



Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society



THE WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

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Cover Illustration:

Glück Rosenthal Calligraphic Portrait of John Wesley 2nd issue c.1860

Courtesy of the Trustees of Epworth Old Rectory

Note the missing line of text below the Bible and just above the wavy fringe

Demography and the Decline of British Methodism II: Fertility

Family size

Apart from the brief period of the operation of the Wesleyan Methodist Registry in Paternoster Row, London between 1818 and 1837,¹ the Methodist Church never maintained a central record of the births and baptisms of its members and adherents, and even statistics of baptism have only been collected connexionally since 1969. The incomplete survival of local registers (including the surrendered non-parochial registers to 1837),² spatial mobility on the part of Methodists, and the continuing preference of some Methodist parents for baptism of their children in the Church of England in the nineteenth century generally make it problematical to use Methodist baptismal registers for family reconstitution.³ So, alternative prosopographical techniques have to be deployed to investigate Methodist fertility.

In the case of the ministry, eighteenth-century Wesleyan preachers had 3.41 children each (making no allowance for under-recording), less than in the population as a whole, consequent upon delayed marriage, a tendency to marry women older than themselves, and repeated absences from home at night.⁴ By the second half of the nineteenth century, Methodist ministerial fertility was declining rapidly, and faster than in the wider society, according to data on completed family size from obituaries. For those marrying between 1880 and 1909, the mean number of children of Wesleyan and United Methodist ministers was 2.4 and of Primitive Methodist ones 2.2. Whereas Wesleyan itinerants who wed in 1870-99 had 2.8 children on average, the figure was 1.9 for 1900-29, the reduction being due to a modest increase in childless marriages but particularly to a large decrease in those begetting more than two children. Just over one-half of Primitive Methodist ministers marrying in 1860-89 and Wesleyans in 1870-99 had more than two children, but thirty years on in each case the proportion had fallen to one-quarter.⁵

Ministerial trends are shown in sharper relief by a contrasting methodology, based on a larger sample of Methodist who's who entries, which also avoids Brown's perplexing overlapping cohorts. This analysis (Table 1) deliberately terminates with preachers born in 1890, to maximize the chances of dealing with completed family size. This reveals that the fertility of Methodist preachers halved within 60 years, the Methodist mean of four for the birth cohort of the 1830s and 1840s comparing with an

¹ *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 11 (1917-18), 66-8, 163-4. The Registry's records are preserved at The National Archives, RG 5/162-207, with an index at RG 4/4677-4680.

² Listed in William Leary, *My Ancestors were Methodists* ([fourth] edition, London: Society of Genealogists, 2005), pp. 21-97.

³ For a case-study of two Victorian London chapels, see Clive Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London, 1850-1920' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), p. 292.

⁴ John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), p. 119.

⁵ Kenneth Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 180-2.

ultimate family size of six for the same birth decades in England and Wales, and the figure of two in 1871-90 contrasting with three nationally. The proportion of ministerial marriages which were childless rose from 8.5 per cent for those born in 1831-50 to 12.3 per cent in 1851-70 to 15.0 per cent in 1871-90; it ranged from 11.4 per cent for Wesleyan preachers to 15.3 per cent for United Methodists.⁶

Table 1 also deals with Methodist laymen, albeit the 'officer' elite. Lay fertility was somewhat higher than among ministers, but it too mostly halved during these 60 years and was consistently below the national norm of ultimate family size. The proportion of childless lay Methodist marriages rose from 9.6 per cent in 1831-50 to 14.9 per cent in 1871-90, figures which were likewise above countrywide averages (which grew from 8.3 to 11.3 per cent respectively). The halving of the number of children occurred in all three social classes which can be analysed, although, in line with national patterns, the fertility gap between the classes was not eroded. Methodists in routine non-manual or skilled manual occupations had families which were one-quarter larger than their co-religionists who were professionals or higher managers. This class fertility differential may help explain why Primitive Methodists, whose social profile was somewhat more diverse than the other traditions, had more children than other Methodist laymen. That said, the class fertility differential was not especially pronounced in a sample of Methodist local preachers in 1934, whose mean family size fell from 3.61 for those born in the 1840s and 1850s to 2.51 in the 1870s and 1880s, with childless marriages at 15.1 per cent for those born during the latter decades.⁷

A partial drawback of all the foregoing data on family size is that they have related to men. One of the first studies to measure the fertility of married female Methodists was by Burton in two Wolverhampton churches in the early 1960s. Of the 140 then aged 50 and over, 15.0 per cent were childless, 27.1 per cent had one child, 42.9 per cent two children, and 15.0 per cent three or more. Unfortunately, his previous cohort (30-49) was too broad to be meaningful, being likely to include several incomplete families.⁸

The same consideration needs to be borne in mind in viewing Table 2, which relates to married and formerly married women aged 20 and over attending Methodist churches in England on 29 April 2001. On the face of it, this demonstrates that the mean family size was 1.91, peaking at 2.02 for females aged 40-79 (born between 1922 and 1961), whose families can be assumed to be, in large measure, complete. The average of 1.57 for those in their twenties and thirties would probably have eventually been a little higher, as some may have given birth until their early forties. The similar mean of 1.57 for women Methodists aged 80 and over is puzzling at first sight and is probably partially explained by the fact that the relevant question was

⁶ Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London', p. 286.

⁷ Clive Field, 'The Methodist local preacher', in Geoffrey Milburn and Margaret Batty (eds), *Workaday Preachers* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995), p. 241 and new analysis of the underlying data.

⁸ Lewis Burton, 'The Social Stratification of two Methodist Churches in the Midlands' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1972), pp. 123, 127.

answered in terms of children still living at the time of the survey, some inevitably having predeceased their mothers. However, there is also a strong suspicion that human error occurred when the data were coded, a zero apparently being used both for cases where a woman recorded no children and where no reply was given. This mistake will have artificially depressed all the mean figures to an unknown extent.

Taking the cohorts from 40 to 79 as the most robust indicators of completed family size in 2001, it is interesting to note that married female Methodists had exactly the same number of children (2.02) as Salvation Army worshippers in this age bracket and nearly the same as the United Reformed Church (2.03), but rather fewer than the Anglicans (2.09) and the Baptists (2.19). National comparisons are best made in terms of all Methodist women between 40 and 79, whether married or not. They had an average of 1.86 children each when surveyed in 2001, which was well below the figure for all women in England and Wales born between 1922 and 1961. The secular peak during this period was 2.42 live births per woman in 1934-35, and not until 1958 did it fall below 2.00. Childless female Methodists constituted 19.4 per cent, in excess of all English and Welsh women born in 1922-61, but the proportion will be artificially inflated by the coding problem described above. If childless women are removed from the analysis entirely, then the mean number of children of female Methodists aged 40-79 would rise to 2.31. This would be an overestimate, with the true figure perhaps between 1.95 and 2.00.⁹

Family limitation – to 1932

Conscious efforts at family limitation are likely to be the principal explanation for declining fertility among Methodists. It has long been recognized that ‘it was among the Nonconformist Churches that a more broadly-based move developed in favour of birth control’, partly because of ‘their greater emphasis on freedom of individual conscience’.¹⁰ It also reflected the concentration of Free Church members and adherents in middling social groups known to have been in the vanguard of adopting family limitation, although it was suspected in 1916 that this mostly extended to ‘the voluntary moral control of all natural functions’, with Nonconformists resistant to ‘the use of all mechanical or chemical means of prevention’.¹¹ A hostile observer in 1923 suggested that Nonconformists ‘almost invariably’ practised birth control but preferred to remain silent on the subject, because they cared more about combating sin (which birth control was seen as likely to increase) than alleviating human suffering.¹² Certainly, any opposition progressively weakened throughout the twentieth century, when various national surveys sought to chart the effects of religious affiliation on birth control practices. For instance, a study of married women in 1954 discovered

⁹ See http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/cohort-fertility.xls for English and Welsh comparative data.

¹⁰ Flann Campbell, ‘Birth control and the Christian Churches’, *Population Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (November, 1960), 133.

¹¹ National Birth-Rate Commission, *The Declining Birth-Rate* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1916), pp. 66-7.

¹² *New Generation*, vol. 2, no. 12 (December, 1923), 137.

four-fifths of Nonconformists were taking birth control precautions,¹³ while childbearing was found to start later with women born in 1946 brought up as Nonconformists than among Anglicans, Roman Catholics or those of no religion.¹⁴

Unfortunately, such surveys do not differentiate Methodists, for whom the historical and contemporary evidence base is therefore more circumstantial and qualitative. Throughout the long nineteenth century, it was rare for sexual relationships in general to be openly discussed in Methodist circles, although the Wesleyans curiously brought out in 1790 a second edition of a Jacobean marriage manual, which included a warning against over-indulgence of sexual desires.¹⁵ Procreation was always stated in the Methodist literature to be the first design of marriage, under Providence, and some publications even explicitly promoted the advantages of large families, albeit the health and economic burdens they imposed were sometimes complained of.¹⁶

One such complaint, which let the Methodist cat out of the bag, was in 1893, when an unidentified Methodist minister's wife sent a letter to the editor of the *Christian World*, the influential Nonconformist weekly, lamenting her fate. She was weighed down and worn out, physically and emotionally, with caring for six children (five of whom were under ten), born over a twelve-year marriage, as well as for an aged relative, and without any servant to help or adequate financial means. Her letter generated a correspondence in subsequent issues, including the suggestion from one reader that the minister and his wife practice continence. The wife retorted with a diatribe against 'man's innate, untutored, sexual selfishness':

Were it left to a wife there would be very few overgrown families. The most fervent prayer of many a worthy woman's heart . . . has been "God grant that I may have no more children", and God has not heard it. No. He had no business to. Just as soon pray for a drink of water when the water was in the kitchen . . . But a wife's lips are sealed. Rather would she suffer and work . . . to the day of her death, than she would say the word that, according to the conjugal code, would stamp her as unwomanly, and brand her as an abnormal creation . . . and perhaps be the means of lessening the love of him which she prizes more than anything else on earth.

A second ministerial wife noted 'signs among thoughtful Christians which indicate that the large families which heretofore were reasons for pity and consideration are not the recommendations they once were', claiming to be taking 'careful regulations' herself. A third ministerial wife also advocated 'methodical organisation' as a means of reducing life's difficulties; she had just three children. Summing up, the

¹³ Eustace Chesser, *The Sexual, Marital and Family Relationships of the English Woman* (London: Hutchinson's Medical Publications, 1956), p. 269.

¹⁴ Kathleen Kiernan and Ian Diamond, 'The age at which childbearing starts', *Population Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3 (November, 1983), 366-7.

¹⁵ William Whately, *Directions for Married Persons* (second edition, London: printed and sold at the New-Chapel, City-Road, 1790), p. 13.

¹⁶ Jacqueline Williams, 'Methodist Families, c. 1850-1932' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2003), pp. 60-5.

newspaper's editor, James Clarke (a Congregationalist), observed that increasing numbers of Christians were questioning whether family limitation really was such an interference with the workings of Providence as had formerly been imagined, the reasoning now being that Providence operated through an individual's common sense. Clarke agreed with this interpretation and argued that couples had both a right and a duty to restrict their family size by observing basic physiological laws.¹⁷

The controversialist Wesleyan minister, Frank Ballard, concurred, but went further and from rather different motivations. He was perturbed about the consequences of rapid population growth and chided religion for ignoring Malthusian realities. In an oblique reference to the widespread condemnation of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant for their advocacy of birth control, he asked: 'Has Christianity nothing to do but to hound down the unbeliever who bravely dares to face facts which believers know and hide?'¹⁸ Exemplifying this hostility were the Wesleyan parents of Stella Davies, for whom birth control was 'an impious indecency', and who had fifteen children in twenty years as a consequence.¹⁹ However, the prevailing anxiety in the opening decades of the twentieth century was about the *declining* birth-rate, which William Lofthouse, ministerial secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service, characterized as 'an undoubted evil', urging the need to develop a climate of public opinion in favour of moderately-sized rather than small families. Denouncing 'selfish childlessness', his concern was as much qualitative as quantitative, since it was among the 'better classes', he judged, that the fertility decline was greatest, precisely those on whom the nation depended for its wealth and family-building. The very poor, by contrast, were multiplying too fast, since they had little relaxation apart from drink and sex.²⁰

Lofthouse gave written and oral evidence to the National Birth-Rate Commission in 1916, but his position was not entirely consistent under questioning by the Commission's members. While accepting that sex was not inherently sinful, and that it was legitimate to derive pleasure from it within marriage, he was anxious that reliance upon 'preventive checks' might 'interfere with the Christian's filial trust in God' and frustrate 'what God may intend to come about, as well as what the state clearly needs, viz. the production of children of good parents who will grow up in a good home.' Should housing and economic conditions make family limitation desirable, he contended, it should usually be exercised through continence, the safe period or faith in Providence. Although he did not entirely exclude the use of contraceptive devices under all circumstances, he deemed most mechanical means unsafe to the wife and proclaimed self-control as the Christian ideal. At the same time, he did not consider it appropriate for the Church to be unduly prescriptive about birth control, he declined to take on the mantle of 'a spiritual director' himself, and his sense was that, if anybody

¹⁷ *Christian World*, 1, 8 and 15 June 1893.

¹⁸ Frank Ballard, *The Mission of Christianity* (London: Elliot Stock, 1891), pp. v, 30-2.

¹⁹ Stella Davies, *North Country Bred* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 52, 101.

²⁰ William Lofthouse, *Ethics and the Family* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), pp. 198-200, 211; Lofthouse, *Declining Birth-Rate*, pp. 374-6.

sought advice from the local minister, 'very little guidance would be given'.²¹ Lofthouse had still failed to come off this fence a few years later when, as chairman of the COPEC Commission on the Relation of the Sexes in 1924, he set his face against mediating 'a spurious compromise' between the churches on the contested matter of conception-control within marriage and simply rehearsed the competing arguments.²²

Lofthouse's apparent ambivalence was perhaps symptomatic of the often considerable reluctance to tackle sexual questions more generally in Methodism. As Lofthouse wrote with his wife in 1920, 'organized religion still maintains an obstinate silence on the whole subject, and most church members seem to prefer to keep it out of sight'.²³ One Methodist New Connexion minister believed that teaching on the physical aspects of sex should be 'occasional', targeted at boys and young men and, above all, be 'tactful',²⁴ while it was the proud boast of another that he had neither received sex education at home or school, nor given any in his life.²⁵ As late as 1930, a Wesleyan minister published a manual on love, courtship and marriage which entirely failed to address the sexual dimension.²⁶ This reticence partly stemmed from a conviction that sex was a personal matter and unsuitable for public discussion, but it was also driven, particularly after the First World War, by a sense that British society was becoming 'oversexed'. It is interesting that, during the so-called 'psychoanalytic craze' of the 1920s, Sigmund Freud's sexual theories, and explicit sexual descriptions, received comparatively little exposure in Methodist newspapers, periodicals and books, with such coverage as there was being critical and dubious about their scientific validity.²⁷

Specifically on birth control, the occasional Methodist utterances of the 1920s were largely negative. Thus, the Wesleyan Conference of 1921 denounced chemical methods of contraception, because they undermined chastity and facilitated the spread of venereal diseases.²⁸ A Wesleyan student at Westminster College in 1922-24 recalled that a best-selling book on sexual questions by Herbert Gray, a Presbyterian minister (but coincidentally educated at the Wesleyan Leys School), 'was at that time far in advance of the thinking of the Methodist Church' in advocating birth control.²⁹ William Younger, Primitive Methodist minister, implicitly rejected contraception in attacking the selfishness of 'large numbers of women' who put domestic comfort and 'the satisfaction of an esthetic animalism' above their duty to contribute 'to the

²¹ *Declining Birth-Rate*, pp. 372-81.

²² Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC), *The Relation of the Sexes* (London: Longmans, Green, 1924), pp. 150-62.

²³ Kate and William Lofthouse, *Purity and Racial Health* (London: Epworth Press, 1920), p. 77.

²⁴ William Townsend, 'The duty of the Free Churches in relation to morals', in James Marchant (ed.), *Public Morals* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1903), p. 37.

²⁵ Stafford Dabill, *The Man at the Keyhole* (Twynford: Patray Publications, 1975), p. 26.

²⁶ Henry Bodgener, *Love, Courtship & Marriage* (London: C. W. Daniel Company, 1930).

²⁷ Dean Rapp, 'The reception of Freudianism by British Methodists during the "psychoanalytic craze" of the 1920s', *Fides et Historia*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 23-46.

²⁸ Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Minutes of Conference*, 1921, p. 58.

²⁹ Ronald Gould, *Chalk up the Memory* (Birmingham: George Philip Alexander, 1976), p. 28.

maintenance and increase of the population'.³⁰ The Wesleyan economist, Josiah Stamp, lamented the inability of the churches to agree a Christian ethic of birth control, as well as the failure of a special committee on birth control of the National Council of Public Morals to draft even an interim ethic.³¹ Lofthouse and Arthur Newsholme, the prominent Wesleyan doctor, had been members of this special committee and Newsholme was also vice-chairman of its medical committee.³²

However, another Wesleyan layman, Harold Bellman, pioneer of building societies, regarded the churches' preoccupation with birth control as a diversion from the (for him) key issue, the slum housing conditions which were a major cause of infant mortality.³³ Likewise, although personally in favour of contraception, the Wesleyan politician, Arthur Henderson, felt it necessary in 1927 to overturn a Labour Party Conference resolution in favour of instruction about it being given at state-funded clinics because it would be contrary to the religious convictions of many Party members.³⁴ A Congregational minister, delivering the Wesleyan Beckly Social Service Lecture two years later, was only prepared to countenance the use of artificial means of contraception for medical reasons, otherwise urging self-control by married couples and warning that 'without it the physical side of marriage easily degenerates into mere animality'.³⁵ Ensor Walters, a Wesleyan preacher, took an even tougher stance, declaring that 'the use of contraceptives, under any circumstances, is against the law of nature and of God and against Christian belief and tradition'. He rounded on those 'who claim to represent science; who would strip marriage of its mystic glory; and who speak of the sacred relationship in holy matrimony in language more befitting a stockyard'.³⁶

Family limitation – after 1932

Therefore, until the 1930s, Methodists who practised family limitation generally struggled to find official or unofficial sanction for their acts, although a few isolated ministers evidently tried to mediate some advice for their female congregants from

³⁰ William Younger, *The International Value of Christian Ethics* (London: Holborn Publishing House, 1924), pp. 162-4.

³¹ Josiah Stamp, *The Christian Ethic as an Economic Factor* (London: Epworth Press, [1926]), p. 31.

³² National Council of Public Morals, *The Ethics of Birth Control* (London: Macmillan, 1925) and *Medical Aspects of Contraception* (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1927). The former includes (pp. 34-7) remarks by Lofthouse on the history of contraception. Newsholme's role in these investigations is not covered in the standard biography: John Eyler, *Sir Arthur Newsholme and State Medicine, 1885-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Newsholme had also been a member of the National Birth-Rate Commission in 1916 but is not listed as a signatory of its report.

³³ Harold Bellman, *The Silent Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1928), pp. 55-6.

³⁴ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson* (London: Heinemann, 1938), pp. 268-70.

³⁵ William Selbie, *The Christian Ethic in the Individual, the Family and the State* (London: Epworth Press, 1929), pp. 52-7.

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Sixth Ecumenical Methodist Conference . . . 1931* (London: Epworth Press, [1932]), p. 383.

Marie Stopes and the Society for Constructive Birth Control.³⁷ The situation changed dramatically in October 1931 with the publication of Leslie Weatherhead's *The Mastery of Sex*, written with the assistance (on physiological matters) of a medical doctor, Marion Greaves.³⁸ Lofthouse had read the work in typescript and in proof, making various suggestions (which were largely taken up), and also contributed an epilogue, praising the book's 'sanity' while setting great store by self-control.³⁹ Weatherhead was a Wesleyan minister, then aged 38 and stationed in Leeds, who had increasingly been studying psychology and applying it to his ministry. He was one of the few Methodist popularizers of Freud's sexual theories, although he unequivocally rejected permissiveness in favour of chastity before marriage and fidelity within it,⁴⁰ a position which in later life drove him to burn a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and refuse to be an expert witness for the defence when Penguin Books were prosecuted for obscenity.⁴¹

The Mastery of Sex was a direct response to Weatherhead's psychological counselling work and to his discovery that four-fifths of his patients were in difficulties which derived originally from sex. According to his son, Weatherhead's core purpose was 'to disinfect the whole subject of the guilt, fear, and horror that have traditionally attended it'; to stress that sexual desire arose from God-given instincts in human nature; and to improve the quality of sex education, ignorance being especially prevalent among religious people.⁴² Weatherhead underlined the therapeutic and emotional value of regular coitus within marriage and poured scorn on invocations to self-restraint: 'Continence outside marriage is a very different thing from abstinence when, night after night, propinquity stimulates passionate desire which is unexpressed. It is one thing to do without food when in a desert. To be taken to the grill-room where desire is stimulated unbearably and still not be allowed food is a form of torture'. Provided that a doctor was consulted in advance, he could see 'no prohibitive physical, psychological or spiritual reason why birth control devices should not be used by married people who feel the need of expressing their love physically and yet who do not desire the birth of children'.⁴³

The Mastery of Sex was an instant success, with eight British editions by 1938, sixteen by 1947, and nineteen by 1964. The first American edition appeared in 1932, and there were translations into several foreign languages, albeit the work was initially banned in the Irish Free State. Predictably, Methodist reactions to the book, as reflected in published reviews and private correspondence with the author, were

³⁷ Richard Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 240, 351.

³⁸ Leslie Weatherhead, *The Mastery of Sex through Psychology and Religion* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. xxiii, 247-9.

⁴⁰ Rapp, 'Reception', pp. 29-31.

⁴¹ Kingsley Weatherhead, *Leslie Weatherhead* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), pp. 210-11; John Travell, *Doctor of Souls* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1999), pp. 69-70.

⁴² Weatherhead, *Leslie Weatherhead*, pp. 93-6.

⁴³ Weatherhead, *Mastery of Sex*, pp. 91-102.

mixed. It had doubtless been in anticipation of this that the board of management of the Epworth Press, the Wesleyan connexional imprint and Weatherhead's usual publisher, had effectively and strenuously declined to handle the work, at its meeting on 23 June 1931, after protracted correspondence between the author and Alfred Sharp, the book steward.⁴⁴ It was brought out instead by the Student Christian Movement.

Eric Waterhouse, Wesleyan minister and reviewer of *The Mastery of Sex* for the *Methodist Times*, openly questioned the 'desirability of an utterly frank and outspoken discussion of the most fundamental intimacies of life being broadcast to all and sundry'. While conceding it might benefit engaged couples, he anticipated much harm arising if adolescents got hold of it. The review elicited a response from Weatherhead: 'I am not so foolish as to suppose that frankness is without any dangers at all . . . But these are not nearly so serious as those incurred by ignorance, and they never bring neurosis. Further, the hush-hush merchants have had their way for several hundred years. Let us give a new way a trial . . .'

Another *Methodist Times* correspondent, Joshua Sinfield (a Scarborough Wesleyan layman), sided with Waterhouse. He 'deeply deplored' the work, noting: 'There is much in the book that surely cannot be considered as the accepted views of the leaders of the Methodist Church'. In the *Methodist Recorder* the substantive review, by Wesleyan minister Arundel Chapman, was positive, but fellow preacher Alfred Costain found the subject distasteful ('I am not among those who believe that there is virtue in much talking on these things'), albeit he accepted that Weatherhead had handled a difficult topic in a masterly fashion. One of Weatherhead's severest critics was the patriarchal Wesleyan minister Scott Lidgett, long opposed to the use of prophylactics among the civilian population even to control the spread of venereal disease.⁴⁵ He thought the volume verged on indecency and went on to lead the successful campaign by the Methodist 'establishment' at the 1936 Conference to prevent Weatherhead being stationed to Wesley's Chapel, London.⁴⁶

Notwithstanding the hostility of conservative Wesleyan leaders, there can be little doubt that rank-and-file Methodists, especially the young, were reading *The Mastery of Sex* in large numbers. This put pressure on the Methodist Church's Temperance and Social Welfare Department and the Methodist Conference to address the issues raised in the book. The breakthrough came in 1939 when Conference adopted *A Declaration of the Methodist Church on the Christian View of Marriage and the Family*, following consideration of a draft in 1938 and its subsequent referral to a special committee representing the General Purposes Committee, the Methodist Missionary Society and the Temperance and Social Welfare Department, and to the Committee on Divorce

⁴⁴ John Rylands University Library [JRUL], MAW MS 648, Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Book Room Committee, 1911-32, p. 252; Travell, *Doctor of Souls*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 16 September 1920.

⁴⁶ Travell, *Doctor of Souls*, pp. 66-70; Alan Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003), p. 351.

and the Remarriage of Divorced Persons.⁴⁷ The declaration affirmed that sex was 'part of the Divine order of nature' but should be confined to marriage. It placed a responsibility on Methodist ministers to guide couples contemplating marriage on sources of advice and information about its physical aspects. Parenthood was one of the two chief ends of married life, and the 'normal home' would be incomplete without children. The declining birth-rate remained a concern, and 'the refusal of parenthood and the limitation of families, from whatever motives, have been carried to a point where they have become perilous to the community, and defeat the purpose of marriage to the maintenance of the race'. On the other hand, 'the obligations of parenthood are . . . to be undertaken deliberately, and with forethought. Careless, improvident and undesigned begetting of children is entirely to be deprecated as wrongful to children and injurious to the social order'.

In this way, the Methodist Church had clearly sanctioned the principle of moderate family limitation. It also, effectively, gave the green light to the use of contraception, despite its professed inability to pass 'an unqualified judgment' on its advantages and disadvantages and on the conflicting views about its use. It acknowledged that 'many Christians' found artificial means to prevent conception 'deeply repugnant' and 'contrary to nature and to the spirit of the Christian religion'; they preferred abstinence. Yet it recognized that 'other Christians . . . believe that something is lacking in marriage, even as a spiritual union, when it is deprived of all physical intercourse'. 'They think that conception-control may be a gift of God, through science, for the better performance of the function of parenthood, and so for the good of the race'. Ultimately, the Church said, it was for 'the individual conscience in the sight of God' to decide what to do, in the light of moral and spiritual factors. Nevertheless, while contraception would be deplorable if it 'develops a sensual habit of mind and impairs self-control', it 'commends itself . . . to the Christian judgment when it is associated . . . with the positive aim of producing the healthiest family in the healthiest possible way'. Proper medical advice should be sought about birth control, and the state should make that advice available to all, as well as bringing the advertisement and sale of contraceptives under effective regulation.⁴⁸ The Church concluded that: 'The use of a contraceptive method can only be justified if the marriage bond and married love are thereby truly honoured and not debased, if the obligation to parenthood is the better fulfilled and not evaded, if family life is enriched and not impoverished, and if increase and not diminution of good comes to society'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ JRUL, MA 189, Minutes of the Methodist Church Moral Welfare Standing Committee, 1936-66 [hereafter Moral Welfare Minutes], 26 October 1938; *Methodist Church Conference Agenda* [hereafter *Agenda*], Representative Session [RS], 1938, pp. 393-410; 1939, pp. 477-95.

⁴⁸ A reference to the Contraception (Regulation) Bill 1938, which the Methodist Church had supported but which was talked out in Parliament; Moral Welfare Minutes, 23 November 1938, 25 January 1939.

⁴⁹ *A Declaration of the Methodist Church on the Christian View of Marriage and the Family* (London: Methodist Church Temperance & Social Welfare Department, [1939]), pp. 5-7, 19-20, 23-8. Summarized in George Thompson Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932-1982* (London: Edsall, 1984), pp. 456-9.

The declaration was carried in Conference by an overwhelming vote, albeit not without a lively debate. The implicit acceptance of, or at least connivance in, birth control was particularly controversial for some delegates. George Hicks, ex-United Methodist minister, claimed 'the use of contraceptives was rebellion against God'. He accused proponents of the declaration of condoning 'the way of marital life in which men lived for pleasure and not for procreation', and he feared Roman Catholics would seize upon it as proof that Methodism was not a true church. James Lewis, an ex-Wesleyan minister, also anticipated potentially adverse consequences for Methodist-Catholic relations; he urged self-denial and said such questions should simply not be talked about openly. But Ronald Spivey, ex-Primitive Methodist minister, and Mrs Emily Rattenbury advanced the needs of Methodist youth, who wanted such issues discussed.⁵⁰ They said that 'quite a number of our young people were regarding personal relations between the sexes with much greater freedom than most of them [Conference delegates] would care to believe', and that it was necessary to 'bring those matters out into a place where the light of God could illuminate them'. Summing up, Clifford Urwin, ex-United Methodist minister and Secretary of the Temperance and Social Welfare Department, argued that many sensitive Christians were looking to the Church to give a lead and that, if it promulgated a declaration on marriage without dealing with contraception, it would be accused of evasion.⁵¹

Urwin elaborated his thinking in a book five years later. Notwithstanding his conviction that 'the sex interest tends to run riot' in wartime Britain, a concern which had prompted Conference to pass a special resolution in 1943, highlighting in particular 'the peril attaching to the use of prophylactics as provided by medical authority in the Forces',⁵² Urwin was not anti-sex. Indeed, he regarded sexual intercourse between husband and wife as 'one of the greatest joys and richest experiences which marriage can provide' and as having 'its own independent validity, quite apart from child-bearing'. 'Profligate and irresponsible parenthood is always to be condemned, and the bringing of "unwanted" children into the world can never be justified'. Although Christians remained divided about the use of artificial means of contraception, Urwin saw the balance of argument in their favour, as a route for lessening the nervous strain caused by abstinence, avoiding the exhaustion of frequent pregnancies, and ensuring 'offspring are produced under conditions most favourable to health and strength'.⁵³

Another wartime Methodist ministerial advocate of birth control was David Mace, the ex-Wesleyan who helped found the National Marriage Guidance Council in 1938 and later became its first general secretary and director. He took a less cautious line than Urwin, dismissing the case for sexual restraint within marriage. 'To regard sex as a means of procreation only is a totally false and inadequate conception of its

⁵⁰ Unsurprising, perhaps, given that a connexional youth manual was telling them: 'make no mistake: sex is both beautiful and good'. Stanley Frost, *The Pattern of Methodism* (London: Methodist Youth Department, 1938), p. 91.

⁵¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 27 July 1939.

⁵² *Agenda*, RS, 1943, pp. 224-5; *Methodist Church Minutes of Conference*, 1943, p. 51.

⁵³ Clifford Urwin, *Can the Family Survive?* (London: SCM Press, 1944), pp. 20, 52, 60-1, 68-71.

function', he wrote in 1944. 'It is in itself a source of refreshment, a reward which sweetens the duties and disciplines of marriage and family life, a kind of lubricant which keeps the whole relationship working smoothly'. Rejecting as objectionable and unreliable both *coitus interruptus* and the safe period, he strongly advocated scientific contraception, although he regretted it was sometimes employed by single people to circumvent marriage and by married couples to avoid having any children, rather than planning their families.⁵⁴ He expanded his views nine years later, in a book for Methodism's Epworth Press. While asserting the primacy of parenthood, he condemned as 'a false and mischievous distortion of Christian truth' the notion that marital sex was only right when its purpose was procreative. While upholding the freedom of Christian conscience with regard to the use or non-use of birth control, he noted 'most Protestants . . . welcome contraception as a means by which they can plan their families and yet continue to enjoy fully the blessings of their sex life'.⁵⁵

Mace left the British Methodist ministry in 1948 and emigrated to the United States in 1949, the year in which Epworth Press brought out two titles for those about to marry, both written by Methodist ministers. The first, a pamphlet by Richard Waugh, made only passing reference to contraception by way of a nod towards the 1939 Conference declaration. Rather, it warned against family limitation as 'a disguised form of selfishness'; voluntarily childless marriages (said to be against 'God's will') and those which begat only one child were frowned upon.⁵⁶ The second publication, a little book by Douglas Thompson, while agreeing with Waugh upon the necessity for couples to have children, openly dismissed marital abstinence and advocated 'some form of modern contraception'. Children should be born 'by acts of will, not chance, using our intelligence, considering our economic strength, planning the time of their arrival in our family history, with due regard to the bodily and mental rhythm of both parties'. Contraception achieved these goals and also left 'sex-functioning free to serve the other psychological needs'.⁵⁷

During the 1950s and 1960s Kenneth Greet was the champion of sexual ethics in Methodism, from his position as a Secretary in the Church's Christian Citizenship Department between 1954 and 1972. His 'conversion' to family planning probably came when, as 'a very young fellow', perhaps in the late 1930s or early 1940s, he had been discreetly given a copy of *Married Love* by Stopes.⁵⁸ About the time of taking up office in the Department, Greet's assessment was that, subsequent to the 1939 Conference declaration, both the principle of family planning and the use of contraception had become widely accepted and practised among Methodists.⁵⁹ Certainly, by then, anecdotal evidence can be found of an unrepressed attitude to sex among Methodist youth (such as the 20-year-old Nottingham Methodist youth leader

⁵⁴ David Mace, *Does Sex Morality Matter?* (London: Rich and Cowan, [1944]), pp. 102-9.

⁵⁵ David Mace, *Whom God Hath Joined* (London: Epworth Press, 1953), pp. 16-20, 45-8.

⁵⁶ Richard Waugh, *Preparation for Marriage* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), pp. 14-16.

⁵⁷ Douglas Thompson, *About to Marry* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), pp. 53-7, (second edition, London: Epworth Press, 1957), pp. 63-5.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Greet, *Guide to Loving* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 100.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Greet, 'A Methodist looks at the F.P.A.', *Family Planning*, vol. 5, no. 1 (April, 1956), 15.

interviewed by Mass-Observation in 1949),⁶⁰ and of Methodist ministers recommending birth control to engaged couples.⁶¹

Greet himself was a strong supporter of the Family Planning Association (FPA), which had been formed in 1930 and adopted the FPA name in 1939, but whose work was apparently not formally commended by the Methodist Church Moral Welfare Committee until 1950.⁶² Active links between the Church and the FPA were first forged in 1955. Greet was a member of the FPA's executive committee from 1956 to 1964, and he promoted the FPA at every level of the Church, including connexionally through Conference, Women's Fellowship and the *Methodist Recorder*. He saw it as incumbent on the Christian Citizenship Department to give 'wise teaching about the stewardship of sex and the importance of method and plan in our whole approach to family responsibilities'.⁶³ His published writings (one of them, *Man and Wife Together*, with a commendatory foreword by Weatherhead) were sensitive to the feelings of Methodists who continued to entertain moral objections to artificial birth control but left his readers in no doubt of his own approval of them. Indeed, for him, family regulation was 'a duty' and contraception 'a dire necessity' if the human race was to be saved from the threat to its survival presented by the population explosion. Parenthood was integral to marriage ('those who put television sets and motor cars before babies will probably live to regret it'), but it was simply 'wrong for married people to have more children than they can properly care for'.⁶⁴

In 1961 Greet was instrumental in securing Conference's approval, apparently with no dissentient voices, to the revision of section VI (on parenthood and family planning) of the 1939 declaration. This had become 'out of line with contemporary Christian judgment' in two major respects, in that, in the interim, the concern had shifted from a declining birth-rate to the dangers of global over-population, and that Methodist attitudes to contraception had become much more positive. The new wording reflected these changes. While reaffirming that children should be the norm in marriage, it was stated without qualification that 'the principle of family planning . . . commends itself to the Christian conscience', and that the Methodist Church believed that contraceptive methods were entirely permissible, provided they were acceptable to both husband and wife and caused neither physical nor emotional harm: 'there is no moral distinction between the practice of continence and the use of estimated periods of infertility, or of artificial barriers to the meeting of sperm and ovum, or, indeed, of drugs which would, if made effective and safe, inhibit or control

⁶⁰ Liz Stanley, *Sex Surveyed, 1949-1994* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995), p. 159.

⁶¹ Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 151.

⁶² Moral Welfare Minutes, 17 January 1950.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 22 March, 16 May, 19 October, 29 November 1955, 15 May 1956; Greet, 'Methodist looks at the F.P.A.', 15-16; Margaret Kabell, 'The Family Planning Association', *Christian Citizen*, vol. 8, no. 4 (July, 1955), 11-12; Audrey Leathard, *The Fight for Family Planning* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 95; Kenneth Greet, *Fully Connected* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1997), p. 57.

⁶⁴ Kenneth Greet, *Man and Wife Together* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), pp. 34, 37-45; *The Mutual Society* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 111-14, *Guide to Loving*, pp. 97-114; 'Introduction', in *Some Religious Views on Contraception* (London: London Foundation for Marriage Education, [1965]), p. 5.

ovulation in a calculable way'. Furthermore, 'contraception can assist both the relational and the procreative ends of marriage by promoting marital harmony and enabling parents to space their children'.⁶⁵ However, abortion was strongly condemned as a retrospective means of family limitation, as it had been in 1939 and was to be in subsequent statements such as in 1976.⁶⁶

The 1961 declaration contrasted starkly with the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to artificial birth control, as set out in the 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae vitae*. The latter upset many individual Methodists, not least the minister Donald Soper, who condemned it as 'a piece of masculine arrogance masquerading not only as spiritual insight but as divine authority'.⁶⁷ The Christian Citizenship Department issued a statement to say that it had been 'profoundly disappointed' by the encyclical, characterizing its theological foundations as 'dubious'.⁶⁸ The Methodist Church continued to discuss many facets of human sexuality in the ensuing decades, notably homosexuality, and, after protracted consideration (Conference had commissioned it in 1980), it adopted a new declaration on *A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage* in 1992. Although contraception was not one of its main eventual preoccupations, preparatory reports reaffirmed that it was 'a welcome means towards fulfilment in marriage'.⁶⁹ Responsible family limitation within marriage was no longer a matter for debate. As Methodist minister Richard Jones observed in 1979: 'Steadily there has emerged a Protestant consensus that the procreative capacity of marriage must be seen as secondary to the unitive purpose of the married relation. From this has followed an acceptance of contraception as normal practice within responsible Christian marriage'.⁷⁰ Geoffrey Fletcher, a sector Methodist minister at the National Marriage Guidance Council, expressed the point even more bluntly in 1984: 'Most sexual activity is not intended to produce children, it is a kind of body language by means of which a couple can express their enjoyment of each other'.⁷¹

Conclusion

The evidence in parts I and II is admittedly fragmentary and imperfect, but it provides partial support for the hypothesis that reproduction, or the comparative lack thereof, may have been a contributory cause of Methodist decline in the twentieth century. Taking limited evangelistic success and inter-generational leakage into

⁶⁵ Moral Welfare Minutes, 1 December 1960, 2 February, 23 March, 17 May, 17 October 1961; *Agenda*, RS, 1961, pp. 498, 510-13; Methodist Church, *Declarations of Conference on Social Questions* (second edition, London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 111-15; Greet, *Mutual Society*, pp. 113-14 and 'The Methodist Church attitude', in *Some Religious Views on Contraception*, pp. 18-20; Brake, *Policy and Politics*, pp. 459-60. The FPA had 5,000 copies of the 1961 declaration printed for its staff.

⁶⁶ Methodist Church, *Statements on Social Responsibility, 1946-1995* (London: Methodist Church Division of Social Responsibility, 1995), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Mark Peel, *The Last Wesleyan* (Lancaster: Scotforth Books, 2008), pp. 226-7.

⁶⁸ *Agenda*, RS, 1969, pp. 90-1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1979, p. 141; 1980, p. 121; 1989, pp. 229-30.

⁷⁰ Richard Jones, 'Recent books about marriage', *Epworth Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January, 1979), 104.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Fletcher, *Preparing to Marry* (Rugby: National Marriage Guidance Council, 1984), p. 15.

account, Methodists may simply have had too few children to renew the Church's membership and, especially, to compensate for natural losses through death. If this were the case, the causes did not lie in avoidance of marriage; on the contrary, Methodism has probably been a relative haven for the married and once-married, even discounting the progressive ageing of Methodist congregations since the Second World War. Rather the explanation is perhaps to be sought in deferred ages of marriage, especially on the part of Methodist brides, which have impacted negatively on their fertility; and, more importantly, in the increasing adoption of family limitation. The latter can be traced in Methodism from the final quarter of the nineteenth century, when it probably only involved abstinence and natural methods. But scientific contraception found increasing favour after the First World War and was given a major boost in the 1930s through Weatherhead's *The Mastery of Sex* and the 1939 Conference declaration. After 1945 birth control apparently became the norm in Methodist marriages and could be seen to be officially sanctioned by the leadership of the Methodist Church.

Of course, these trends tracked changes in the wider society. But Williams is perhaps unwise to suggest there was minimal distinctiveness in Methodist family life, which, she argues, was instead shaped by the surrounding secular community and often at odds with connexional teachings.⁷² Some of the evidence reviewed here indicates that Methodists were in the vanguard of fertility decline, with an above-average number of childless marriages and fewer children per fertile marriage. Partly that will have been a function of Methodism's disproportionate concentration among the lower middle and upper working classes for whom family limitation was increasingly attractive. Yet it was also driven by the prudential behaviours of Methodists and their commitment to active and careful stewardship of all God-given and worldly resources. The same motivations which inspired them to promote and practice temperance,⁷³ home-ownership,⁷⁴ and self-improvement⁷⁵ also led them to plan their families. In so doing, they may unwittingly have been helping to lay the foundations for the subsequent decline of the Methodist Church of which they were otherwise such loyal members. In sum, there may be an argument for considering fertility, alongside secularization and other causes, as a possible explanation for the dwindling fortunes of British Methodism since 1932. Whether this also applied to mortality will be discussed in part III.

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⁷² Williams, 'Methodist Families', pp. 356-62.

⁷³ Clive Field, "'The Devil in solution'", *Epworth Review*, vol. 27, no. 3 (July, 2000), 78-93.

⁷⁴ Clive Field, 'Safe as houses', in Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (eds), *Methodism and History* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 2010), pp. 91-139.

⁷⁵ Little studied in Methodism beyond formal education, but see Charles Thomas, *Methodism and Self-Improvement in Nineteenth-Century Cornwall* (Redruth: Cornish Methodist Historical Association, 1965).

Table 1
Mean family size of married Methodists in Great Britain born in 1831-90

	1831-50	1851-70	1871-90
Ministers			
Wesleyan	4.32	2.97	2.12
Primitive	4.00	2.62	1.83
United	3.59	2.46	1.78
All	4.18	2.81	1.97
Laymen			
Wesleyan	4.29	2.97	2.12
Primitive	5.10	3.03	2.51
United	3.50	2.58	2.30
All	4.49	2.94	2.22
Social class (laymen)			
RG I	4.39	2.78	2.04
RG II	4.48	2.98	2.21
RG III	5.44	3.24	2.47

SOURCE: Clive Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London, 1850-1920' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), pp. 283-4. N = 1,674 ministers and 1,426 laymen (RG I-RG III only).

Table 2
Number of children (percentages) and mean family size of married women Methodist churchgoers in England, 2001

Age	0	1	2	3	over 3	mean
20-39	21.0	20.3	43.2	12.4	3.0	1.57
40-59	9.8	12.7	51.5	19.4	6.6	2.02
60-79	14.1	14.4	41.5	20.4	9.7	2.02
80+	23.8	24.4	31.9	13.8	6.2	1.57
All	14.9	15.9	43.1	18.4	7.7	1.91

SOURCE: Unpublished analysis of the dataset for the Church Life Profile, 2001, courtesy of Professor David Voas. N = 15,274.

The first Primitive Methodist Chapel: the claim for Boylestone

Occasionally, a document will come to light which changes the historical perspective of a situation and which invites historians to look again at an established situation and viewpoint. When considering the early days of Primitive Methodism, most historians follow Hugh Bourne¹ and H. B. Kendall² in asserting that the first Primitive Methodist chapel to be built was that at Tunstall in Staffordshire. This chapel was opened on 13 October 1811,³ having been registered with the bishop of Lichfield on 16 July 1811.⁴ However, earlier, on 10 June 1811, a chapel had been registered with the bishop of Lichfield⁵ in the small rural village of Boylestone in Derbyshire, which *new* chapel Hugh Bourne had visited in August 1811.⁶ These records suggest that Boylestone, and not Tunstall, was the first Primitive Methodist chapel to be built for the purpose of public worship. However, the situation is not as clear cut as these registrations suggest since Kendall⁷ acknowledged the primacy of Boylestone chapel in dating, but dismissed it as not really belonging to the embryo Primitive connexion at that time.

This article makes a fresh exploration of this situation within the context of the 1811 Boylestone chapel; the present (Primitive) Methodist chapel at Boylestone dates from 1846, opening in January 1847,⁸ and is not discussed in this article. It argues that the case for Tunstall's supremacy is not as clear cut as previous writers have suggested and that Boylestone has a strong claim to being the first chapel in Hugh Bourne's connexion. This article first explores the evidence of the extant records before moving on to discuss the various points which arise from these records.

The Context of the Situation

The chapel at Tunstall is described in the application for a registration certificate as 'a certain building situate at Tunstall . . . and known by the name of Tunstall new Chapel and now in the possession and holding of Hugh Bourne and James Bourne. . . . [It] [i]s intended to be used as a place of religious worship'.⁹ This application is signed

¹ Hugh Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists, giving an Account of their Rise and Progress up to the Year 1823* (Bemersley: Office of Primitive Methodist Connexion, 1835), p. 36.

² H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (2 vols, London: Edwin Dalton, n.d.).

³ John Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne* (new edn, Stoke-on-Trent: Berith Publications, 1999), vol. 1, p. 344.

⁴ Lichfield Record Office, B/A/2iF.

⁵ Lichfield Record Office, B/A/12ii.

⁶ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. 1, p. 337.

⁷ Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, p. 174.

⁸ Bourne's *Journal*, Jc'in Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folios 123 – 124.

⁹ Lichfield Record Office, B/A/2iF.

by Hugh Bourne, James Bourne, James Nixon, E. N. McEvery, Henry Mattison and Thomas Booth. The application is undated except for July 1811, but the certificate was granted on 16 July 1811. Bourne's 'Journal' states that the chapel was opened on Sunday, 20 October 1811 by James Crawfoot; 'it was a glorious time, and Tunstall is likely to be a very flourishing place. . . . O Lord bless this place'.¹⁰

An entry in the bishop's Register shows that the chapel at Boylestone had been registered with the bishop of Lichfield on 7 June 1811 and a certificate granted on the 10 June 1811. The key words in this request for a certificate are: 'the undersigned . . . do hereby certify a chappel [sic] situate at Boylston . . . is intended to be used as a place of publick worship of Almighty god [sic]. The signatories of the undersigned are James Croowfoot, James Bourn, Hugh Bourn and William Cluos, all listed as licensed preachers, with additional signatories being Thomas Moorcroft, Maria Moorcroft, Robert Potter, John Potter, John Salisbury, John Lochors, George Pountain, Thomus Morley, Mary Pountain, Dorothy Hollis, Thomas Burn, John Duckin and Thomas Blood. The certificate has a note written across the top that this chapel is the 'property of Robert Potter Alkmonton'.¹¹ Before briefly discussing what is known of the local signatories, it is worth noting that earlier on 8 March 1811, a request to register the house of George Pountain, 'situate at Boylston . . . as a place of publick worship' had been granted on 11 March 1811. The signatories to this earlier registration were: James Crofet, Hugh Bourn, both shown as licensed preachers, and Thomas Moorcroft, Thomas Moorcroft Junior, Maria Moorcroft, John Lockers, George Pountain, Dorothy Hollis, Ann Blood, Mary Pountain, Thomas Blood and Thomas Morley.¹²

At this time in Boylestone, there was another building 'lately. . . erected . . . for the purpose of a place of worship', belonging to Humphrey Hollis of Boylestone. This certificate of registration had been granted on the 26 August 1809 and the signatories were: William Moseley, Humphrey Hollis, John Moorcroft, John Lockers, George Pountain, Benjamin Warrington and Thomas Blood.¹³ The certificate does not state that this building was for Methodist use but two years' earlier, on 13 November 1807, the house of John Cotton in the parish of Boylestone, had been registered for worship for those 'protestant subjects . . . commonly called Methodists'. The signatories to this document were: John Cotton, William Moseley, Humphrey Hollis and George Moorcroft.¹⁴ Given that William Moseley and Humphrey Hollis were signatories to both of these documents, we may deduce that the chapel registered on 26 August 1809 was for the use of (Wesleyan) Methodists; this is confirmed by a conveyance dated 29 or 30 April 1819 between Humphrey Hollis and one Robert Stone in which a croft was conveyed from Hollis to Stone 'except a certain part of the croft upon which [a] Wesleyan Methodist Chapel has lately been erected'.¹⁵ Thus, these extant documents indicate that Boylestone chapel should have primacy over Tunstall chapel in terms of

¹⁰ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. I, p. 344.

¹¹ Lichfield Record Office, B/A/12ii.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Derbyshire Record Office, D137 M/T 7-8.

dating; we now seek to amplify these rather curt records from Hugh Bourne's 'Journal'.

On Friday 10 May 1811, Bourne wrote in his 'Journal': 'we were at Tunstall, and had much conversation about a chapel at Tunstall'; the following Monday, 13 May 1811: 'I was at Tunstall. We fixed upon a piece of land to build a chapel'. About a month later, on Friday, 6 June 1811, 'we broke ground for a new chapel at Tunstall; old James Crawfoot assisted' and on Tuesday, 11 June 1811, 'we signed the writings, and secured the land'.¹⁶

At the end of that week, on Saturday, 15 June 1811, Bourne visited Derbyshire and 'came to Mr Potter's and found Mrs Dannel and all well'.¹⁷ Mr Potter was probably the Robert Potter who, according to the bishop's Licence¹⁸, owned the land upon which the chapel was built. However, Clowes, writing in 1844, recalled how he visited a respectable house in Boylestone and the 'old grandfather . . . gave us a plot of ground to build a chapel on . . . It was not long before the master of the house died in the faith; his loss in the neighbourhood where he resided was felt to be very great, as he had been, during his religious career, distinguished for his active and pious labours'.¹⁹ When Bourne later reminisced about Boylestone around the year 1824, he noted that a gentleman farmer, Mr Thomas Moorcroft, ran the first Sunday School there and expired suddenly one Sunday lunch-time.²⁰ The burial records for Boylestone Parish Church state that a Thomas Moorcroft, aged 43 years, was buried on 7 June 1815. The tombstone of this man, in the churchyard of Boylestone Parish Church, recorded his being aged 42 years, and it also records the burial of his wife Maria. From the signatories above, it may be concluded that this Thomas was the person who ran the first Sunday School at Boylestone and was the 'Thomas Moorcroft Junior' who signed the bishop's Licence on 8 March 1811 for worship at the house of George Pountain. The burial records also note that another Thomas Moorcroft, aged 79 years, was buried on 13 May 1814. It is possible that this person was the 'grandfather' whom Clowes mentioned, but there is no confirming evidence for this. However, all these facts concur that it was Thomas Moorcroft's grandfather who gave the land for the 1811 chapel rather than Robert Potter, thus making the bishop's records incorrect. The other key character mentioned above, Mrs Dannel, is well known to historians of Primitive Methodism and her part in Boylestone's chapel will be discussed in more detail below.

On Sunday 16 June 1811, Bourne preached at Rocester and then Roston, both within walking distance of Alkmonston and Boylestone. The entry for Monday, 17 June 1811 is important: 'This day a great sorrow. O Lord I beseech thee deliver my soul. At night after much difficulty we set out a chapel at Boylestone to be 16 feet

¹⁶ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. I, p. 325.

¹⁷ Bourne's 'Journal', John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 133.

¹⁸ Lichfield Record Office, B/A/12ii.

¹⁹ William Clowes, *The Journals of William Clowes, A Primitive Methodist Preacher* (new edn., Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2006), p. 90.

²⁰ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. II, pp. 155-9.

wide and 8 yards long clear within. O Lord bless and prosper the undertaking'.²¹ Erroneously, Lysons ascribed these dimensions to the chapel at Tunstall rather than that at Boylestone.²² The dimensions of the Tunstall chapel were 'sixteen yards long by eight wide, inside, and galleried half way'.²³ The depression from which Bourne was suffering continued the next day: 'Tuesday June 18 [1811]. I had much heaviness this morning from what cause I cannot tell. I seem not to be in the right place. But O Lord Jesus, thou knowest. I feel particular union only with the friends at Rocester. O Lord Jesus, bless them. Mary Dunnel prayed for me and I got help. At night I went to Rocester and she to Hollington'. Both Rocester and Hollington are near Boylestone and for a person of Bourne's walking experience easily attainable in a few hours. On Friday 21 June 1811, Bourne was back nearer to Boylestone at Rodsley and, importantly, on Saturday 22 June 1811 his 'Journal' reads: 'We ordered about the Chapel [at Boylestone].'²⁴

On Tuesday 6 August 1811, Bourne remarked that there were 'some disagreeable things on foot, in M. Dunnel's society, in Derbyshire'.²⁵ However, Bourne did not hasten to Derbyshire, only arriving in Boylestone on Tuesday, 13 August 1811, where he 'saw the new chapel; then came to Mr Potter's, where they were glad to see me, not withstanding the late disagreeables. It rained and I went and spoke at Hollington'.²⁶ On Friday, 16 August, 1811, Bourne 'stayed all night at Boylston, and got a young woman convinced and converted'.²⁷ Even allowing for Bourne's buying the land at Tunstall, the chapel at Boylestone was registered just one day before the purchase of the land at Tunstall was completed. As Bourne's 'Journal' shows, the chapel at Boylestone was viewable, if not completed, in August 1811. There are no known records of its opening.

Concerning the place of the Boylestone chapel, Chawner confidently asserted that this was on the site of the present 1846 chapel,²⁸ but the deeds of this chapel show that the land was purchased for the erection of the 1846 chapel. There is no mention of this new building replacing the 1811 chapel, nor that the vendors of the land were descendants of Robert Potter. However, the deeds of the 1846 chapel suggest that the 1811 chapel had been erected elsewhere, but without further evidence, no definite conclusion can be drawn. It would appear that Chawner relied on Kendall: 'see that plain, brick chapel with its three windows, the adherents of the new cause built for themselves as early as 1811!'²⁹ Interestingly, Kendall continued: 'the primeval chapel

²¹ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. I, p. 333.

²² Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives* (Buxton: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2001), p. 17.

²³ Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists, giving an Account of their Rise and Progress up to the Year 1823*, p. 36.

²⁴ Bourne, 'Journal', John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 317.

²⁵ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. I, p.337.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 337. Mistakenly, Walford has 18 August instead of 13 August.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ R. G. Chawner, *Boyleston Church and Parish A Brief History* (Boylestone: Boyleston Parish Church, 1983).

²⁹ Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, vol. I, p.175.

was in 1846 superseded by a better one'.³⁰ Thus, Kendall acknowledged the 1846 chapel, but it is this chapel and not the 1811 chapel, which had the three windows, as he described above, before later alterations added a school-room and porch. Incidentally, this 1846 chapel is still in use for weekly worship. No record of any building in Boylestone matching Bourne's 1811 description of the chapel has yet been identified.

It might be thought that Heathy Close Farm, situated between Alkmonton and Boylestone, would be a suitable venue for the 1811 chapel since this was secured in 1810 for Mary Dannel's use and prayer meetings were held there. However, Bourne's 'Journal' makes it clear that preaching at Boylestone was in a different place to Heathy Close Farm. The entry for Friday, 11 October 1811 reads in part: 'I came to Heathy Close and saw Mrs Dannel in a pretty good state of mind. Old Mr Potter was gone to publish for me to preach at Boylestone. This was contrary to my desire but I preached and had a pretty good time'.³¹ Likewise, the entry in Bourne's 'Journal' for Tuesday, 13 August 1811, quoted above, indicated that Mr Potter's house was not in the same place as the chapel.

Thus, from the extant evidence, it can be concluded that in 1811 Boylestone chapel was almost certainly in use in 1811. There was a chapel at Tunstall a couple of months earlier, and it seems that Hugh Bourne played a major role in bringing both projects to fruition. However, there is no conclusive evidence as to where exactly the 1811 chapel at Boylestone was situated. We now turn to discussing the reasons why Tunstall has been given supremacy over Boylestone in terms of being the first Primitive Methodist chapel to be used for public worship.

Suggested reasons for Boylestone's exclusion as the first Primitive Methodist chapel

It would appear that Kendall followed Bourne's 1835 account in stating that Tunstall was the first chapel to be opened within the Connexion.³² Bourne was, however, writing with hindsight after his memory had failed him early in 1812 when he stopped writing his 'Journal' for almost a year.³³ Today, this would be considered a nervous breakdown, probably brought on by the trials of leadership in 1811. At least two relevant events stand out from 1811; first, the group of societies under Bourne's leadership decided to form a connexion separate from the Wesleyan grouping and secondly, trouble was brewing centred on the three Derbyshire chapels of Boylestone, Roodsley and Hollington.

According to Bourne's 'Journal', it was in 1812 that his movement took the name of the Primitive Methodist Connexion at the suggestion of James Crowfoot but, later

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bourne 'Journal', John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 170.

³² Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists, giving an Account of their Rise and Progress up to the Year 1823*, p. 36.

³³ See Bourne's 'Journal' for 1812. John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 198. It states: 'I left off keeping a journal for near a year during which time James Crowt declined from the faith and fell into sin'.

in life, Bourne considered the camp meeting of 1808 to be the forming moment together with the establishing of the separate society at Standley in North Staffordshire: 'The Lord in his wisdom, July 17, 1808, caused the camp meeting company to become an organised connexion'.³⁴ Clowes certainly believed that the connexion was 'regularly formed' by 1811,³⁵ but it may be a little premature to see this formation as early as 1808. In his later life, Bourne seemed to have an inability to marry up dates and happenings; historians are, therefore, probably correct in following the 'Journal' for accuracy since this was presumably written at the time of the events.

It is well known that Boylestone was not listed as one of Bourne's churches on the autumn plan for 1811,³⁶ thus suggesting that it was not within the embryo Primitive Methodist Connexion at that time. Bourne's 'Journal' entry for 6 August 1811, quoted above, stated that the Derbyshire societies were under Mary Dunnel; the question is whether Dunnel was seen as their leader within the embryo Primitive Methodist Connexion, or whether her societies were regarded as Independent Methodist societies removed from the Primitive Methodist cause.

Mary Dunnel is associated with the second significant event of 1811 mentioned above, namely, strife at Boylestone and the separation of the Boylestone chapel from the embryo Primitive Methodist Connexion. Not much is known about Dunnel,³⁷ but she was first heard by Bourne at Tunstall where the 'people liked her; but I took a most pointed dislike to her and did not want to hear her again'.³⁸ However, on learning that souls had been converted under Dunnel's ministry, Bourne's prejudice 'was removed; and I saw her near Harriseahead, she having preached there'.³⁹ In 1810, Dunnel came to Hugh Bourne at Bemersley in distress because she had backslidden. Bourne took her in and following the 'healing' of the backsliding, re-introduced her to preaching at Standley, where his cousin had opened his house for preaching.⁴⁰ Bourne remarked that Dunnel had 'made her way to Bemersley, somewhat like a person ready to perish. But when her wants were supplied, and her soul restored, she had a good tact for opening places'.⁴¹

Although this is largely reliant on Bourne's memory, it is confirmed by Walford.⁴² This is important for it shows that Dunnel was very much one of Bourne's preachers; indeed, she appeared on Bourne's 1810 list as the fourth travelling preacher after Hugh Bourne, William Allcock and James Crowfoot.⁴³ Consequently, after preaching

³⁴ Hugh Bourne, 'Autobiography B' (c.1850), MS DDHB2/2, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 77.

³⁵ Clowes, *The Journal of William Clowes*, p. 97.

³⁶ Clowes, *The Journal of William Clowes*, p. 97; Lysons, *A Little Primitive Methodism*, p. 19.

³⁷ E. Dorothy Graham, 'Mary Dunnel, fl 1807-1813', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Hugh Bourne, 'Autobiography C' (1850/1851), MS DDHB2/3, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 125.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, folio 129.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, folio 169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, folio 175.

⁴² Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. I, p. 341.

⁴³ Bourne, 'Autobiography C' (1850/1851), folio 175.

in June 1810 at the Ramsor camp meeting, Dunnel was invited to preach in Boylestone and Church Broughton, a village some two miles from Boylestone, by an attendee at the camp meeting, Mrs Salisbury from Church Broughton.⁴⁴ By the summer of 1810, Dunnel was settled in Heathy Close Farm, between Boylestone and Alkmonton. By September 1810, Boylestone, Rodsley and Hollington, Dunnel's main areas of evangelism, Bourne recalled had 42 members.⁴⁵ An example from Bourne's 'Journal' for 2 December 1810, must suffice in showing that Dunnel was accepted as one of Bourne's preachers and that Boylestone was one of his societies: 'This forenoon we spent in opening the Scriptures . . . at Church Broughton. . . . There was no preaching by us at Boyleston this forenoon. This was by desire of the other society who requested it'. Thus, at this time at least, Boylestone was seen by Bourne as a 'society'. This entry also confirms Dunnel's position as one of Bourne's preachers: [Dunnel's] 'word was with great power. . . . I was quite glad that she has been brought into the work'.⁴⁶ By 15 June 1811, just a couple of days before the Boylestone chapel was laid out, Dunnel was listed third in Bourne's list of preachers, behind Crowfoot and Lorenzo Dow, Bourne himself being placed sixth, interestingly below Clowes.⁴⁷

The only derogatory remarks Bourne seemed to have made about Dunnel prior to the autumn of 1811 is that she failed to preach 'the suffering part of religion, not even the trial of faith'.⁴⁸ Bourne spoke to Dunnel about this the next day.⁴⁹ It is understandable that the Derbyshire chapels were omitted from the plans of 1811, if the plans are seen as those meeting houses to which itinerant preachers were assigned systematically. If the work at Boylestone, Rodsley and Hollington is seen as the Derbyshire Mission, principally with Dunnel building up these societies, then it can be argued that there was no tension between the plans and the work in Derbyshire since this latter work did not need itinerant preachers beyond Dunnel. This viewpoint is reinforced by Bourne's not visiting Boylestone from August to October 1811. However, early in October 1811, Bourne did go to Derbyshire 'under the cross'⁵⁰ and on Friday 11 October, 1811, went to Heathy Close Farm and met Dunnel, later that day preaching at Boylestone, albeit against his desire.⁵¹ Staying all night with 'Mr Moorcroft', on 12 October 1811, he went to the house of George Pountain, who together with Hannah Salisbury, used many arguments to persuade 'us to come and labour among them; I informed them that they were a society separate from us. This they did not know, and were much surprised'.⁵² There is no extant evidence for any reason for this separation beyond Bourne's perception that Dunnel, John Potter and

⁴⁴ G. M. Morris, 'The Origin of Primitive Methodism in North Staffordshire 1800-1812', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, 9 (1968), 62-73.

⁴⁵ Bourne, 'Autobiography C' (1850/1851), John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 179.

⁴⁶ Bourne 'Journal', 2 December 1810, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 48.

⁴⁷ Bourne, 'Journal', John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 133.

⁴⁸ Bourne, 'Journal', Monday, 25 June 1810, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 313.

⁴⁹ Bourne, 'Journal', Tuesday, 26 June 1810, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, folio 313.

⁵⁰ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. 1, p. 340.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

another lorded 'it over the people'.⁵³ Interestingly, Bourne's 'Journal' makes it plain that the people at Boylestone, and, incidentally, Rodsley and Hollington, had no idea that they were not members of Bourne's connexion.

Bourne, filled with sorrow, left Derbyshire, only returning on 29 December 1811, with the news that Dunnel had committed double bigamy, in being married three times. In the interim between these two visits to Boylestone, in August 1811 and October 1811, Bourne had found evidence at Macclesfield that Dunnel had been married twice.⁵⁴ However, a cursory search through the marriage registers for Prestbury in which parish Macclesfield was at this time, has not revealed any evidence of a marriage of a person named Dunnel (or Dunnell). If these marriages took place as Bourne and Walford have claimed, then Mary Dunnel must have used another name.

Bourne then went to Derby with George Pountain and they found the registration of the third marriage, eventually convincing the people of Boylestone that Dunnel had 'three husbands living at once!'.⁵⁵ One can imagine the effect of this on the villagers. They began looking 'to the Lord in earnest'.⁵⁶ and by February 1812, on a visit to Boylestone, Bourne found the people 'in a good state'.⁵⁷ From this point of time onwards, Boylestone was added to the preaching plans on which it has remained ever since.

Discussion

The question of why Bourne considered Boylestone's (temporary) separation from the Primitive Methodist Connexion is not mentioned in the extant documents. Historians such as Graham⁵⁸ and Lloyd⁵⁹ have followed Walford⁶⁰ and Bourne's 'Journal' for the end of 1811 in blaming Dunnel for setting up a separate society. Walford's work, in particular, was written with hindsight and claimed that Dunnel was not part of Bourne's connexion. It is hoped that the evidence above clearly shows that this is very much a viewpoint that takes advantage of the benefit of hindsight. Unfortunately, there is no extant evidence beyond Bourne's 'Journal' for Dunnel's misdemeanours, including her marital status. In particular, Bourne blamed Dunnel (and John Potter and another) for keeping the separation from the people, but nowhere is there any evidence of a separation before the autumn of 1811. Indeed, this does not seem to have been mentioned by Bourne on his visit to Boylestone in August 1811, so we are left wondering what happened between August and October 1811.

The extant literature seems silent about these two months as is Bourne's 'Journal'. This means that suppositions must prevail. Bourne may have heard about Dunnel's

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.349.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Graham, 'Mary Dunnel, fl 1807-1813'.

⁵⁹ Jennifer M. Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers, 1807-1907*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 90.

⁶⁰ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. I, p. 350.

two marriages at Macclesfield, but not noted them in writing and understandably he wanted to distance the Derbyshire mission from his own connexion. It may also be that Dunnel was highly volatile and subject to impulsive actions. Whatever the truth of the situation, for the latter half of August and September 1811, we can safely say that the people of Boylestone were unaware of any separation from Bourne's connexion and so considered themselves belonging to his connexion.

This whole episode also shows the extremes of Bourne's emotions, from happiness to extreme sorrow. It may be important that in February 1812, he stopped writing his 'Journal' so that he could rest his mind, having passed through troubles not only in Derbyshire but also in Cannock Wood,⁶¹ as well as deciding to make his adherents a formal connexion separate from the Wesleyans. His 'Journal' indicates that he was suffering at this time and leaning on God, but there are a number of occasions when it reveals that depression is not far from his mind. Anyone reading the manuscript editions of his 'Autobiography', albeit written later in life, will soon perceive the hurt and depressive underpinning of much of the views expressed therein.

As an aside, from the registrations with the bishop of Lichfield, it is apparent that the situation in Boylestone in the early 1800s was fairly typical of elsewhere; disaffected Wesleyans such as John Lockers, George Pountain and Thomas Blood responded to the preaching from the camp meetings and joined the embryo Primitive Methodists under Hugh Bourne. It is interesting that John Moorcroft and Humphrey Hollis seem to have remained Wesleyans; there exists a conveyance in which Hollis was described as a gentleman,⁶² and another conveyance described Moorcroft as a farmer living at Brook Farm.⁶³ In the same conveyance, George Pountain was listed as the blacksmith whose shop had been built on land purchased in 1754 by John Moorcroft's grandfather.⁶⁴ The blacksmith's shop was a joint purchase between Pountain and Humphrey Hollis the younger who was described as a farmer.

Returning to the primacy of Boylestone chapel, this essay has shown that from the registration documents and Bourne's 'Journal', there is no doubt that the chapel was ready before that at Tunstall. This discussion has attempted to show that, in reality, Boylestone was never a separate society, but was involved for a short time in scandal, not of its own making.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Boylestone chapel is entitled to claim supremacy over that at Tunstall in terms of its building and opening as the first Primitive Methodist Chapel. This claim is supported by the fact that the adherents at Boylestone always considered themselves as members of Bourne's connexion and knew nothing of the separation which Bourne claimed Mary Dunnel had brought about. Indeed, it seems that the scandal of Dunnel's three marriages, assuming she were so married, caused

⁶¹ Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, vol. 1, p. 346.

⁶² Derbyshire Record Office, D137 M/T 7-8.

⁶³ Derbyshire Record Office, D137 M/T 17.

⁶⁴ Derbyshire Record Office, M/T 17.

her downfall rather than any efforts on her part to claim supremacy over Bourne. The inconsistencies in Bourne's writings over the years, especially in the later years of his life, suggest that he may have suffered from depression which unduly coloured his views and which may have undermined his evaluations of situations at certain times through his life. There is still much that is uncertain about the details of this early Derbyshire mission, but it is hoped that further work may help to address these inadequacies so that a much more substantiated and detailed picture may be obtained in due course.

STELLA MILLS

Methodist Missions 250th Anniversary: Oral Tradition and Historical Aberrations

The year 2010 marked the 250th anniversary of Wesleyan Methodism in the Western Hemisphere. This was celebrated by the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) in a special Connexional Conference, held in Antigua, where the missionary work began. In historical shorthand, we read that on 7 April 1760 Mr Nathaniel Gilbert, Speaker of Antigua, having joined the Methodists, preached to his slaves and formed a society of about 200. In summary, the persons involved were Nathaniel Gilbert (1760), John Baxter (1778) and Dr Thomas Coke (1786). The contribution of Francis Gilbert (1763-4 and 1773-5) remains undervalued.

Revisiting Methodist History

The study of Methodist missions is fraught with difficulties since the sources frequently give confusing and misleading information. The selection, interpretation and conflation of past events sometimes gives a distorted picture of what actually happened. At the same time, oral traditions are often misremembered or even embellished. The historian who relies on secondary sources may fail to distinguish between historical fact and myth, or even outright fiction, witness for example, many of the stories in the books of Deaville Walker, Cyril Davey and Wycherley Gumbs.¹ The first difficulty confronting the historian concerns the question of dates.

Oral tradition and twentieth century historical sources have cemented the year 1760 as the beginning of Methodism in Antigua. However, the 250th anniversary should have been celebrated in 2009, as the actual beginning of the mission was in 1759 when Nathaniel Gilbert returned to Antigua and gathered a congregation of family and friends in the house on his estate. The 2010 Nathaniel Gilbert Memorial Lecture stated that in August 1760 the first 5:00 am service took place on the Gilbert estate.² However, the letters of Nathaniel and Francis Gilbert to John Wesley give the times at their estate house and in St John's, excluding any mention of an early morning service. I suggest that the momentous ringing of the estate bell and the assembling of slaves to hear Nathaniel Gilbert preach from the steps of the great house was more likely to have been June 1769. This was when he fitted a chapel over his stores to accommodate 200 persons.

For the purposes of clarification, a time line for the beginning of Methodist activity in the Caribbean and the Americas runs as follows:

¹ F. Deaville Walker, *The Call of the West Indies: The Romance of Methodist Work and Opportunity in the West Indies and adjacent regions* (London: Cargate Press, MMS, 1933); Cyril J. Davey, *The Man Who Wanted the World* (London: MMS [Cargate Press], 1946) and *Mad About Mission: The Story of Thomas Coke* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1985); Wycherley Gumbs, *Nathaniel Gilbert: a Planter Redeemed* (St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands: Supreme Printing, 2005).

² Joan Delsol Meade, 'Caribbean Methodism: Bursting Barriers 1760-2010 and beyond', 7. See www.mccalive.org [accessed September 2011].

Methodism in Caribbean and AmericasAntigua

- 1757 Nathaniel Gilbert resigned seat in Antigua Assembly on 3 February. He and his family sail for England to hear John Wesley.
- 1758 Gilbert converted under John Wesley and his slaves baptised in Wandsworth.
- 1759 Nathaniel Gilbert, 'Home Missionary', preached in his estate house to members of his family and acquaintances; supported by Governess Mary Leadbetter.
- 1760 Gilbert preached to slaves.
- 1763 Francis Gilbert, a travelling preacher set apart by Wesley in England, was in Antigua for family reasons. Preached at Gilbert's and in St John's town house.
- c.1763 Mary Leadbetter returned to England.
- 1764 Francis and five Gilbert daughters return to England.

North America

- c.1763? Robert Strawbridge formed classes in Maryland.

New York

- 1766 Barbara Heck and Philip Embury, Irish immigrants, with Captain Thomas Webb, who in 1773 married his second wife, Grace Gilbert, sister of Nathaniel, organised Methodists.
- 1769 First Wesleyan Ministers: Revs Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor.

England

- 1767 Francis and Mary Leadbetter married in November.

Antigua

- 1769 Nathaniel III resigns as Speaker of Antigua.
Converts room above stores at Gilbert's for a chapel.
- 1773 Francis and Mary return to Antigua with three girls.
Francis preaches in 'town chapel'.
- 1774 Nathaniel III died on 22 April 1774, and was buried at St Peter's. Francis conducted the funeral service.
- 1775 Francis and Mary returned to England, 28 May.
- undated Sophia Campbell & Mary Alley built the first small chapel in St John's largely through self-help.
- 1778 John Baxter, Local Preacher and Class Leader, arrived on 2 April.
- 1781 Mary Gilbert returns to Antigua to give leadership.
- 1783 John Baxter built a chapel to accommodate up to 1,000.

- 1784 Methodist Episcopal Church Christmas Conference. Jeremiah Lambert was ordained Elder for Antigua, 27 December 1784.
- 1785 Early in year Lambert conducted his first communion service in Antigua. Baxter ordained Elder at Baltimore by Methodist Episcopal Church on 1 June 1785 and returned to Antigua.
- 1786 William Warrener was ordained by Wesley on 28 July 1786, and appointed to assist Baxter. Dr Coke preached on Christmas Day to a crowd of 2,000.
- 1787 John Clark[e] (St Vincent) and William Hammett (St Christopher's) was stationed.
- 1791 Mary Gilbert returned to England.

Mistakenly, historians give the year 1760 as the date of Nathaniel's return to Antigua. This can be traced to the work of Thomas Jackson (1839)³ and Findlay and Holdsworth (1921-4).⁴ The 1760 date may be attributed to Anne Gilbert's résumé, 'Rise and Progress of Methodism' in her letter to Mr William Pattison. In one sentence she fused different occasions and wrote: '1760 . . . the Lord raised up Messrs Nathaniel and Francis Gilbert . . . they enforced Mr Wesley's rules upon individuals and families that received the truth'.⁵ A letter of John Walsh to John Wesley quotes his sister, Mary Leadbetter the Gilberts' Governess, where she writes that they arrived in Antigua on 13 June 1759.⁶

The tangled web of the Gilbert family

The main source for the Gilbert family is Oliver's 'The Pedigree of Gilbert' whose only error is to confuse the mothers of Nathaniel II's children.⁷ He gives Mary Lynch (widow Gaynor) as Nathaniel's second wife who gave him Francis, Ambrose and Sarah. Henrietta Gilbert confirms the mother of Francis as Elizabeth in the title of her book.⁸ Apart from making the Cornish itinerant, Nicholas Gilbert, a member of the

³ Thomas Jackson, *Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism, 1839: A brief sketch* (London: John Mason, 1839), pp. 112-3.

⁴ G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (5 vols; London: Methodist Church Office, 1921-4), vol. 2, pp. 30-6.

⁵ London, School of Oriental and African Studies, Methodist Missionary Society Archives [MMS Archives] West Indian Correspondence [WIC] Fiche 1: 37, Anne (Hart) Gilbert (1 June 1804).

⁶ John Walsh to John Wesley, Knightsbridge (30 October 1759), *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, no. 3 (1780), 330-32.

⁷ Vere Langford Oliver, *History of the Island of Antigua, one of the Leeward Caribbees in the West Indies from the First Settlement in 1635 to the present time* (3 vols; London: Mitchell & Hughes, 1896), vol. 2, p. 12.

⁸ Henrietta F. Gilbert, *Memoirs of the late Mrs Mary Gilbert, with some account of Mr. Francis Gilbert, (her husband) Second son of the Honourable Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua* (London: Cordeaux, 1817).

Antiguan family, the unwary fail to note five generations named the first-born son after his father, as was the custom.⁹

To distinguish between five generations of the Antiguan dynasty, the Gilberts are noted as Nathaniel I, Nathaniel II (Sr. or 'Elder', sometimes entitled Col.), Nathaniel III (Jr. or 'The Hon.' who introduced Methodism in Antigua) and his son Rev. Nathaniel IV and grandson Rev. Nathaniel V. A Gilbertian timeline has been included below:

Gilbertian Timeline

Nathaniel Gilbert I d. 1702	Came from Barbados
Nathaniel Gilbert II d. April 1761	Colonel, Elder or Sr.,
Nathaniel Gilbert III d. 20 April 1774	Jr. or The Hon.

Nathaniel III married (i) Mary, born in London; died 16 July 1747.
(ii) Elizabeth Lavington, buried in 1777 at St Peter's, Antigua.

children of Nathaniel III

- 1751 Mary; born 28 February, died in England, 21 January 1768.
- 1752 Nathaniel; born July, died in Antigua, July 1752.
- 1753 Alice; born, 15 November, died in England, 27 August 1772.
- 1755 Euphemia; born 22 April, died 17 November 1835.
married Dr Thomas Lynch, c.1776.
- 1757 Ann; born 7 February, died 13 April 1802.
married Timothy Yate of Madeley Hall, Shropshire.
- 1758 Elizabeth; born in Wandsworth and baptised by John Wesley, died 29 July 1832.
- 1761 Nathaniel IV born in Antigua in 1761, died 18 November 1807. Served as Chaplain in Sierra Leone and vicar of Bledlow, Buckinghamshire.
- 1763 William; born 1 October, died c.1825. He was the author of *The Hurricane* (1796).

Nathaniel V Rector of his own chapel, Gilberts in Antigua. Favoured the Moravians over the Methodists. He died in 1854.

⁹ Robert Glen, 'Tangled Web': The Gilberts of Cornwall and the Gilberts of Antigua', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 53 (2002), 216-25.

The historian George E. Lawrence wrote that a younger brother was a graduate in medicine from Cambridge.¹⁰ Findlay & Holdsworth perpetuate the myth that Francis Gilbert was a ‘Cambridge medical graduate practising on the island’.¹¹ Cyril Davey stated that Nathaniel went to England to hear Wesley ‘at the urgent suggestion of his brother Richard who had read some of Wesley’s writings, to his own profit’.¹² Again, he writes: ‘Richard Gilbert, a medical graduate of Cambridge, had been introduced to Methodism before he went to practice as a doctor in the West Indies. Soon after he arrived in Antigua he tried to interest Nathaniel in Methodism’.¹³ However, Melville Horne tells us: ‘Nathaniel Gilbert . . . on reading the *Appeals*, etc., of Mr Wesley, which had been sent him from this country by his brother, Francis . . . made a voyage’ across the Atlantic.¹⁴ William Barrett, in a bicentenary publication, regarded as a definitive history in the Western area, said Francis Gilbert, ‘a graduate in medicine returned to Antigua as a doctor’.¹⁵ The inaugural Nathaniel Gilbert Memorial Lecture, commemorating the 250th anniversary of Methodist beginnings in Antigua, calls Francis Gilbert ‘Dr.’¹⁶ and Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood, reflecting American conventions of ministers having a doctorate, even refer to ‘Dr. John Baxter’.¹⁷

Robert Glen notes that there was no Richard Gilbert in this family and adds that in respect of the Gilberts of Antigua, ‘unwary scholars continue to get entangled in the gigantic and growing web of errors and half-truths’.¹⁸ He adds that the ultimate source of some of these confusions was Isabella Graham who apparently misremembered the facts of her four-year stay in Antigua and unfortunately conflated the respective ministrations (spiritual and medical) of the two brothers.¹⁹ The doctor was another brother, John, who is not known to have had Methodist sympathies. Paul Cheshire’s research on William Gilbert regards Findlay & Holdsworth as ‘disappointedly inaccurate’ in some matters of the Gilbert family history.²⁰

Nathaniel Gilbert: a ‘Home Missionary’

On 3 February 2011 the *Methodist Recorder* misleadingly asserted the arrival of the first Methodist preacher from across the Atlantic, Nathaniel Gilbert, in 1760.

¹⁰ George E. Lawrence, *The Wesley of the West Indies* (Barbados: Advocate Co., 1938).

¹¹ Findlay and Holdsworth, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, vol. 2, p. 30.

¹² Davey, *Mad about Mission*, p. 55.

¹³ Davey, *The Man Who Wanted the World*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁴ Edgar W. Thompson, *Nathaniel Gilbert: Lawyer and Evangelist* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), p. 12.

¹⁵ Methodist Church, British Guiana District, *Kindling of the Flame* (Demerara, BG: Methodist Bicentennial Celebrations Committee, 1960), p. 11.

¹⁶ Meade, ‘Caribbean Methodism’, p. 7.

¹⁷ Sylvia R. Frey & Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), cited in, Robert Glen, ‘A rebuttal of “The History of Early Methodism in Antigua”’, *The Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2002), 163.

¹⁸ Robert Glen to John Neal, 3 February 2010.

¹⁹ Quoted in Robert Glen, ‘Early Methodism in Antigua’, *Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), 278. Isabella was the wife of John Graham a Royal Army physician who died in Antigua 1773.

²⁰ Paul Cheshire, ‘Nathaniel Gilbert (1722-1774) Source Tree’. See www.williamgilbert.com [accessed 13 March 2007].

However, Nathaniel returned to Antigua as a third generation immigrant of Barbados pedigree and should therefore be described as a 'Home Missionary', a Creole or West Indian. Unlike his brother Francis who was one of Wesley's preachers both before and after he went to Antigua in 1763, Nathaniel's preaching was the spontaneous evangelism of a layman constrained by the love of Christ.²¹

Nathaniel epitomizes the apostolic commission of Matthew 10: 7: 'As you are going, preach'. Methodism spread when those converted under Nathaniel's discipleship converted after arriving in other territories. These included members of the plantocracy like Mr Claxton in St Vincent, and the domestic slaves Lydia in St Kitts and Kitty Dorset in Montserrat. Antigua Methodism spawned work in other Caribbean islands also through economic migrants: Obed Anthony in Curaçao, Richard Hazel, Tom Markham and 'Daddy' Griffiths in Aruba and William Claxton in Demerara, South America. John Hodge began Methodist work in his native Anguilla and in French St Martin.²² These pioneers illustrate the interpretation of some missiologists who translate the aorist participle in Matthew 28: 19; 'As you are going, make disciples'.²³

Other fundamental errors occur based on the assumption that only ordained ministers or missionaries could have begun church work overseas. Susan Lowes wrote that Anne Hart 'married John Gilbert, cousin of the Reverend Nathaniel Gilbert, the founder of Methodism in Antigua' (my emphasis).²⁴ John Saillant also writes: 'In 1798 Anne (Hart) married John Gilbert, a cousin of a leading Methodist in Antigua, Nathaniel Gilbert'.²⁵ The cousin was Nathaniel IV who remained an Anglican priest working in both England and Sierra Leone. Modern writers have also presumed that Nathaniel was an agent of a missionary society. For example, Beastrabban says: 'In Antigua Wesleyan Methodism was run between the death of its founder, Nathaniel Gilbert and the arrival of his official replacement, by a series of gifted female slave preachers' (emphasis mine).²⁶

Nathaniel Gilbert: planter, lawyer, politician and pastor

Nathaniel III was articled at Gray's Inn on 29 July 1741, and called to the Bar in 1747. After his first wife died without issue, Nathaniel returned to Antigua to help manage the family's two estates, finally inheriting them in April 1761. He combined these duties with those of the legal profession. Conflated histories make Nathaniel the Speaker of Antigua's House of Assembly as early as 1757.²⁷ However, he was a

²¹ 'The Love of Christ Constrains us' is the motto of the MCCA.

²² Details for all these pioneers are found in Methodist Church, BG District, *Kindling of the Flame*.

²³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), pp. 73-4 and 'The Structure of Mission: An exposition of Matthew 28: 16-20', in Wilbert R. Shenk (ed.), *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 218-48.

²⁴ Susan Lowes, 'The Peculiar Class: The Formation, Collapse, and Re-formation of the Middle Class in Antigua, West Indies, 1843-1940' (unpublished PhD. dissertation, Columbia University, 1994), p. 13.

²⁵ John Saillant, 'Antigua Methodism and Antislavery Activity: Anne and Elizabeth Hart in the Eighteenth-Century Black Atlantic', *Church History*, vol. 69, no. 1 (March, 2000), 86ff.

²⁶ See <http://beastrabban.wordpress.com/2008/02/13/christianity-atlantic-slavery> [accessed 6 September 2011].

²⁷ Jackson, *Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism*, p.112.

member of the Assembly from 1749 until he resigned on 3 February 1757 when he went to England to hear John Wesley. He was re-appointed on his return in September 1759 and elected Speaker in 1763, but resigned in 1769 to devote himself fully to the pastoral care of Methodists.

Nathaniel had recurrent health problems and was recovering from one bout of illness when he read Wesley's tracts sent by Francis in about 1755.²⁸ It was presumed that 'Nathaniel Gilbert went to England for the recovery of his impaired health'.²⁹ We can compare Mary Gilbert's diary where, in correcting the diary, John Wesley said that the family went to England 'entirely on a religious account'.³⁰ In addition, Thompson quotes Melville Horne's letter to John Fletcher where he stated that his uncle's visit to England was to enquire into Wesley's religion, adding that 'this voyage of Nathaniel was the pilgrimage, calm and resolved, of a deeply religious man in quest of truth'.³¹

Ordinations by the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC)

Thomas Jackson's centenary book (1839) stated: 'On Christmas Day Dr. Coke and John Baxter were unknown to each other except by reputation'. Etheridge's biography of Thomas Coke (1860)³² perpetuated this view and was followed by Edgar Thompson in his bicentenary publication in 1960: 'When Dr. Coke arrived with Warrener in St Johns on Christmas Day 1786, he was not satisfied with the mere election *in absentia* of Baxter as an Elder by the Baltimore Conference, and immediately laid hands on him and ordained him Deacon and Elder'.³³ The 2010 Memorial Lecture noted that Baxter left Antigua to serve in Baltimore, but he went specifically for ordination as an Elder. Immediately after his ordination by Coke and Francis Asbury on 2 June 1785 he returned to Antigua.³⁴

Furthermore, Thompson contracts a time span when he writes that: 'It was Warrener who took charge of the Methodists in Antigua. Dr Coke carried off Baxter to St. Vincent'.³⁵ Warrener was stationed to assist Baxter and acted in January 1787 when Baxter accompanied Coke to the Windward Islands. Clarke was left in St Vincent, but Baxter worked in Antigua as Superintendent for over a year before transferring to the St Vincent Carib Mission where Coke met him on his second tour. He returned to Antigua in 1789 and apart from a furlough in England remained there until his death in August 1806. Warrener left Antigua in 1790 for St Kitts.

²⁸ John Wesley, *An earnest appeal to men of reason and religion* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1743); idem., *A farther appeal to men of reason and religion* (London: William Strahan, 1745-6).

²⁹ See Jackson, *Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism*, p. 112.

³⁰ See M. Gilbert, *An extract from Miss Mary Gilbert's journal . . . 1751-1768* (Chester: J. Harvie, 1768), p. 12.

³¹ Thompson, *Nathaniel Gilbert: Lawyer*, p.12.

³² Cited in *Methodist Archivist*, no. 21 (September, 1961), p. 3.

³³ Thompson, *Nathaniel Gilbert: Lawyer*, p. 29.

³⁴ Vickers, *Journal of Dr Thomas Coke*, p. 65, n. 191.

³⁵ Thompson, *Nathaniel Gilbert: Lawyer*, p. 29.

Jeremiah Lambert was ordained for Antigua at the Inaugural Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but American historians overlook his ministry in Antigua and he is largely edited out of British histories. British Methodist Church History follows in stating that Lambert 'died before he could go to Antigua'.³⁶ However, Dr Coke's writings,³⁷ letters from the Hart sisters³⁸ and the testimony of William Warrener³⁹ vouch for his ministry in Antigua. The purchase of 'red port for the uses of the Society' suggests that Lambert was the first Minister to administer Methodist Communion in the West Indies.⁴⁰

Dr Coke and baptism

John Saillant writes: 'Anne and Elizabeth (Hart) were baptized in 1786 by Thomas Coke'.⁴¹ Sandra Pacquet also wrote that: 'The sisters were baptized Methodists during the visit of Dr. Thomas Coke to Antigua in 1786'.⁴² As children of a Creole yeoman, Barry Conyers Hart, the girls could have been baptised in the parish church.⁴³ Furthermore, Lambert and Baxter had been exercising a sacramental ministry for up to nine months before Coke's arrival. There is only one reference by Coke that he baptised in the West Indies and that was in the Dutch island of Sint Eustatius (Statia) where: 'We ventured to baptise about one hundred and forty of our society. And even under this heavy cross and hot persecution, our numbers . . . amount to two hundred and fifty eight'.⁴⁴ Of this visit early in 1789, Coke wrote in the plural indicating that baptisms could have been undertaken by Hammett, stationed in neighbouring St Kitts. Baptism was not the formal means of accepting Methodists and members were often in Society before they were actually baptised. Compare the Methodist Classes formed by the freed slave William Claxton in Demerara in 1813 when there was no ordained minister of Christ in the colony.⁴⁵

³⁶ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George & Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (5 vols; London: Epworth Press, 1988), vol. 3, p. 4.

³⁷ Quoted in Davies, George & Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church*, vol. 4, p. 210.

³⁸ MMS Archives, WIC, 1: 31, Anne Gilbert to William Pattison (1 June 1804); WIC, 1: 37, Elizabeth Hart to Preachers (now in Europe) (5 May 1804).

³⁹ William Warrener in 'Review of "A Report of the principle SPEECHES, delivered on the 6th day of October, 1813, at the formation of the Methodist Missionary Society for the Leeds District. . ."' by James Nicholls', *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 37 (1814), 514.

⁴⁰ St John's Building Account, 9 April 1785, *The Methodist Archivist* (undated), appendix.

⁴¹ John Saillant, 'Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity: Anne and Elizabeth Hart in the Eighteenth-Century Black Atlantic', *Church History* (March, 2001), 1.

⁴² Sandra Pouchet Pacquet, Review of Moira Ferguson (ed.), 'The Hart Sisters: Early African Caribbean Writers, Evangelicals and Radicals', *African American*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1995), 517.

⁴³ Oliver, *History of the Island of Antigua*, vol. 3, p. 225. Barry Conyers Hart was most likely the 'Mr H ___' who introduced Baxter to the Methodists. He procured the premises for the first purpose built chapel on the island.

⁴⁴ Vickers, *Journals of Dr Thomas Coke*, p. 110.

⁴⁵ MMS Archives, WIC, fiche 1: William Claxton to Rev Mr Whitworth (16 February 1813).

The house in Wandsworth

Frey and Wood took issue with Robert Glen, insisting that Nathaniel's visit to England was 'a visit home', despite at least seven generations of the family having lived in the West Indies. They wrote that he stayed at 'the family estate in Wandsworth'.⁴⁶ There is no evidence of the Gilbert's holding land in England. Nathaniel may have procured his own accommodation between 1757 and 1759, but Francis maintained a house in what is now called Fairfield Street, just round the corner from Wandsworth High Street where the original St John's Church was built.⁴⁷ After Nathaniel and his family left, Francis became an itinerant in Bristol in 1759.

An example of the evolution of confused memories that get into print is seen in the memoirs of Samuel Smith of Antigua. He apparently mixes up the oral traditions of Mary Alley and Sophia Campbell with the slaves converted by John Wesley: 'Two women Bessy and Mary or Manda who play a major role to save the Methodist religion after the founder dead.'⁴⁸ Gilbert's letter tells us that Bessie was one of the slaves baptised by John Wesley in November 1758.⁴⁹ Frey and Wood include the unsubstantiated speculation that Mary Alley and Sophia Campbell were the other two servants at Wandsworth in January.⁵⁰ However, they are not identified in the Methodist story until 1775.

Historical aberrations

This paper, focussing on Antigua, has attempted to clarify the historical facts surrounding the beginning of Wesleyan Methodist missions. In addition, a further example of retailed fable and gossip in the story of missionary beginnings concerns Statia, where the slave 'Black Harry' preceded Thomas Coke's arrival. It has been said that 'Black Harry' of Sint Eustatius was the same ex-slave as 'Black Harry Hosier' born in North Carolina, the Negro servant of Francis Asbury. Harry of Statia has also been confused with 'Daddy Harry', a nineteenth century Negro teacher in Antigua. Dr. Hartog draws on Statia folklore when he writes that 'Black Harry' 'became acquainted with Methodism in Antigua and carried it to Statia'.⁵¹ Davison wrote: 'A Negro slave known as "Black Harry" was converted to God under Methodist influence in North America – possibly Antigua'.⁵² Kenneth van Putten understood that: 'Black Harry was born in Anguilla, went to Sint Maarten then Statia, or born in South America and went to Statia in the 1770s and Harry of Statia same

⁴⁶ Robert Glen, 'Review of *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), in *Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), 255.

⁴⁷ Phyllis Plummer, 'History of Wandsworth' (unpublished booklet received from author, 28 October 2010).

⁴⁸ Smith & Smith, *To Shoot Hard Labour: The Life and Times of Samuel Smith an Antigua Working Man, 1877-1982* (Scarborough, Ontario, Canada: Edams Publishers, 1986) p. 70.

⁴⁹ Nathaniel Gilbert to John Wesley, Antigua, 22 July 1765, in *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 6 (1783), 329-30.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Robert Glen, 'A rebuttal of "The History of Early Methodism in Antigua"', *Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2002), 158, 163.

⁵¹ Dr J. Hartog, *History of Sint Eustatius* (Aruba: De Wit Stores, 1976), p. 115.

⁵² Methodist Church, BG District, *Kindling of the Flame*, p. 51.

man as Black Harry of North America'.⁵³ There is no evidence of 'Black Harry' in Antigua. Coke's journal entry states that he had been a member of the Methodist Society 'on the continent' (North America) and implies that he had been recently transported as a slave to Statia.⁵⁴ Like his namesake Harry Hosier, he may have been born in America.

This deviation from historical fact even extends to philately. To celebrate the 200th anniversary of Methodism in the British Virgin Islands a special stamp was issued in 1989. This 12¢ stamp pictured Nathaniel Gilbert preaching in the open air together with a portrait of 'Black Harry'. However, the portrait was of 'Black Harry Hosier', an early twentieth-century watercolour on paper painted by R. Vigurs.⁵⁵

William Warrener, the first missionary stationed by Thomas Coke in Antigua, noted that in the first fifty years of Methodist work the persistence of many oral traditions had contributed to a significant number of historical inaccuracies and aberrations. At the formation of the first Methodist Missionary Society, Warrener seconded the first resolution, saying 'my statements will correct several little mistakes, into which many writers have fallen'.⁵⁶ This paper has addressed omissions in the edited versions of missionary history and the perpetuation of wrong suppositions and unsupported details in the Methodist story that continue into the twenty-first century. The inclusion of the Gilbert family dynasty distinguishes between the five generations of Nathaniels and the outline of the beginning of Methodist work puts Antigua in a wider context. Readers are reminded that the overseas work of British Methodism began with a layman who was a 'Home Missionary'.

JOHN C NEAL

⁵³ Kenneth van Putten, in Julia G. Crane (ed.), *Statia Silhouettes* (New York: Vantage Press, 1999), pp. 409, 412.

⁵⁴ Vickers, *Journals of Dr Thomas Coke*, p. 37.

⁵⁵ First Day Cover for 255th Anniversary of the birth of Harry Hosier, Fayetteville, NC, 19 July 2005. For a discussion of the 'Two Black Harrys' see, *Methodist Philatelic Society Newsletter*, no. 79 (December, 1990), 11-13; no. 141 (Spring, 2006), 21-2; no. 141 (Summer, 2006), 16-17.

⁵⁶ 'Formation of the Methodist Missionary Society for the Leeds district, October 6 1813', *Methodist Magazine* (1814), 511.

BOOK REVIEWS

Margaret Batty, *Scotland's Methodists 1750-2000* (Edinburgh: John Donald/Birlinn, 2010, pp. 277, Hardback, £30.00, ISBN 978-1-906566-26-5).

This work is clearly the product of a tremendous amount of research, covering not only Methodism's presence in Scotland, but detail as to how this was influenced by other denominations and the wider political scene. This is one of its charms, but also its weakness. In most cases Margaret Batty demonstrates her dedication to the task and an understanding of the story but, on occasion, this leads down byways and winding paths which obscure the focus of her story.

The span of the work is impressive and Mrs Batty details the early problems, not only of Methodists in Scotland, but of the Church of Scotland's response to that presence. Perhaps because the Scottish Methodists seem to have been disconnected from the English Connexion, they struggled with who they were as much as what they were there for. There were dissidents in Scotland, but she relates much of this to problems in English Methodism; Alexander Kilham, the founder of the Methodist New Connexion, being stationed in Aberdeen to keep him out of trouble.

The two principal difficulties for the Methodists in Scotland seem to have been, first, that the Church of Scotland ministers were well-educated, qualified and respected because of this, while many of the Methodist preachers were seen as unqualified and lacking in status. More importantly Mrs Batty tells of struggles with finances. The Church of Scotland was supported by taxation while Methodism held to the system of 'class money'. For much of its history the Scottish Methodist District seems to have been unable to raise money from its congregations. I was left somewhat puzzled as Mrs Batty mentions strong Congregationalist and Baptist churches during this time and later the dissenting Free Church which did not seem to find this a problem.

It is interesting how much of the success of Methodism was in the fishing towns of the East Coast where, it seems, strong congregations were formed and chapels built. The economic struggles of the fishing areas are well covered, as are those in the industrial areas of the central belt. She records the flow of Methodist immigrants from below the border into the weaving areas and other industrial communities and the effect the rise and fall of the economy had in these towns.

The growth and development of Primitive Methodism in Scotland is well covered with the temperance movement, a powerful influence in the Primitive Methodist Connexion, endeavouring to bring that message to an extremely reluctant Scotland.

Scotland's story of union parallels that of England at first but a strong ecumenical theme seems to have developed and that story is well told up to and including the voting statistics for the proposed union with the Church of Scotland in 1977.

This book might have been more easily read with a tighter focus, but the diversions offer fascinating insights into the little known situations in Scotland. The various church doctrinal and political machinations bring a great deal of interest, offering the reader insights into Methodism not so easily seen within the English situation. The author's interest in the political scene provides colour and depth to the entire book. Although not everyone will agree with her analysis of political events in the later years it offers a useful background to a history which could easily become detached from the society within which it lives.

Margaret Batty is to be congratulated on the extent of her research and her mastery of the complex creature that is the Methodist Church in Scotland. The book is full of personalities, many of whom one would like to hear more about. It offers insights into theology and polity from a very different perspective and will be a valuable addition to the library of Methodist history.

RONNIE AITCHISON

Alan P. F. Sell, *Christ and Controversy: the Person of Christ in Nonconformist Thought and Ecclesial Experience, 1600-2000* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011, pp. xii + 217, paperback. £25 ISBN 978-1-61097-669-5).

There are few surer guides through the thickets of Nonconformist thought than Alan Sell. His fertile pen has produced many works of history and historical theology, and his dogged perseverance as series editor achieved the successful publication of the invaluable four-volume collection of *Protestant Nonconformist Texts* (2006-7). Professor Sell brings to his work historical insight, theological acumen, a deep sympathy for the principles and practices of Nonconformity and a desire to make available to the present generation the wisdom of a dangerously neglected past. These gifts, to which may be added a remarkable breadth of reading and a mischievous turn of phrase, are all evident in his latest book, *Christ and Controversy*.

Recognising that the author attempting to deal with four centuries of Christological reflection is 'confronted by a vast territory' (p. 1), Alan Sell begins by narrowing the field of investigation to Protestant Nonconformity in England and Wales. Exotic sects of the seventeenth century, groups which have developed since 1800 and Roman Catholics are excluded from consideration here. The subject-matter is also limited to the doctrine of the person of Christ, so that there is no attempt to deal with soteriology, the Trinity or Christian doctrine in general viewed through a Christological lens. The point is made that disagreement over the Person of Christ was the most divisive issue in historic Nonconformity, with significant ramifications for local congregations.

After a brief introductory chapter, the study proceeds chronologically. A chapter on the seventeenth century reviews early Nonconformist confessions of faith and Socinian and Arian challenges to classical orthodoxy. These issues are taken further in

the chapter on the eighteenth century, which traverses the Salters' Hall controversy of 1719 and the views of Lindsey, Belsham, Priestley and Price, carefully distinguishing between Unitarians, Arians and Socinians. Two chapters then explore 'representative ecclesial repercussions', first in England and then in Wales. Here we find concise descriptions of the impact of Christological controversies on local congregations. Professor Sell shows that nineteenth-century polemics do not tell the whole story, and it was not always the case that conflict broke out between free-thinking liberals and dogmatic conservatives, or between arid rationalists and warm-hearted evangelicals. Depending on such variables as the qualities of the minister, the attitude of the trustees and the opinions of the members, in some places orthodox members seceded, in others the Arians left, and in still others a congregation managed to stay together through many changes. Balancing the accusation that Arian preaching emptied chapels, Professor Sell notes that High Calvinism could be equally unappealing, citing the telling obituary euphemism: 'his gifts were not of the popular order' (p. 62).

The nineteenth century brought fewer controversies and a hardening of denominational definitions. Professor Sell sees much of this period as one in which Nonconformists made few contributions to the development of Christological thinking. By contrast, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a 'proliferation of Nonconformist Christology' (p. 121), with a parade of eminent and creative thinkers, mostly Congregationalists. Perhaps exhausted by their endeavours, the second half of the twentieth century is dealt with in six pages, recording 'a decided tailing off of Christological endeavour' (p. 173). A substantial bibliography and indexes of persons, of places, of academies, colleges and universities, and of subjects, conclude the volume.

References to Methodism in *Christ and Controversy* are rather few and far between. After unfortunately misquoting Charles Wesley on page vi, Professor Sell touches on the Wesleys' antipathy to Socinianism, and on a riposte to Priestley suggested by John Wesley, begun by Fletcher and completed by Joseph Benson. There is some discussion of the controversy between Adam Clarke and Richard Watson over Christ's eternal Sonship, and William Burt Pope's writings are praised for their 'reverence and spiritual depth' (p. 119), although his scholarship is effectively dismissed as outmoded and his *Compendium* is omitted from the bibliography. Twentieth century Methodist contributions to Christology are dealt with in a single footnote (p. 171); here the author's distinction between theology and biblical studies rules Vincent Taylor (and presumably J. A. Findlay) out of contention.

Alan Sell is to be congratulated on a volume which combines breadth of coverage, insightful summaries of the lives and works of major thinkers and incisive analysis of the ways in which Nonconformists have wrestled to understand the person of Christ.

Susan I. Jackson, *'In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock': A History of the Gibraltar Methodist Church* (Evesham: Wesley Historical Society, 2009, pp. xiv + 470, Paperback, £12.50. ISBN 978-0-9554527-5-8).

Susan Jackson's *'In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock'* is a masterly telling of the story of Methodism in Gibraltar, totalling over 450 pages and including 70 illustrations spread over twenty-five chapters. Each chapter has a main and sub-heading with date, maintaining a chronological sequence, commencing with 'Setting the scene – up to 1769', and culminating in 'Another new beginning – into the future (1997 onwards)'. At the end of the volume is a full list of the early leaders and ministers of the church, plus an extensive bibliography and index.

'Setting the scene' gives us the background to the naming of the Rock, its capture by an Anglo-Dutch fleet in 1704 under Admiral Rooke and transfer to Britain under the Treat of Utrecht in 1713. George Whitefield, *en route* to America in 1738, briefly lodged there and 'was delighted with the prospect of the place' and impressed by some pious soldiers, known as 'new lights' nightly praying, reading and singing psalms at the King's chapel – a fact attested to by a Doctor Pole visiting the Rock in 1748. Not mentioned by Jackson is Samuel Bradburn, the Methodist 'Demosthenes', born three years later on a naval ship in the Bay. A resident on the Rock for twelve years, his father (a soldier) had been much influenced by John Haime, an early Methodist soldier-preacher, when in Flanders. Did Bradburn Senior become a 'new light' and were those 'methodistical' soldiers the first stirrings of Wesleyan Methodism at Gibraltar?

Chapter 2; 'Foundations and beginnings' introduces us to Sgt Henry Ince of the Queen's Regiment (later a hero of the Great Siege) and other early lay leaders such as Sgt Henry Hall of the Scots Guards and Brother Morton 'under whom the work prospers'. Ince, in 1769, wrote to John Wesley indicating that he was leading 35 or so Methodists in worship adding how astonished he was that God was working through him in such a barren place!

Numbers inevitably declined as regiments came and went until 1792 when the Society was re-invigorated by the presence of Sgt Andrew Armour, only to have its very existence threatened in 1803 when two corporals were summarily flogged (200 lashes) and demoted for holding meetings in their homes, a shocking display of antipathy towards Methodists in the army, which was to persist for another fifty years. Letters of protest were sent to London and the Methodist Connexion entreated to send out a missionary whose authority might ensure fairer treatment for the Methodists.

From this point on, Jackson tells the story of the Gibraltar's Methodist ministers and the immense challenges they, their wives and families faced during the early and later parts of the nineteenth century. First and foremost was the ever-present threat of disease in what, during the summer months, was an oppressively hot environment with poor sanitation and frequent shortages of fresh water. Secondly, the attitude of the military towards them was deeply disappointing and proving difficult to overcome as was their acceptance by the Anglican clergy and Catholics.

An outbreak of Yellow Fever in 1804 killed thousands, including the first Minister, James McMullen and his wife, both dying within a month of their arrival. William Griffiths, in post from 1807, increased the membership and was able to build Providence chapel before handing over to another married man, James Gill, in 1812. Gill improved the preacher's accommodation, the chapel and also distributed several consignments of bibles to a naval ship in the Bay and to the many regiments on the Rock, placing some at the hospital and one at every guard post. Both he and his wife contracted Yellow Fever but survived, later securing for the Methodist preachers rations from the military stores, before they returned home in 1814.

Jackson then tells the story of a 'high-jacked' consignment of bibles (taken by the new forces chaplain) later returned to the Methodists with instructions to distribute them 'as though they had been originally consigned to them' which indeed they had! Just one example of the many annoyances faced by the Methodist preachers in their dealings with the military and the local clergy – unusually, one problem was resolved in 1818, when the Governor set aside a plot of land in the cemetery for the sole use of the Methodists. Yellow Fever struck again in 1828 and another Methodist minister, William Barber, was among the 900 or so victims dying within a month of this appointment as assistant garrison chaplain.

Jackson's narrative highlights the resilience of the preachers and the bravery of their wives as they endeavoured to serve their congregations, both military and civilian and, at the same time, engage in the risky activity of evangelising in Spain itself. It was a dangerous venture, subjecting them to much abuse, forfeiture of property and imprisonment. Prominent in this work was the autocratic William H. Rule, often at odds with his colleagues and higher authorities, who left an indelible mark as regards Methodist progress in Gibraltar and Spain. George Alton was another effective minister who, for ten years was secretary of a sanitary committee set up to improve Gibraltar's sewage and water systems at another time of crisis and in response to the unacceptably high number of infant deaths.

Two ministers, William Sarchet and Alfred Sacket, at the turn of the century, prioritised the work with the military, building and improving a Welcome Home establishment for sailors and soldiers. This changed attitudes, leading to a first visit to Sunday worship by a Governor and a fulsome testimonial of appreciation and thanks by the Commanding Officer of the Second Queen's Regiment with an accompanying token to Sacket. The token was a silver tea set presented by the very regiment who had flogged two Methodist corporals so many years before.

Gibraltar's longest serving minister was Frederick E. Brown (better known as 'Padre' Brown) who served as a second minister, 1907-12, and then from 1922 until 1951, a time of momentous change, not least of which was the relocation of the Welcome House into the King Edward VII Soldier's and Sailor's Institute, also on Main Street. Brown also guided the Welcome and church through the difficult war years before handing over to John F. Jackson (the author's father) and it was during his ministry that the church was moved from its uphill site and re-located and incorporated into The Welcome, where it remains to this day.

The final chapter; ‘Another new beginning – into the future (1997 onwards)’ saw a new minister, Ivor Pearce, in charge at a special service marking the inauguration of the Gibraltar circuit in September 1997 and was followed in 2006 by the induction of Fidelio R. Patron, the first native Gibraltarian to become a Methodist minister who, from 2008 then became superintendent of the circuit. Despite its humble beginnings and fierce early persecution the Methodist church in Gibraltar has endured, adapted and changed, now largely serving a civilian population, but confident about its future in the twenty-first century.

One visitor in the 1930s commented that several ex-Presidents of Conference did not even know that a Methodist church in Gibraltar existed, but there should be no excuse for that now. Susan Jackson’s book is a fascinating and easy read, and a most welcome addition to any Methodist library.

ANDREW G. MATHIESON

Graham Tennant (ed.), *Bulletin of Wesley Historical Society in Wales*, no. 1 (2011).

[Subscriptions at £6.00 / £7.50 are available from Colin Merrick, 3 Heol Wern Las, Whitchurch, Cardiff, CF14 1RY. Email: wernlas3@talktalk.net].

Readers of the *Proceedings* will no doubt be very interested to hear of the founding of a branch of the Wesley Historical Society in Wales, and the appearance of the first number of its newly launched *Bulletin*. Attractively produced, with a colour illustration of Fonmon Castle on the cover and a sprinkling of coloured pictures inside as well, the *Bulletin* showcases both some of the research being done on the Welsh expression of Wesleyan Methodism and some of the wider activities of the Welsh branch of the WHS.

The first issue focuses largely on eighteenth century material. Martin Hunt mines John Wesley’s *Journal* to examine his many visits to Cardiff, while Graham Tennant offers some complementary material on Charles Wesley’s visits to Llanishen in Cardiff in 1740 and 1741. Other articles include some reflections by Andrew Mathieson on early Methodism in Montgomeryshire, and another piece on Wesley’s August 1769 preaching tour through parts of mid and south Wales. Other subjects covered in this issue include Gay Roberts’ presentation of some fascinating material on the Old Market Hall in the mid Wales town of Llanidloes, and the reprint of an article on ‘The Cardiff Martyrs’ by Revd Richard Butterworth, a frequent contributor to the *Proceedings* in its early years, which first appeared in the *Roath Road Review* in 1908, the Sunday School magazine of the Roath Road Wesleyan Circuit in Cardiff.

The editors are to be congratulated on a lively, varied and interesting first number of the *Bulletin*, whetting the appetite for further numbers.

DAVID CERI JONES

**Wesley Historical Society Annual Meeting and Lecture
Saturday 30 June 2012**

**The New Room, 'John Wesley's Chapel', 36 The Horsefair, Bristol,
BS1 3JE**

The Annual Lecture and AGM of the Wesley Historical Society for 2012 will be held at The New Room of 'John Wesley's Chapel', situated in the heart of Bristol with its rich associations with Methodist heritage on Saturday 30 June. The Annual Lecture will be given by Professor John Wolffe of the Open University, on the subject of 'Past and Present: Taking the Long View of Methodist and Anglican History' which will compare Methodist and Anglican church growth and decline in the earlier nineteenth and later twentieth centuries. Professor John Wolffe is the author of *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1825-1860* (1991); *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (1994); *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (2000) and *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (2007) and has also edited the *Yorkshire Returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship* (3 vols., 2000-5). The lecture will be chaired by Dr Gary Best, Warden of The New Room, former Head of Kingswood School and biographer of Charles Wesley. As in recent years there will be a supporting programme of stimulating activities in the morning which are open to anyone who is interested in finding out more about Methodist history, so why not invite your family and friends and enjoy a full day's exploration of Methodism's fascinating and inspirational history.

We are grateful to the Revd A. Ward Jones, chairman of the trustees of the New Room, for inviting us to hold our Annual Meeting and Lecture at this historic venue and to David Worthington for advising on practical arrangements for the day. John Wesley arrived in Bristol on 31 March 1739, encouraged by George Whitefield and famously 'submitted to be more vile' by engaging in open-air preaching proclaiming in the highways the glad tidings of salvation'. Opened in 1739, The New Room was the first Methodist building in the world. Enlarged in 1748, it is now both a place of worship and centre for Methodist Heritage and a treasure house of documents, artefacts and publications illustrating Methodist history. On arrival tea, coffee and refreshments will be available for purchase from 10.15 am at the New Room. At 10.30 there will be a guided tour of the New Room with its historic collections by a member of the stewarding team. At 11.15 there will be the opportunity to join a guided tour of the Georgian townhouse in nearby Charles Street, which was the former home of Charles Wesley, his wife, Sally and their children from 1766-71, for which there will be a charge of £5.00. At 12.15 p.m. there will be a short break of 45 minutes for lunch (participants may eat their own packed lunches at the New Room or purchase refreshments from a wide choice of outlets in the vicinity). The society's AGM will commence promptly at 1.00 p.m. and conclude no later than 2.15 p.m. The Annual

Lecture will begin at 2.30 pm and should conclude no later than 4.00 p.m. The customary offering will be taken at the Annual Lecture to cover expenses. The best websites for refreshments and accommodation in the Bristol area are www.broadmeadbristol.co.uk and www.visitbristol.co.uk respectively. Further details of the meeting will be available on the Wesley Historical Society website [www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk] and of the venue on the New Room website [www.newroombristol.org.uk]. It would be helpful if advanced notice of attendance, particularly for the morning programme, could be given to Dr John A. Hargreaves, 7 Haugh Shaw Road, Halifax. HX1 3AH (Tel. 01422 250780; E-mail: johnahargreaves@blueyonder.co.uk) to whom any further enquiries should be addressed.

We are pleased to welcome the following new Members:

Mr David Griffith

West Kirby, Wirral

Rev Paul E. Hardy MA M Arch,

Heavitree, Exeter

Mr Melvin Johnson MA, PGCE, Dip Spec Ed,

Willerby, East Yorkshire.

Miss Alice Walker

Longton, Preston

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Associate Membership is offered to a second person in the household of a Wesley Historical Society member. Subscription rate is GB£4 per year. US\$8 €5. The Associate member does not receive a separate copy of the Proceedings.

All Members and Associate Members are entitled to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Society, may use the facilities of the Wesley Historical Society Library and attend any lecture, conference or event organized by the society.

New members who join partway through the year will receive the copies of the Proceedings already published in that year.

All members receive post-free the tri-annual *Proceedings*. Whilst no complete sets of the Proceedings remain in stock some back numbers may be purchased. Please contact the Marketing Officer for details of which issues are still available.

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