kinds of superior administration are admirably fitted on to one another and finally the Head at Navoloa [the mission HQ] has at his command a perfect machinery which enables him to know down to the minutest detail all that is doing in every part of the islands. His statistics and information are far greater than those which government can obtain....²³

Writing privately to Gladstone the following year, he still had, 'nothing but good to report of the Wesleyan mission. If they have made some mistakes they are but trifles compared with the great work they have accomplished and the beneficial influence they daily exercise'. Once again he spoke of their organisational machinery which had clearly made a great impression on him, and concluded, 'fortunately, the missionaries and I are on the best of terms. They would be very formidable opponents for any government to deal with'.²⁴

Although Sir Arthur Gordon endeavoured to maintain good relations with the Wesleyan mission, inevitably they clashed, initially over the missionaries' method of collecting money from the people, and later over land questions and the validity of native (ie non-Methodist) marriages. 'Leave nothing undone on your part to soothe and please them, , he told his subordinate, W .S. Carew. 'Bear in mind that I think their support so important and their enmity so dangerous, that I would sacrifice a great deal to conciliate them'.²⁵ It was not Gordon's nature to pick a fight with the missionaries, but neither would he shirk one if a matter of good government and lawful authority was involved. The honeymoon period quickly deteriorated into cold war and Sir Arthur Gordon found himself up against the resentment and opposition which the missionaries seemed to reserve for able Europeans in positions of authority which they themselves coveted. According to Gordon, Langham began to behave as virtual leader of the opposition, 'his chief effort was to regain his lost ascendancy or, failing that, to destroy what had superseded it'.²⁶ This

²³ Gordon to Carnarvon, 21 August 1875, Carnarvon papers, Public Record Office, PRO 30/6/39. Quoted in J.D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji, 1858-1880..*, (1958), p.25 n.1.

²⁴ Gordon to Gladstone, 22 March & 7 June 1876. Quoted in P. Knaplund, 'Sir Arthur Gordon and Fiji: some Gordon - Gladstone Letters', *HSANZ*, 8 (1958), p.291.

²⁵ Gordon to Carew, 4 November 1878. Carew M SS, quoted in Morrell, p.377.

²⁶ Lord Stanmore, *Fiji: Records of Private and of Public Life, 1875-80* (Edinburgh, 1897), II, p.250, quoted in Morrell, p.377.

time, however, the missionaries could not win. Langham met his match in Gordon, 'an aristocrat by birth and an autocrat by inclination'.²⁷ The annexation by Britain for which the missionaries had so long prayed, worked, lobbied and manoeuvred meant, ironically, the end of their authority in the non-spiritual realm in Fiji. It was to take time before the missionaries gradually became reconciled to their change of circumstances. Several months after Gordon's tenure of office had ended, the acting governor John Bates Thurston wrote to his former chief lamenting that 'the chief drag upon the progress of the Native Coach is the presence in Fiji of the great political and trading concern of John Wesley and Co.'²⁸

The underlying reason for Fiji's annexation by Great Britain in October 1874 was not so much because of the desire of the missionaries for colonial status but because of the lawlessness caused by the presence of other Europeans, particularly their involvement with the Pacific labour trade. Lord Carnarvon made this clear in his speech to the House of Lords on 17 July 1874, when he described Fiji as,

a place into which English capital has overflowed, in which English settlers are resident, in which, it must be added, English lawlessness is going on...²⁹

Nevertheless, the Methodist missionaries in Fiji played an important role in the development of Fiji as a focus of European and Australian interest. By bringing the situation in the islands to the attention of the British government through their supporters at home, by correspondence, deputations and parliamentary action, they created an irresistible pressure which convinced two successive Colonial Secretaries that annexation was the only practicable option.

Jean and John L. Comaroff have noted in a southern African context that while 'the presence of a colonial government . . . might give security and support to missionaries, it also curbed their freedom to minister to an unfettered spiritual sovereignty'.³⁰ A similar situation obtained in Fiji. Fifteen years earlier at the time of a previous, unsuccessful missionary attempt to persuade the British government to annex Fiji, the then

²⁷ Deryck Scarr, *Fragments of Empire* (Canberra, 1968), p.24.

²⁸ Thurston to Gordon, 21 March 1881. Stanmore papers 49204, quoted in J.K. Chapman, *Arthur Hamilton Gordon, first Lord Stanmore* (Toronto, 1964), p.198.

²⁹ *Hansard*, Third Series, CCXVIII, col. 185.

³⁰ Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1991, 1994), I, p.78.

Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle was said to have made a prophetic comment to the British consul in Fiji, W.T. Pritchard: 'What will the Wesleyan missionaries do when they see a bishop accompanying the governor, for the Church always goes where the State goes?'³¹

In 1874 the Church of England did indeed accompany the colonial government though it largely operated as a chaplaincy for colonial officials. It always remained a minority denomination and made little headway among the indigenous population. Having unintentionally and, on Langham's part with somewhat bad grace, given up any temporal authority the mission was able to concentrate solely on its primary spiritual role in Fiji where it was, and still is, the majority Christian church. It should be remembered that missionaries are first and foremost messengers of the Christian gospel and its attendant values. Where their presence aided imperial advancement in Fiji or elsewhere it was always incidental to that primary purpose

JOHN H. DARCH

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³¹ Quoted in W.T. Pritchard, *Polynesian Reminiscences* (1866), p.217.

Evangelicals in Methodism: mainstream, marginal or misunderstood? by Martin Wellings, 2005, 40pp. is the full text of the 2003 Fernley-Hartley Lecture, an abridged version of which appeared in the October 2003 issue of the *Epworth Review*. Dr Wellings begins by defining, 'evangelical' and then offers a compressed but very acute historical survey of Methodism's changing attitudes to evangelicalism, particularly after 1860. Two valuable pages highlight the considerable Methodist involvement in the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846. The collapse of the liberal evangelical consensus in Methodism after 1960 is outlined but not described in detail. A stimulating and accessible study. Copies are obtainable from MPH or Moorleys Print and Publishing, 23 Park Road, Ilkeston, DE7 5DA, price £3.50 plus postage.

AN ACQUISITION AND A REDISCOVERY

Historians of early Methodism will recall that Benjamin Ingham (1712-72) was one of the 'Oxford Methodists' and accompanied the Wesleys to Georgia where he was converted by the Moravians. After his return his evangelising work in Yorkshire and Lancashire created a 'connexion' which at its height numbered sixty societies. Division and decline set in before Ingham's death and today only two churches survive.

Ingham's only surviving diary (for 1733-34) is in the Methodist Archives and was published by Professor R.P. Heitzenrater in 1985. There is, however, a manuscript 'Church History', apparently by Ingham's associate William Batty. This claims to be based on memoirs and journals by Ingham and his colleagues and is dated July 14th. 1779. (MCA MS MAM P11b). This is a narrative merging into a kind of journal up to 1755, followed by minutes of Inghamite conferences up to 1760. Rylands MS Eng. 1062 contains a similar record but reaching only to 1748 along with information about Ingham manuscripts. This document probably dates from the 1930s and the journal material comes from an older manuscript copied by a Mr Cockshutt in Canada. The Library has now acquired a further late eighteenth-century version of the Inghamite history preserved through families in Canada. It may be the original behind Ms Eng. 1062. This account ends in 1755 though later notes show that there was once a further volume of records. A comparison with the Methodist Archives manuscript shows that although they have a large amount of common material in the same words, there is also a substantial amount of detail in each that is missing from the other. This suggests that they are early independent copies of a lost original. Between them they give a uniquely detailed account of the early Inghamites together with connections with the Moravians and Methodists. Those interested in the early history of the Evangelical Revival in the north will find much about people and places affected by it.

Now for the rediscovery which comes even closer to Methodism. All readers of these *Proceedings* will be familiar with the story of how John Bennet (aided by Charles Wesley) stole John Wesley's 'last love' - if that is how we should interpret this complicated tale! By 1754 Bennet had broken with Wesley and he became minister of an Independent (Congregationalist) church in Warburton, Cheshire. We know that the Methodist Archives had a document labelled 'Warburton Meetings in 1754' which was likely to cast light on this development but it seemed to have disappeared during the transfer of the Archives from London to Manchester. I can now report that Dr Gareth Lloyd, the Methodist Archivist in the Rylands, has rediscovered this manuscript along with some other items (not connected with Bennet).

The material is contained in a single book and contains the following:
(1) Three consecutive accounts describing how a society was originally

gathered under Methodist auspices in Warburton; how it was constituted as a church on Calvinist doctrinal lines and with a Congregational polity; and how they proceeded to appoint a minister and deacons.

- (2) A list of members (fifty-five in all though some were lost to the 'world' or the Baptists.)
- (3) A register of baptisms (only in the Warburton area; a fuller register in John Bennet's papers adds others in Yorkshire and around Bolton).
- (4) An apparent projected list of burials but with no names.
- (5) Financial accounts and sacrament money.

Among the interesting points in these records is the fact that Bennet's Bolton followers wished to be regarded as a single church with Warburton. A house was registered for worship in Warburton and then some kind of meeting house built next door. Bennet hoped to be ordained by Independent ministers in the region and those potentially involved were apparently Scott of Heckmondwike, Pye of Sheffield and Walkden of Stockport who later jointly ordained Bennet's friend Caleb Warhurst, the first Independent minister in Manchester. But apparently Scott persuaded the others that they should not ordain Bennet unless he kept to a settled pastorate and 'left off rambling'. (We know from Bennet's papers that he hoped to continue to itinerate). So in the end it seems that Bennet and his deacons were ordained or appointed simply by showing acceptance through raised hands.

What happened to Bennet's church? A Methodist inquirer in the early 1900s found no physical trace in Warburton (see *Proceedings* VII, for a report) and Urwick does not mention it in his detailed history of Cheshire Congregationalism. It looks as though the Warburton book was kept by one of the leaders and, ominously, all the entries conclude at the end of 1758. Bennet died the following year and Warhurst's diary shows that he and other friends, not very optimistically, hoped to keep the cause going. Probably it did not survive for long and perhaps the chapel was transformed into a cottage.

HENRY D. RACK

A 'DISTRESSING POISONING CASE' - AND ITS AFTERMATH¹

In her 'City Road Diary', written in the 1880s but not published until nearly a century later, Helen McKenny, whose father was minister at Wesley's Chapel, made a passing reference on 19 February 1886 to 'the distressing poisoning case on Rev. Dyson'. My editorial endnote referred quite erroneously to his suicide and had to be deleted when the book came to be reprinted. The one person who spotted the error was the late David Barton, who revealed a totally unexpected interest in murder trials. His letter to me

¹ For a more detailed and documented version of this article, see *Methodist History*, October 2002, Vol. XLI pp.309-15.

was the first clue which put me on the trail of the real facts of the Rev. George Dyson. But the most important break-through came when, quite fortuitously, I found an article on the library of Edgar Lustgarten, then being offered for sale by Richard Booth of Hay on Wye. This led me to a letter written to Lustgarten by the daughter of one of Dyson's closest friends, which opened a window onto a totally new aspect of his life which no one could possibly have guessed. The following up of these clues was a combination of determination and perseverance, especially on the part of my American friend, Mrs. Betty Young, then a librarian at Duke University, North Carolina.

George Dyson was the son of the Rev. John B. Dyson, a well-known and respected Wesleyan minister in mid-Victorian England. Born in 1858, he was accepted in 1880 as a candidate for the ministry, trained at Headingley and obtained a BA at Trinity College, Dublin in 1885. Sent in January that year to 'supply' a new chapel at Merton in the Wandsworth Circuit, he came to know a married couple in his congregation named Bartlett and the friendship between them (and possibly something rather more than friendship in the case of Mrs. Bartlett) continued after Dyson's removal to Putney in September.

In the early hours of New Year's Day, 1886, Mr. Bartlett died in suspicious circumstances; the cause was established as liquid chloroform and Dyson confessed to having obtained this (again in rather suspicious circumstances) for Mrs. Bartlett. Both were arrested and charged, and the matter, understandably, became a *cause celebre* and a major embarrassment to Wesleyanism. When the time for the trial came, the charges against Dyson were dropped because the prosecution wanted to call him as witness against their prime suspect, Adelaide Bartlett. But this, of course, made little difference so far as his suitability for the ministry was concerned, and the Conference that year followed the lead of the District Meeting in concluding that he had 'misconducted himself in a manner so grave and discreditable as to render his continuance among us in such circumstances utterly impossible'. Dyson's time as a probationer came to an abrupt and disastrous end.

At that point, hardly surprisingly, George Dyson disappeared completely from Methodist records and from public view generally. In one sense he ceased to exist, though not, as I had stated, by suicide. His subsequent career came to light through the letter that turned up amongst Edgar Lustgarten's papers and books. The facts can be no more than summarized here, but will be found in my article in *Methodist History*. Dyson lost no time in emigrating to America, well away from the spotlight of publicity. In fact, he went as far west as he could, taking what menial jobs he could find in Oregon and enduring some degree of hardship. Someone then discovered that he had an artistic talent, especially for technical and architectural drawings and things began to look up for him. On leaving Britain, he had also left behind his name

and assumed a new one, that of John Bernard Walker, the name by which he eventually became a US citizen in 1898. By the end of the 1880s he had moved back east to New York State, where he joined the staff of *Scientific American* and earned a growing reputation as both journalist and technical expert. So much so that by the end of the century he had become its editor. A new and very different person had emerged from the Dyson chrysalis.

We do not know whether or how often, in his new guise, 'Walker' revisited England in his years as editor. Some of the subjects on which he wrote suggest that he may possibly have slipped in unobtrusively for professional reasons. But his only certain visit was in 1928, when he was already a sick man and within months of his death. An obituary appeared in the December issue of *Scientific American* (but none, curiously enough, can be traced in the *New York Times* - much less in any of the British papers). Early in his stay, Walker went down to Bournemouth to see the closest friend of his early years, Bernard Curtis, who after Walker had left told his daughter Evelyn the bizarre background to the visit. Many years later she in turn told it to Lustgarten in the letter that came my way largely by chance.

And what of the lady in the case? Against all the odds, Adelaide Bartlett was acquitted because the prosecution could not demonstrate any way in which the poison could have been administered without alerting everyone else in the house that night. The pathologist, Sir James Paget, is reported to have commented: 'Now that she's acquitted, she should tell us, in the interests of science, how she did it.' The rest is silence except for the fact that she too, found refuge in America and, at one stage, was teaching the piano in a genteel suburb of Boston. It is highly unlikely that she knew the true identity of 'John Bernard Walker', or that either of them would have wished to renew their acquaintance.

JOHN VICKERS

Sequel to Local Branches Report

In our February number I mentioned libraries belonging to two of our branches - Cornwall and Yorkshire. On February 11 the Yorkshire library was officially settled into its new home in Huddersfield University. It took all day, including a visit to the former Queen Street Chapel (now a theatre), a very good lunch and a lecture by Professor Ted Royle.

Jeffrey Spittal is the Hon. Librarian of yet another collection, the Library of the New Room Bristol. He has contributed to a booklet about the special collections at Wesley College and the Library at the New Room. Copies may be obtained from him for £1 incl. p/p at 162, Church Road, Frampton Cotterell, Bristol, BS36 2ND. This library is now of national significance with some 2000 books, 1100 pamphlets and 500 bound volumes of periodicals. Of particular importance is the complete and thus unique set of Branch Journals

which is being maintained. The chapel's original eighteenth-century library has completely disappeared but its modern successor is full of riches with a highly commendable acquisition and re-binding policy.

Anyone who does not quite understand the forthcoming major boundary changes to the Methodist Districts in the South East can be forgiven. Mercifully our London Branch will continue to encourage and support interest in Methodist history in the Home Counties as well as in London itself, as it has always done. Nationally there are now thirteen active local branches so there is not coverage of the whole country but an up to date list of branches and officers can be obtained from me for two second class stamps.

ROGER THORNE, LOCAL BRANCHES SECRETARY

Call for Papers

Proposals are invited for short papers to be presented at a major international conference to be held at Liverpool Hope University, 11-13 September 2007.

The title of the conference is "An 18th century Evangelical for Today: A Tercentenary Celebration of the life and ministry of Charles Wesley". Key-note addresses will be given by a number of distinguished international scholars including Phyllis Mack (Rutgers University), Richard Watson (University of Durham) and Mark Noll (Wheaton College).

The aim of this conference is to examine the significance of Charles Wesley (1707-1788) as a Methodist, evangelical Anglican and hymn writer. Papers are invited that provide new insights into Wesley, not simply in his 18th century context but as a figure of relevance to the 21st century Church.

Papers should aim to be approximately 30 minutes in length. Proposals containing an abstract should be submitted before 31 August 2006 to:

The Revd. Professor Kenneth G.C. Newport Assistant Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Development) Liverpool Hope University Liverpool, L16 9JD England.

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BOOK REVIEWS

John Wesley - Tercentenary Essays Proceedings of a Conference held at The University of Manchester June 2003, edited by Jeremy Gregory. (Pp. 431. Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester, Volume 85, Numbers 2 and 3, Summer and Autumn 2003 ISSN 0301-102X. Available from the Publications Office, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PP. £20 + postage.)

This is an outstanding volume of essays, presented as a Festschrift for Henry Rack, for many years lecturer in Manchester University, whose *Reasonable Enthusiast, John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* is unsurpassed.

Jeremy Gregory sets Wesley studies in the proper context of eighteenth-century history, before summarizing the material here, which is in three sections: *Wesley and The Development of Methodism*; *Wesley and Print Culture* and *Wesley and Theology*. David Hempton gives a scintillating foretaste of his book *Methodism, Empire of the Spirit* (2005). He shows Wesley combining assurance, 'heart religion' with discipline, at first in the sub-culture of Anglicanism, but with mobility, following the movements of lay people across the world from the tin-miners of Cornwall to Cornishmen in Australia. He throws up two controversial points: 'It was essentially a movement of women, who formed a majority of members almost everywhere Methodism took root' (p.54); and that it was a forerunner of Pentecostalism, which has taken over its role. So the essay on gender and feminine spirituality by Phyllis Mack and celibacy by Anna Lawrence assume importance, as do the lectures by W M Jacob and David Ceri Jones showing the influence of the Church of England in the early days and Wesley's divergence. Then there is the role of Howel Harris in the early confused conflicts between Evangelical Arminians and the 'Calvinists of the heart' symbolized by Wesley's uneasy relationships with women like the Countess of Huntingdon. Yet, as Jonathan Rodell points out, he did stay on his journeys with bourgeois ladies and households!

John Lenton makes clear that the success of Methodism can be put down to the building up of a notable cadre of preachers - men like Adam Clarke, Francis Asbury, John Nelson and Freeborn Garretson. I would add Robert Carr Brackenbury, Squire and alumnus of St. Catharine's College Cambridge. Lenton stresses their independence and Wesley's indulgence of them. Charles Wallace talks of Wesley's eating habits and hatred of tea - 'small beer' much to be preferred.

The second section on print culture reveals Methodism as not only oral - sermons and hymns - but sponsoring reading at all levels of Methodism. Isabel Rivers reveals the distinctiveness of Wesley's selectiveness. He always had his own agenda in editing, as Elizabeth Lynch shows, but there was a great deal of publishing 'networking' among Evangelicals. From the French scene Françoise Oeconinck Brossard and Jean-Pierre Van Noppen analyse

Wesley's particular style of language illustrated by Brycchan Carey on slavery. Brett McInnelly throws up Tobias Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker* as attacking Calvinism rather than Wesley. This section deserves careful reading and more is promised.

The third section on theology takes us to the American theological scene where Wesley is seen as an important and still relevant theologian. Kenneth Collins claims him as a great 'practical theologian' taking us beyond Cutler's assertion that he was a 'folk theologian'. Ted Campbell shows the development of Wesley's theology in Commentaries, Catechisms, hymn books. There is a strange lack of mention of pioneering non-American scholars - Flew, Rupp, Schmidt, Lindström, Davies - which is somehow typical of the American passion for what they call 'Wesleyanism'. So we come to controversy. It was Reinhold Niebuhr who stated that the debate between Wesley and the Moravians raised all the important issues between Reformation and perfectionist spirituality. Peter Vogt underlines that in the meeting between Wesley and Zinzendorf in 1741. Was there personality clash here as well as theological difference? Was Wesley influenced by Locke in his empiricism? - 'No', claims Mark Mealey, although he omits Wesley's clear agreement with Locke on the limitations of tolerance for Roman Catholicism. Warren Smith shows Wesley's use of Gregory of Nyssa's 'epectasy' - that is movement into God's being (Philippians 3: 13), but Thomas Noble puts Augustine at the heart of Wesley's approach to the Trinity and his assertion of love as the heart of the matter. Could it be a matter of 'both...and' as with so much of Wesley's thought? His theology was not static - later he was influenced by John Fletcher, as Lawrence Wood shows. Robert Webster dealing with evil - and the ghost of Epworth Rectory! - shows Wesley, like Isaac Newton, at the early stage of the Enlightenment.

A review can only give a cursory summary of the essays here, very well edited, and throwing up a cluster of new scholars in the area of Wesley studies. I commend it heartily to our readers.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER

Two Calves in the House, being the Shetland Journal of the Reverend John Lewis 1823-1825, edited by Harold R. Bowes, (Shetland Amenity Trust 2005 pp xii,152, illus hb £15, ISBN 0 9543246 4 1)

This is a little masterpiece - two, in fact: John Lewis' forthright, unembroidered account of the day-to-day life of a Methodist missionary in Shetland, and Harold Bowes' meticulous scholarship in editing it.

Lewis wrote what he saw and felt, periodically sending extracts to Adam Clarke who encouraged and largely by his own efforts, sustained the Mission for ten years. Cheering or depressing, it is all there, the perilous sea when 'I never saw death so near' ; storms which 'took men completely off their feet

and carid them like birds' ; the damp, cold, smoke-filled cottages 'beyond description as to wretchedness and filth' ; nights in beds 'swarming with lice and flees'. (After picking off 'some mighty monsters' he thought this could be 'the hardest cross I have to take up').

Islanders shared their meagre food with him, barley or oat bannocks, sometimes fish, and once 'a black sheep's head, with the skin and wool on' . The poor seem to have received him more readily than the better-off and he records that 'a poor girl. . . brought a shilling for the chapel. This was at least three weeks' hard earning'.

He describes having enough daylight to read the Bible at midnight, being 'dazed by the reflection' from the new lighthouse, the 'uprore' on Old Christmas Day, January 5, the majestic scenery, the vicious floods, the precarious harvests. It is an invaluable social commentary, but that is secondary to his work as a preacher facing opposition from Calvinists, indifference to his message, failures and also weariness in himself, but also times of pure joy when the Gospel took root and he felt sure he was in the right place .

Harold Bowes has long given Shetland his critical affection, the fruit of his ministry there, his MTh research into its Methodist history, and his editions of Samuel Dunn's and John Lewis' Journals. Here he has provided a brief history of the mission, translated dialect words (and asked for help with those he cannot) elucidated Lewis' spelling, tracked down families, provided many circuit maps, a photograph of Lewis, twelve evocative contemporary drawings by James Everett and lists, with page references, of names, places, topics and events mentioned in the Journal. There are a few minor errors: on page 2, Nicolson Square Chapel was opened in 1816; p53, the entry for 7 April 1825 is on p112 not p65; p107 caption 1824 not 1823; p131, the year is 1828; pp136,137/ Halcrow Laurence was the Baptist preacher, not the Independent, and p144 'Harriet' Chapel not 'Harrier.'

There has been no penny-pinching by the publishers. The superior cover, binding and paper endorse the contents as a source for scholars and a delight to Shetlanders everywhere.

MARGARET BATTY

Berkshire Nonconformist Meeting House Registrations 1689- 1852. Lisa Spurrier (ed) Part I pp [ixi] + 186 & ditto Part II pp260 ISBN 0 9524946 9 8 & 0 9548716 0 X. Both 2005, being Volumes 9 and 10 of Berkshire Record Society. £53.50 for the two volumes incl. postage from Dr. Peter Durrant, Berkshire Record Office, 6 Coley Avenue Reading, RG 1 6AF

Having transcribed (but not published) the meeting house registrations of Devon this reviewer regards this two-volume paperback set as a work of

supererogation. It will be an example and encouragement for potential editors in other counties although admittedly it is not cheap. In recent years county Record Societies have been busy with the returns to the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census so that all of Wales and about half of England have now been published with differing degrees of excellence. The equally interesting but more intractable meeting house licences have hardly been touched, except for Bedfordshire, Plymouth and Wiltshire. The 1851 Census was carried out at one time, to one plan, by one authority and the returns were collated and stored as one collection. The meeting house registrations brought together in this publication date from a period of more than a century and a half, resulted from various Acts, were issued by various authorities (both ecclesiastical and secular), were recorded on various pieces of paper (some of which were pre-printed forms with a variety of wording) and are now to be found in a variety of repositories.

The editor has shown a remarkable tenacity of purpose in locating and editing more than 700 registrations although she laments the irretrievable loss of many others. Her editorial policy has been to transcribe manuscript documents in full but extract details from pre-printed forms. This reviewer has a preference for a topographical approach, where records are listed under parishes and towns. Here, Lisa Spurrier adopts the traditional approach and arranges items, giving each a reference number, by date under the twelve issuing authorities, which included three Bishops, one Dean, and eight Quarter Sessions. This does emphasise one weakness of this publication, the index. The all embracing index extends breathlessly from page 205 to 260 but its uniform and unhelpful typeface makes it difficult to obtain an overview of any particular place. It would have been much better to transfer the local details from the main index to the cursory list of parishes.

What do we learn of Methodism in the Royal County? Again the index is deficient and incredibly the enquirer finds nothing whatsoever under 'Methodism' let alone 'Bible Christian'. But think laterally, look under 'Religious groups' and Methodist registrations of various persuasions are revealed - Bible Christian, Countess of Huntingdon, Independent, Methodist (undifferentiated) Primitive (many), Tent, Wesleyan (many), as well as the Methodist-related Cudworthians. Taking Berkshire's short-lived sole Bible Christian cause, Sunninghill 1836, as an example, the editor gives us a six-line footnote quoting the Conference and District minutes in the Methodist Archives in Manchester, a work of supererogation indeed. In her long introduction she states as fact, the disinformation that the Bible Christians 'started independently in Cornwall' but she must be applauded for her two pages on Pocock and the Tent Methodists, in which she draws attention to their registration of a field.

ROGER THORNE

Water from the Moors. The Life and Works of Joseph Foord. By Isabel Anne McLean. (Published by The North York Moors National Park Authority, 188 pp, A4 with many maps and illustrations. £17.95 plus £4 for Post and Packing. ISBN 1 904622 05 4. Order from the Old Vicarage, Bondgate, Helmsley, York YO62 5BP or www.moors.uk.net

This is a beautiful book, lovingly produced, with gorgeous maps of the southern slopes of the North York Moors. Half of it is about the engineering work involved in canalising water from the Moors to the farmsteads of the area and what remains of this today. The other half is about the families of Foord and Pilmore, closely related in several ways, and their two chief members, Joseph Foord of Skiplam, the watercourse engineer and agent for the Duncombe family of Helmsley, and his illegitimate son the Methodist itinerant preacher Joseph Pilmore. Pilmore was sent with Richard Boardman as the pioneer preachers to America in 1769. They were successful in establishing Methodism in Philadelphia and New York. Pilmore made a great journey right down to Georgia, establishing Methodism in the Southern United States. However, they had become unpopular with Wesley and were replaced by Rankin in 1773, returning to Britain in 1774.

Pilmore wanted to be ordained and to return to America as an Anglican clergyman, but failed to gain ordination. After two years when he did not travel, he travelled as a Methodist preacher again in the British Isles to 1784. At the end of the War of Independence he decided to return to America where he had many correspondents begging him to go back. Armed with a recommendation from Charles Wesley and informed that Asbury and the Methodists would not receive him, he was ordained by the new Anglican Bishop, Seabury, and settled as an Evangelical clergyman in Philadelphia and New York, not dying till 1823.

The book has 12 pages dealing with this in more detail, much of it new. It also has another 19 pages on Joseph Foord, nearly half of which concentrates on the birth of Pilmore. The author shows that Pilmore was born in 1743, not 1739 as he had said, that his mother Sarah indicated that Joseph Foord was the father, and the case was heard and proved by both the Quaker meeting to which Foord had belonged and the Consistory Court in York.

There are mistakes in dealing with Methodism, as when Coke is blamed for what happened in America before 1784. However, these are minor blemishes which do not mar the new information about Pilmore and his background. The genealogical and local research done to establish the background of the two families and fit in the discoveries made by the last biographer, Joseph Lockwood in the nineteenth century, is most impressive. Lockwood discovered the story of Pilmore's illegitimate birth but was begged not to publish it, which is why it did not appear in his book. Those interested in the North York Moors area or Pilmore and early Methodist preachers should obtain this well-illustrated book.

JOHN LENTON

'A warmed heart and a disciplined mind perfectly joined' Sister Dorothy Hincksman Farrar (1899-1987) and the evolution of women's ministry in Methodism by John A. Hargreaves. (Church in the Market Place Publications, Buxton (now Warrington), 2005, pp.41. £5. ISBN 899147 50 0)

Dr John Hargreaves' WHS lecture for 2005 gives a sympathetic and penetrating portrait of Dr Dorothy Farrar's contribution to the Wesley Deaconess Order, of which she became Vice-President in 1941, Vice-President of the Ilkley College in 1942, and to the wider ministry of women in the Methodist Church. She was a fine teacher of psychology, and is remembered for her teaching of and practice of prayer, devotion and preaching. Hargreaves details her background in Halifax and North-West Wesleyan bourgeois 'cousinhoods' with their strong emphasis on Overseas Missions, a change from the denigration of the Wesleyan middle-class. Sister Dorothy was the second woman Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 1952 and was the only Methodist woman on the Anglican-Methodist Conversations panel until 1963. She was to be disappointed by their failure and the cessation of recruitment to the Deaconess Order in 1978 - rescinded in 1986 just before her death with, earlier, the admission of women to the presbyterate and men to the Diaconal Order. This lecture - well illustrated with thirteen photographs - gives an insight into the heart of Methodist spirituality and ministry especially that of women, who probably always outnumbered men in Methodism, exercising more influence than is often realized as Callum Brown, and others have recently shown.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER

Edgworth to Crowthorn: the story of a Lancashire Children's Home by Anita D.Forth (Landy Publishing, 2005, 96pp. £8.00 ISBN 1 872895 69 7)

Edgworth lies on the Lancashire moors between Bolton and Blackburn and here in 1872 the first branch of the NCH was established in a former public house. The work continued until 2002. Mrs Forth worked at Crowthorn School between 1983 and 2001 and here tells the story from the beginning, making much use of personal recollections of staff and children. The most famous alumna is actress Shirley Ann Field. Copies may be had from 3 Staining Rise, Staining, Blackpool, FY3 OBU, post free if payment accompanies an order.

A new guide to John Wesley's Chapel, Bristol (the New Room) has recently been published. Profusely illustrated in colour, it serves as both guide and souvenir. Even those familiar with the building will learn much from Mark Topping's text. Copies, £3.50 are available from the New Room or MPH.

THE ANNUAL LECTURE

will be delivered in Nicolson Square Methodist Church, Edinburgh on
Monday 26 June 2006 at 7.30pm
by Dr Margaret Batty MA

Primitive Methodism in Scotland

Chairman : Dr John A. Vickers BA BD

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

* Please book with the General Secretary by 10 June, cost £2.50 per head.

TRAVEL DIRECTIONS

Nicolson Square is on the south side of Edinburgh. It is very close to the Edinburgh Festival Theatre and the Royal College of Surgeons and two minutes walk from the George Square site of the University of Edinburgh. It is 15 minutes walk from the east end of Princes Street, St Andrew Square bus station and Waverley Railway Station.

BUS TRAVEL FROM HERIOT WATT.

The No 25 bus is most direct. Total journey time is about one hour. The buses are every ten minutes. Change at West End and then take a No 3, 3, 3A, 31 or 33 bus to the Surgeons Hall. Nicolson Square is across the road.

There is limited parking in the church forecourt. After 6.30pm you can park on the street. For more information contact info@nic-square.org.uk.

JOHN RUSSELL RA

2006 marks the bicentenary of the death of this artist who was also a Methodist. He was born in Guildford, Surrey and the Guildford House Gallery is mounting an exhibition of his work 29 April - 22 July *John Russell RA : Royal Painter and Portraitist*, accompanied by a series of talks and events. On 28 June, Dr Antje Matthews, whose article will appear in the October *Proceedings*, will speak on "Worshipping God Through Nature: John Russell's extraordinary Scientific Work".

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Registrar: Rev Donald H. Ryan M. Th., 15 Foxlands Drive, Lloyd Hill, Penn,
Wolverhampton, WV4 5NB. Tel: 01902 335556

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs Jean Brown	Ludlow
Mrs Barbara Prosser	Vale of Glamorgan

DECEASED

Mr G John C Griffiths	Sandbach
Mr H Jack Haden	Stourbridge

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The Popular History of Methodism by John Telford. First published in 1897, Reprinted by professional copier 60 pages, paper back. £3.50 inclu' p/p from Methodist Books, 27 Riverside Close, Kingston upon Thames. KT1 2JG.

METHODIST BOOKS – bought and sold. Please send for lists enclosing SAE to 27 Riverside Close, Kingston Upon Thames, KT1 2JG.

WANTED by member to extend collection: early class tickets, all branches/countries. Those with a cartouche especially sought. Also wanted: Pew Rent and Admission to Communion Tickets or Tokens. Details to John Morgan, The Chambers, 110 Court Road, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2RZ.