

EXPLORING METHODISM: WOMEN IN METHODISM

Preface

The part played by women in Methodism can hardly be over emphasised, though that emphasis varied in different periods in history as both the denomination developed and the social perception of the role of women altered. So, simply for convenience and in true Methodist fashion (!) this account will be divided broadly into three periods:

- (1) Early Methodism, up to 1803 - chiefly John Wesley's own period and the immediate aftermath following his death in 1791.
- (2) 1803-1880s - with particular reference to the use of women in the non-Wesleyan denominations.
- (3) 1880s -1932 - the developing and changing roles of women and working towards Methodism Union. A few references to later developments, often name changes, may be included where it makes sense to follow through the story

In each period brief accounts of the lives and work of a few women will act as examples of the part played by women in Methodism.

Author's Note

It is important to emphasise that this project is chiefly a 'gathering together' of material from many sources rather than original research. The hope is that readers will find it helpful in tracking down subjects of specific interest to their own research. It is very much 'a work in progress' and obviously much more could be added in all the areas covered.

Introduction

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the official statistics of Methodism do not give a break down of the membership figures by gender, so we cannot tell how many women were members. Even if it were possible, however, there would need to be taken into account the many hundreds who were and are attracted to the denomination for one reason or another, but not actually listed as members.

As Clive Field has pointed out ‘the major role played by women during the first century of English Methodism is widely recognised’, but the emphasis had been on individuals and little attempt made to verify the contemporary belief that early Methodism attracted women thereby disrupting family life.¹

Methodism: a bad influence on women?

‘Many journeymen who had worked hard till noon, going home, found their wives gone out to the *dear hearers*, and their children neglected and no dinner for them, and that by such avocations many mouths had come upon the parish.’

Source: D. S. O’Sullivan, ‘The case of James Wheatley, Methodist’, [Norfolk Archaeology, 36 (1974-77)] pp. 167-75

The early class books which are available and which have been analysed by Dr. Field tend to show that many of the names recorded were those of women.² They indicate that out of 80,361 members the percentage of women was 57.7%. Why was this so? Were/are women more innately religious than men? Did they find in early Methodism a warmth, a welcome and acceptance which was lacking in the established Church of England? As the heads of their families (in all but name) did they find in

¹. Field, C. D., *The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis* [Bulletin of the John Rylands, University Library of Manchester, Vol. 76, No.1, Spring 1994] pp.155-6 & fns 12-19

². Ibid. pp. 158-9, 159, 170-175

Methodism more care and concern for their children and families? Did they find more opportunities for the exercise of their gifts in the service of God?

Whatever the reason for its attraction to women it is certainly a fact that women played a large part in all the branches of Methodism from the very early years. This study will endeavour to consider some of the women and the roles they played in the making of Methodism.

PART I

Chapter 1 - The Formative Years

Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) is without doubt the best known woman of early Methodism, but she was by no means the only one. However, we do need to start with the one who has been dubbed ‘The Mother of Methodism’.

‘The Mother of Methodism’

Susanna was the last but one child of Samuel Annesley and his second wife.³ She was born in London and received a sound basic education. Dr. Samuel Annesley had been an Anglican clergyman, but finding himself unable to accept the Act of Uniformity, which insisted on conformity to the new Book of Common Prayer, he and about two thousand other priests left the Church of England on St. Bartholomew’s Day, August 25th 1662 and thereby became Dissenters.

A matter of conscience

‘A scruple in the mind is as gravel in the shoe, it vexeth the Conscience as that hurts the foot.’

Source: Dr. Samuel Annesley (quoted in A Wesley Family Book Of Days (June 8) (compiled and edited by Susan Pellow, Ill., 1994)

Susanna, who had a lively and enquiring mind, considered all aspects of the situation and by the age of thirteen was convinced that she should join the Church of England. It says a great deal for her family, her up-bringing and her independent spirit that she was allowed to make this choice for herself. Susanna met Samuel Wesley, who had himself moved from Dissent to Anglicanism, and they married on 12th November 1668. For a year he acted as curate at St. Botolph, Aldersgate, but then went to sea as a ship’s chaplain, ostensibly to earn more money to support his

³ Susanna was probably the 25th child of Samuel Annesley. For detailed information about Susanna see Newton, John, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism* (2nd edn., 2003, Epworth)

family and Susanna moved back to the family home where Samuel Junior was born in February 1690. Returning from sea Samuel was for a time a curate in Surrey, but then was presented with the living of South Ormesby, Lincolnshire. Unfortunately, Samuel was a difficult, rather high-handed man who came to be disliked by his parishioners. In 1697 the family moved to Epworth where Samuel became Rector and, again, no doubt from the best of motives, upset his parishioners. Susanna bore a child almost every year and, because Samuel was a very poor manager of money, the family was always in severe financial straits with Susanna trying to cope with the children, debts and the hostile parishioners. On one occasion Samuel was actually consigned to a debtors prison.

As a member of the Convocation of the Church of England Samuel was often away in London and, although his curate was nominally in charge of the parish, the local people did not like his sermons and refused to go to church, so Susanna started to hold prayers for her family in the Rectory. Soon the villagers asked to join in. Susanna could not refuse, and, needless to say, the curate became very angry and complained to Samuel who wrote telling her to stop, but Susanna insisted on continuing her meetings until he returned to Epworth and Samuel had the good sense to give way to her.

Susanna Wesley's stance

‘If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience: but send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment, for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Source: Susannah Wesley, (quoted in *Family Circle* (M.

Edwards, 1949) p. 55 and *Susanna Wesley: Mother of Methodism* (M. Greetham, 2003) p.8)

When fire destroyed the Rectory in 1709, including all Samuel's and Susanna's papers, plus the parish records, and John had been saved from death by being passed out through an upstairs window, Susanna felt sure that this meant that he was destined for something special and described him as 'a brand plucked from the burning.'⁴ She decided that he and, indeed all the family, should each have a 'time apart' with her to foster their spiritual development and discuss their private concerns.

Wesley family: private family conversations

'On Monday I talk with Molly; on Tuesday with Hetty; Wednesday with Nancy; Thursday with Jacky; Friday with Patty; Saturday with Charles; and with Emilia and Sukey together, on Sunday'

Source: Susanna Wesley (quoted in *Family Circle* (M. Edwards, 1949) p. 68 and *Susanna Wesley: Mother of Methodism* (M. Greetham, 2003) p.12)

Susanna not only wrote manuals of instruction for the children to guide them in their lives, but each day she herself engaged in her own spiritual devotions and wrote her meditations. This practice could not have failed to influence John, so that all through his own life he copied her example of private devotion.

Susanna Wesley's private devotions

'Help me, Lord to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Thy Presence.'

Source: Susanna Wesley (quoted in *Susanna Wesley: Mother of Methodism* (M. Greetham, 2003) p.13)

It is obvious that Susanna exercised a great influence on all her family by teaching

⁴. a reference to Zechariah 3:2

them, guiding their spiritual footsteps and by her own example. Brief mention should be made of her daughters, who tend to get overlooked because of their more famous brothers.

Clearly they, encouraged by Susanna's teaching and their upbringing, were very intelligent girls, but, unfortunately, they did not play a role in society which they could have done. Some of them had quite turbulent lives. Of the seven sisters Emilia (Emily), (1692-1771), who was musical and wrote poetry eventually married, when she was well into her forties, but it was not a happy union. Mehetabel (Hetty) (1697/98-1750) whose marriage was rather disastrous also wrote poetry, while the husband of Martha (Patty) (?1706-1791), had 'a roving eye' so that marriage was a trial, however, she became a friend of Samuel Johnson; Anne (Nancy) (1701-?) had a good happy marriage; Susanna (Sukey) (1695-1764), married to a wealthy land owner, but he turned out to be an immoral, vulgar man; Mary (Molly) (1696-1734) married a clergyman and Kezia (Kizzy) (1710-1741) , who suffered from ill-health, died at thirty two.⁵

⁵. Maser, F. E., *Seven Sisters in Search of Love: The Story of John Wesley's Sisters* (Vermont, 1988); Maser, F. E., *The Wesley Sisters* (The Mini Wesley series, No.4 Foundery Press, Peterborough, 1990); Edwards M., *Family Circle* (1949)

Chapter 2: Susanna's influence on John

However, we are particularly concerned with Susanna's relations with John, the founder of Methodism. Susanna without doubt proved to be a steadying, calming force on John on several occasions when he was tempted to act in an arrogant or high-handed manner. By no stretch of imagination could the prayer meetings Susanna held in Epworth Rectory be called 'preaching, but they do show that she felt there was a need for good religious teaching and that she was not afraid to take the initiative.

For example, in 1740, while John was away from the Foundery, the chapel in London, Thomas Maxfield had been in charge of the classes, reading and expounding the Scriptures, so it was but a small step for him to start to preach. John returned to London furious that a layman should dare to preach, but Susanna met him and persuaded him to listen to Thomas Maxfield rather than summarily to forbid his preaching. John took heed of his mother, listened and was convinced.⁶

Thomas Maxfield's preaching

(JW) 'Thomas Maxfield has turned preacher I find.'...

(SW) 'John, you know what my sentiments have been. You cannot suspect me of favouring readily any thing of this kind. But take care what you do with respect to that young man: for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him also yourself.'...

(JW) 'It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.'

Source: H. Moore, *Life of Rev. John Wesley*, 2 vols. (1824-5) vol.1 p.507; *Family Circle* (M. Edwards, 1949) pp.82-3 et al; *WHS Proceedings* 27: pp. 8

So it might be said that Susanna could be called 'the mother of local preaching'.

⁶ . Moore, H. *Life of Rev. John Wesley*, 2 vols. (1824-5) vol.1 p.507; Edwards, M., op.cit. pp.82-3 et al; *WHS Proceedings* Baker, Frank 'Thomas Maxfield's First Sermon', vol.27 (March 1949): pp. 7-15

Local Preaching

Once laymen had been allowed to preach and classes, many of which were led by women, had become established it became almost inevitable that some of these women would feel the need to do more than just pray and testify to their religious/spiritual experience and indeed their classes required more from them. So, soon some women felt it important 'to say a word in season'. They began to give exhortations, which is described by Margaret Batty as the 'reproving of sin, pleading with sinners to flee from the wrath to come, describing his own experience in those matters and testifying to his present joy'.⁷ It soon became inevitable that exhortation would lead to local preaching for certain women. Most probably when this happened quietly in the classes it excited little attention and there was not much debate or concern about it, especially as, in most cases, the women were talking to members of their own sex. In the course of time, naturally, some women felt a call to speak out more publicly and it is here where the story of women preaching really begins. However, first it is necessary to note the other influences Susanna had on John.

The letter writer

Again, Susanna's practice of holding meetings at Epworth surely furnished John with the paradigm for his own band and class system (as we shall see). So also did her copious correspondence with her family, for he wrote constantly to family, friends and fellow-workers. The number of John's correspondents is remarkable and many of them were women. It seems that on the whole John was able to communicate well with his female correspondents in many cases relying on their opinions and indeed giving them considerable influence in the running of the societies

⁷ Batty, Margaret, *The contribution of Local Preaching to the Life of the Wesleyan Methodist Church until 1932, and to the Methodist Church after 1932 in England* (MA University of Leeds, 1969), p.38

and later the churches. Perhaps he came to this through Susanna, when he remembered how she had coped with the difficulties at Epworth, how she had educated her family and directed their spiritual paths and how her clear thinking and common sense had enabled her to accept changes. Over the years the number of Wesley's correspondents grew as Methodism grew because he wished to keep a personal eye on its various activities and deal with any problems as they arose. Indeed he wrote to John King in February 1787 'I generally write to all that desire it, though not often in many words,' and on 5th April 1781 to Miss Clarkson '...it is a rule with me to answer every letter I receive.' It is interesting to note that Wesley himself rarely started the correspondence, though obviously he did write to his preachers, otherwise most of his letters were in reply to ones he received, . This is borne out by his comment to Elizabeth Ritchie when he writes:

'My dear Betsy, - It is not common for me to write to anyone first; I only answer those that write to me. But I willingly make an exception with regard to you; for it is not a common concern that I feel for you. You are just rising into life; and I would fain have you not almost but altogether a Christian.'⁸

In his letters Wesley shows himself more as pastor than preacher, encouraging those who are struggling to live a spiritual life, suggesting helpful religious exercises - reading and prayer - , advising them on health matters and rebuking where necessary.

Advice to John Valton and Lady Maxwell

...It might be of use if you were to read over the first volume of *Sermons* seriously and with prayer. Indeed, nothing will avail without prayer. Pray, whether you can or no. When you are cheerful, when you are heavy, pray: with many or few words, or none at all; you will surely find an answer of peace. And why not now?

⁸. Telford, John, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley* (standard edition, July 1931) vol.6 p.84 (May 8, 1774).[hereafter *JWL*]

...You should in any wise give yourself all the air and exercise that you can. And I should advise you...to sleep as early as possible; never later than ten, in order to rise as early as health will permit...I believe medicines will do you little service; you only need proper diet, exact regularity, and constant exercise, with the blessing of God.

Source: J.Telford, ed. *Letters of John Wesley* (1931) vol. 4 pp.230, 309

It is not surprising to find that many letters deal with relationships and Wesley did his best to act as a reconciler and bring people together again. However, he was not slow to warn when he thought his correspondents were in danger of making a marriage he considered wrong - (ironical when one thinks of his own! Hindsight?) Indeed, he wrote several times (1768, 1774, 1777) to Ann Bolton in this vein: 'I am fully persuaded that is not the person. He has neither such a measure of understanding nor of spiritual experience as to advance you either in divine knowledge or in the life of God. Therefore yield to no importunity, and be as peremptory as you can consistent with civility. This is the wisest way with regard for you and the kindest with regard to him.'⁹ When an engagement was broken off Wesley offered support and even wrote a pamphlet - *Thoughts on a Single Life*, 1765 - praising the single life. However, when any of his preachers, Samuel Bradburn and James Rogers, for example, were bereaved Wesley was quite happy for there to be a second marriage, especially as the ladies in question, Sophy Cooke and Hester Ann Roe, were useful to him in his work! Another favourite topic in his letters was education. We shall see later how he gave hints on study and reading programmes (p.?) which would benefit not only his preachers but also the many young men and women who wrote to him for advice.

⁹. JWL vol. 6 p.72 (February 17, 1774)

Naturally, one of Wesley's deepest concerns was with his societies. In the early years Wesley had been able to keep a close eye on the societies himself, but as Methodism grew and spread (and as he himself got older), he was forced to pass the oversight to others: the band leaders, class leaders, stewards, local preachers and the itinerants. Even so he tried by correspondence, when he could not visit, to keep in touch with the societies at grass root level, giving advice and support in all sorts of ways. In a number of cases, as we shall see, Wesley used his letters to women to monitor tricky situations.

Chapter 3: Early correspondence and women correspondents

Again, Susanna's practice of holding meetings at Epworth surely furnished John with the paradigm for his own band and class system (as we shall see) as did her copious correspondence with her family, for he wrote constantly to family, friends and fellow workers. The number of John's correspondents is remarkable and many of them were women. It seems that, on the whole, John was able to communicate well with his female correspondents in many cases relying on their opinions and indeed giving them considerable influence in the running of the societies and later the churches. Perhaps he came to this through Susanna, when he remembered how she had coped with the difficulties at Epworth, how she had educated her family and directed their spiritual paths and how her clear thinking and common sense had enabled her to accept changes.

Apart from writing to his parents and members of his family, Wesley, while he was at Oxford, corresponded with a group of intellectual women he met through Robert Kirkham, the son of the Rev. Lionel Kirkham, rector of Stanton in the Cotswolds, and John (Robin) Griffiths, son of the Vicar of Broadway. In particular, he exchanged letters with Sally Kirkham and Mrs Pendarves, using the fashionable ploy of giving each other classical 'names', so Sally was 'Varanese' or 'Sappho'; Mrs Pendarves was 'Aspasia'; her sister Anne 'Selima'; Charles Wesley 'Araspes' and John 'Cyrus'. John Wesley called Sally Kirkham his 'religious friend' and she introduced him to the works of St Thomas a Kempis, especially *The Christian Pattern* (*The Imitation of Christ*) which influenced him profoundly. When Sally married, Wesley continued his correspondence with Mrs Pendarves, who was a member of the Granville family and who had been, at seventeen, married to Alexander Pendarves, but

early widowed. She was religiously inclined, educated and well able to talk and write seriously about spiritual matters. Maldwyn Edwards summed her up as a ‘woman of the world, but not worldly.’¹⁰ In 1731 she went to Ireland, where she met Dean Swift and also Dr. Delany, who became her husband, and her correspondence with John Wesley lapsed.

Later correspondence and correspondents

Most of the women with whom Wesley corresponded after 1740 were either single, widows, or separated from their husbands. It appears that when the single women married Wesley seldom wrote to them again. His correspondents, many of whom, such as Hannah Ball, Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers, Sarah Crosby, Mary Bosanquet to name but a few, we shall encounter again in various capacities, came from all walks of life and John used their talents to the full, so he was as much at home with the Countess of Huntingdon and Lady Maxwell as with the humblest servant girl.

Women correspondents

...they were the product of different parts of the British Isles..., and came from different social backgrounds (though chiefly from the comfortable, respectable, middle to upper class). They shared some important characteristics,...; they evinced a strong dedication to personal spirituality, and were usually strongly allied to the Methodist societies; they engaged as far as their health allowed in practical religious service; they were thoughtful and intelligent. Most were also teachable and somewhat deferential...

Source: F. Baker, ed., The Works of John Wesley: Letters I 1721-1739 vol. 25(Oxford, 1980) p.87

Frank Baker lists 22 regular correspondents and comments that the number ‘serves to emphasize the way in which Wesley was sensitive to the feminine mystique,

¹⁰ . Edwards, M., *My Dear Sister: the story of John Wesley and the women in his life.* (1980) p.22

appreciated female achievements, and encouraged the leadership of women in his societies.’¹¹

John Wesley’s letter to Lady Maxwell, 1777

‘I love your spirit; I love your conversation; I love your correspondence; I have often received both profit and pleasure thereby....You have frequently been an instrument of conveying this to my soul, of animating me to run the glorious race.’

Source: J. Telford, ed. Letters of John Wesley, vol. 6, 1931, p.264

As examples of this correspondence we shall look at several women with whom Wesley exchanged letters. Those selected, Lady Maxwell, Hannah Ball and Ann Bolton, do not feature to any great degree elsewhere in this survey.

Lady D’Arcy Maxwell (1742-1810)

D’Arcy Brisbane, the youngest daughter of Thomas Brisbane, was born in Ayrshire. She was privately educated, but she loved reading and extended her knowledge so that she became well able to have theological conversations and correspondence with John Wesley and, having adopted his Arminianism was able to hold her own when in discussions with her Calvinistic friends.¹² Born into the Church of Scotland, she, like Wesley, remained faithful to the church of her birth, however when at 16 she was sent to London to be introduced at court she may, through her aunt, the Marchioness of Lothian, have come into contact with a group of pious (evangelical) women, perhaps associates of the Countess of Huntingdon.

When she was 17 Lady Maxwell was happily married to Sir Walter Maxwell, 4th baronet of Pollock, but unfortunately both he and her baby son died two years later, in 1761. So at 19 she was left a fairly wealthy widow and, perhaps, not surprisingly,

¹¹ Baker, F., ed., *The Works of John Wesley: Letters 1721-1739* (vol. 25) p.87

¹² . Arminianism describes the offer of salvation to all and the freedom to accept or reject it. Calvinism emphasised the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of election (predestination) [for a fuller explanation see the Glossary]

she started to look for answers in religion. Eventually, in 1764, she joined the Methodist society in Edinburgh, where she found ‘a home’.

Lady Maxwell to ‘an intimate friend’

If I had never known the Methodists, I should never have attained to those enjoyments in religion, to which I have attained under *their* instructions.... You know we seldom or never go farther than our instructors teach us... If God has a people on earth, and he has many, it is the Methodists.

Source: ‘A Sketch of the Life and Character of Lady Maxwell’ [Atherton] in The Methodist Magazine (1816) p.727

having met John Wesley in 1764, when she was deeply moved by his preaching and he was impressed by her developing faith. Their correspondence started in June that year and continued until his death in 1791. Many of the letters which contain counselling and reassurance show that her spiritual life was progressing slowly, but surely.¹³ However, in April 1768, she wrote in her journal that ‘My peace began to flow as a river...’¹⁴: her journal became her confidant in which she penned her innermost thoughts. Soon after this Lady Maxwell’s commitment to Wesley’s Arminianism was tested by the Calvinistic insistence on Lady Maxwell seems to predestination, when even her closest friend Lady Glenorchy¹⁵ refused to allow Wesley’s preachers into the chapel which she had had built in Edinburgh. Lady Maxwell wrote to Wesley for advice and he replied to reassure her that, although it would not be easy to show ‘that Christ did not die for all, or that He is not willing as well as able to cleanse all from sin’, she should hold fast to her beliefs.¹⁶

¹³. JWL vol.4 p.308

¹⁴. Lancaster, John, *The Life of Darcy, Lady Maxwell....*(1826) p.28

¹⁵. Lady Willielma Glenorchy (1741-86) was an evangelical Calvinist, who started several churches throughout Scotland and England. Lady Maxwell was her executrix. [see ‘The Contribution of Lady Glenorchy and her Circle to the Evangelical Revival’ [E. Dorothy Graham, BD thesis, University of Leeds, 1964]

¹⁶. JWL vol.5 p.226

Wesley and Lady Maxwell continued to write to each other over the years and both derived profit and pleasure from the exchanges. Lady Maxwell was 'methodical' in her life style: private and public devotions, reading, usually of a religious nature, and letter-writing, plus managing her household, and dealing with business matters. After, the death of Lady Glenorchy, in 1786, she commented that dealing with her affairs, particularly Hope Chapel in Bath, as executrix, caused much work. One of the most difficult problems arising from settling the estate was that Lady Glenorchy had entrusted her friend with the task of appointing the ministers, instructing that they be Calvinists, but Lady Maxwell was, as we have seen, an Arminian, so she wrote to John Wesley in considerable distress. Wesley replied, rather obliquely, but forthrightly, that she ought not to appoint such ministers.

The problem of Hope Chapel ministers

Be pleased to observe I do not affirm anything; I only beg you calmly to consider, Would it be right for me to propagate a doctrine which I believed to be false?...

And is it right in you to do this? You believe the doctrine of Absolute Predestination is false. Is it, then, right for you to propagate this doctrine in any kind or degree...

Is not Calvinism the very antidote of Methodism, the most deadly and successful enemy which it ever had? 'But my friend desired that I would propagate it, and lodged money with me for this very purpose.' What then? May I destroy souls because my friend desired it? Ought you not rather to throw the money into the sea? O let not any money or any friend move you propagate a lie, to strike at the root of Methodism, to grieve the holiest of your friends, and to endanger your own soul!

Living or dying, I shall always be, my dear Lady,
Yours most affectionate servant.

Source: J. Telford, ed. Letters of John Wesley (1931) vol. 8 p.95

In addition to her school, which we shall encounter on a later page, Lady Maxwell became known as a person to whom people could turn for help, so she

received many calls on her time, not infrequently from various clergymen, or others who needed practical advice or encouragement or comfort in times of distress.

D'Arcy, Lady Maxwell died on 2nd July 1810.

One regular correspondent was Hannah Ball of High Wycombe.

Hannah Ball (1733-92)

Hannah Ball was born on 13th March 1733 or 1734, probably in Buckinghamshire. She was one of 12 children and at the age of nine went to live with an uncle in High Wycombe. In 1750 she was acting as housekeeper for her brother, a widower, and looking after his four children. Initially against Methodism she was influenced by reading the sermons of Thomas Walsh, a Methodist itinerant. Over the years John Wesley and other Methodist preachers had visited the town, but it was probably on his visit in January 1765 that Hannah Ball first met him and was converted. She began to keep a diary in 1766, later published as her memoirs. Like many people of the period Hannah was a great letter-writer and, apart from those published in her memoirs, others have survived in MSS form. Her correspondence with Wesley started in 1768 and continued until 1789. On several occasions Wesley entrusted her with the delicate task of ensuring that some of his preachers were performing their ministry correctly, both as regards the content and the method of their preaching.¹⁷

To Hannah Ball, April 12, 1774

I hope you will have many opportunities of conversing with Joseph Bradford and that you will speak to him with all freedom. He is plain and downright. Warn him gently not to speak too fast or too loud, and tell him if he does not preach strongly and explicitly concerning perfection.

¹⁷. *JWL* vol.7 pp. 90, 153,216

Source: J. Telford, ed. *Letters of John Wesley* (1931) vol. 6 p.79

Then, Wesley, having felt that ‘a more commodious preaching house’ was needed at High Wycombe, in 1777, rather remarkably wrote to Hannah: ‘I will give you a plan of the building myself; and employ whom you please to build it.’¹⁸ In his letter of February 24, 1779, written after her mother’s death, Wesley went on to give Hannah further advice about building the new chapel at High Wycombe, which he opened on November 11th, 1779.

Chapel Building at High Wycombe, 1779

I advise you whenever you build to build exactly on the model of our new chapel (City Road, London); only reducing the dimension, perhaps, from eighty by sixty to fifty or sixty by forty feet, according as your ground will allow.

Source: J. Telford, *Letters of John Wesley* (1931) vol. 6 p.342

As we will note later Hannah Ball was an assiduous visitor, both to the sick, ‘back-sliders’ and to those in prison and also in work with children. In 1776 Hannah spent nine days in London during the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, when she attended 14 preaching services as well as a service of Holy Communion. More interestingly she was involved in 14 meetings testifying and counselling: some were band meetings, some class meetings and others personal interviews. Although she was not preaching or exhorting in the formal sense, she was exercising a considerable and effective ministry and John Wesley encouraged her. Hannah Ball died on August 16th, 1792.

Ann [Nancy] Bolton (1743-1822)

Ann, the eldest daughter of Edward and Sarah Bolton of Witney, was born on

¹⁸. *JWL* vol. 6 p.258 cf. p.342

3rd June 1743. The family, who had a bakery business, were Anglicans. Ann lived, at Finstock and then Blandford Park, Witney, with her brother Edward (Neddy), four years her junior, who farmed with varying degrees of success. At times his financial problems caused Ann considerable distress as her correspondence with John Wesley shows. Edward was converted at 16 and became a member of the Conference in 1771. Ann herself was converted in 1762 and joined the Methodist society. She probably met John Wesley when he visited Witney for the first time in January 1764. After that he was a frequent visitor and often stayed with the Boltons appreciating their quiet hospitality, perhaps finding there a peaceful retreat in his busy life. In 1777 Ann became a class leader and fulfilled all the visiting and support of its members which came with such a position. Ann was 23 and Wesley 63 when their correspondence started and in many ways it was a more unusual one than with his other women correspondents in that Ann did not write very frequently. In fact, Wesley, several times, rebuked her for her tardiness:

‘Nancy, Nancy....I was wondering that you never wrote. I doubt your love is grown cold. Let it not be six weeks before I hear from you again....’(January 25, 1770)

‘Nancy, Nancy why do you forget your Friends?...You are marvellously slow in writing. Come, I hope you will make me amends (if you are well) by a long letter.’ (September 16, 1771)¹⁹

As we have already seen from Wesley’s letters to Ann it appears that on several occasions she was uncertain (actually ‘in a bit of a dither’ sums it up rather well!) about proposals of marriage that she received. John advised against them and advocated that she stay single if at all possible and devote herself to God. Indeed she did just that until after Wesley’s death, when, in 1792, she married George Conibeer

¹⁹. *JWL* vol. 5 pp. 177,278

(Conybear) and they lived happily together for seven years until George's death in 1779. Ann herself died in 1822, aged 79. Apart from the 'disagreements' about her marriage proposals the affectionate friendship and correspondence between Ann and Wesley lasted for over 30 years, with Wesley regarding her as his 'inalienable friend and such I trust you will always be, until the union of our spirits will be complete where our bodies part no more.'²⁰

Wesley corresponded with Ann about the Methodist work in Witney, giving her advice and encouragement. When a 'large and commodious house' was needed for the society at Witney Wesley wrote to Ann, just, as he did with Hannah Ball, giving clear directions about its design and size.

Chapel at Witney, 1769

I understand your Purchase money was 200 Guineas. It does seem better to mortgage the House to Bro Caddick than to sell it. Whoever is the first Purchaser, he sh(ou)d without delay tran(s)fer it to five or seven Trustees...that Form w(hi)ch stands in the Minutes of Conference.

With regard to the Room.

- 1) Let the Pulpit be at the far end.
- 2) Let the door (with leaves) be at least 5 foot broad.
- 3) Let the windows be with sashes: opening downwards.
- 4) Let the benches have a rail in the middle dividing the men and women, and an (a)isle on each side.'

Source: quoted in 'Nancy, Nancy' (John Banks, 1984) pp.23-4

At Witney, as elsewhere, John Wesley's visits were flying ones, but he was fortunate in being able to have local people, like Ann Bolton and Hannah Ball, to maintain the society and report progress, especially in those places where the itinerant had a large area and many societies to oversee. So he wrote in his *Journal* on October 15th 1778 'I preached at Witney. Since Nancy B[olton] has been detained here, the

²⁰. *JWL* vol. 5 pp.80,86; vol. 6 p.279-80; vol. 7 p.18

work of God has greatly revived.’²¹ However, he did not leave his helpers to cope on their own, because, for example, in addition to his letters, in 1770, Wesley sent Hannah Ball to support Ann and was delighted that the two women enjoyed each others company. Contact between them was maintained with mutual support and encouragement until Hannah’s death.

Again, we can see that Wesley used Ann, like Hannah, to make sure his itinerants were preaching and behaving as he wished. He wrote, in 1772/3:

‘Sammy Wells will always be useful for he can take advice. But how is it with Billy Brammah? Does he follow the advice I gave him concerning screaming and the use of spirituous liquors? If not he will grow old before his time, he will both lessen and shorten his own usefulness. Drop a word whenever you find an opportunity. He is upright of heart. He enjoys a good deal of the grace of God, but with a touch of enthusiasm.’²²

Apparently William Brammah did not heed either Wesley or Ann’s words because the letter of 18th February 1773 makes clear that he still had a drink problem. It must have been a bit galling to the preachers to realize that Wesley was checking up on them through his women correspondents and Ann’s letters reveal that the Witney society had its ups and downs which at times, along with her ill-health, made her depressed. Wesley does not seem to have understood this at all, writing ‘I am almost at a lost to understand what trials can sit so heavy upon *you*! You are with those whom you love and who love you. You have tolerable health. You have no husband, no children to perplex you. How came you to be so weighted down with care?’²³ Ann persevered and the society at Witney made progress with Wesley encouraging her to meet her classes and bands regularly. He was still writing to her

²¹. *JWJ* vol. 6 p214

²². *JWL* vol. 5 p.347. Samuel Wells and William Brammah were the preachers in Oxfordshire: cf. vol. 6, pp. 17-18

²³. *JWL* vol. 7 pp.49-50

right up to within a few weeks of his death in 1791 urging her to trust God.

It is very evident from their letters that there was a special relationship between the young Ann of Witney and the elderly John Wesley and that she relied on him for advice, support and encouragement, while he not only depended on her to oversee the work at Witney, but also found her letters refreshing to his spirit.

Another aspect of Wesley's correspondence with Ann and others was his concern for their health - both spiritual and physical. He was always ready to give advice on diet, exercise, sleep and when advisable the use of an 'electrical machine' - a topic which fascinated him, as well as devotional reading, exercises and prayer. Wesley certainly believed that God wanted men and women to be in the best of physical and spiritual health in order to serve him to the best of their abilities.

Chapter 4: Georgia

In 1734-5 Wesley was at a turning point in his life - he had to decide whether to succeed his father, who was in poor health, as Rector of Epworth or whether to accept an invitation to go as a missionary to Georgia. Later, in his 24th May 1738 review of his life, Wesley maintained that his aim in going to Georgia had been to convert the Indians, though as Henry Rack points out the reality was rather more complicated.²⁴

Georgia

‘I went to Georgia to convert the Indians but oh! who shall convert me? who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near: but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled.’

Source: Journal of John Wesley vol. 1 p.418 (Jan. 24 1738)

In October 1735 both John and Charles Wesley set sail for Georgia. The story of the founding of the colony in Georgia by General James Oglethorpe, and his invitation to the Wesleys to accompany him, with John acting as a pastor to the colonists and Charles as the General’s private secretary, is well documented and well known as many letters and diaries from both brothers survive and many scholars have dealt with the years spent in Georgia.²⁵ Our purpose in this study is to see how John’s relations with the colonists, especially the women, affected his work and ministry.

The Wesleys finally arrived at the colony in March 1736, after a stormy sea voyage in which they had been much impressed by the quiet faith of the Moravians, their fellow travellers, and throughout his time in Georgia he sought to learn more of the Moravians beliefs and practices. Very soon two women, Mrs Hawkins and Mrs

²⁴. Rack, H., *Reasonable Enthusiast* (1989,2002) pp. 92 ff., 107ff.

²⁵. see Rack op.cit. pp.107ff. and notes and references pp.576-9; Tabraham, B. *The Making of Methodism* (Exploring Methodism series) (1995,) pp.13-4, 22 -25

Welch, caused trouble for both John and Charles, as well as General Oglethorpe, by spreading malicious tales about all of them. The matter so upset Charles that he resigned and left the colony in July 1736. Unfortunately, it did not end there and the women continued to make mischief, but Oglethorpe eventually saw through them and was reconciled with John. Although Wesley had hoped to be a missionary to the Indians in reality his work was chiefly with the colonists in Savannah. Rather rigidly John insisted on maintaining his high Anglican stance in some of the practices which he introduced, but, on the other hand, he started setting up 'bands' of like-minded people who would meet together 'to reprove, instruct and exhort one another'. These innovations did not find great favour among some of the settlers, though others were happy with them.

Wesley and Sophia Hopkey

On a personal level Wesley was again heading for trouble with a woman. The accounts of Wesley's relations with Sophia (Sophy) Hopkey are complicated by the accounts given by Wesley's early biographers and the various versions he himself produced. However, it seems apparent that when Wesley met her on 13th March 1736 she was just seventeen and getting over an unfortunate involvement with someone else and that they were attracted to each other, spending much time together in reading and conversation. It is likely that Sophy was more interested in a permanent commitment than Wesley was. Eventually, Sophy either tried to put pressure on Wesley or began to have second thoughts and so, a year after they met, she decided to marry William Williamson and asked Wesley to publish the banns. Wesley shaken, but still unwilling to make a decision about any future they might have together, could not resist interfering and, perhaps understandably, Mr. Williamson was annoyed so he and

Sophy went off to South Carolina and were married there on 12th March 1737. This was against the laws of the Anglican Church and Wesley used it and the fact that she had not attended Holy Communion regularly as an excuse for excluding her from the Sacrament. Her husband and uncle, Thomas Causton, who was also her guardian, were naturally furious at what they considered to be a very high-handed decision and Wesley was cited to appear before the magistrates for defaming Sophy's character and denying her communion. The Grand Jury convened in August and through the autumn its proceedings seem to have had a great deal more to do with the politics of the colony than the original indictment. Wesley debated whether he should stay and defend himself or return to London to give the Trustees of the Colony his version of events. He decided to go to London and, although the magistrates forbade him to leave they made no effort to stop him sailing, and he landed at Deal on 1st February 1738.²⁶

Wesley leaves Georgia, 1737

'I shook off the dust of my feet, and left Georgia, after having preached there... not as I ought, but as I was able, one year and nearly nine months.'

Source: The Journal of John Wesley vol. 1 p.400

After his return to England from Georgia on 1st February 1738 John Wesley spent several months feeling spiritually unsettled and uncertain where his future lay. Charles was equally troubled, but a meeting with Moravian Peter Bohler helped both brothers and eventually both experienced life changing conversions.²⁷ Many have written about this period of the Wesleys lives and details, which are readily available,

²⁶. for a full account of the Sophy Hopkey affair see Rack, op.cit. pp. 123-133; Heitzenrater, Richard P., *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, (1984) 2 vols, vol.1 pp.78-91

²⁷ Charles on 20th 21st May 1738; John 24th May 1738

are outside the scope of this account.²⁸ It should be remembered that both brothers remained Anglican priests throughout their lives and the Anglican Church of their day frowned active evangelism and seemed to do little for the lower strata of society. Both John and Charles were concerned about both these things and so what has been called 'the Methodist Revival' came into being. This, in due course, became the Methodist movement and ultimately a separate denomination developed.

Following John and Charles' contact with the Moravians John visited Herrnhut, a Moravian community in Saxony, Germany, after his conversion experience. He then felt he wanted to put some of their ideas into practice. While in Georgia he had set up 'bands', relied on local hospitality and realized the help and importance women could bring to bear in spiritual matters. The aim of this present work is to focus on the role of women in Methodism by looking at the various areas in which they played a significant part.

²⁸ For e.g. see Tabraham op.cit. (2nd ed. 2010) pp. 46-52; Tabraham, *Brother Charles* (2003) passim; Rack, op.cit.; Heinzenrater, op.cit.] and many older publications.

Chapter 5: John Wesley and his women workers

Women played an important part in the life of early Methodism, often fulfilling roles not normally associated with women at that time. Wesley could see that they could be a valuable asset in his long term aim of taking the gospel into places, and to people largely untouched by the established church and other denominations so he encouraged them to use their talents to the full. In this chapter we shall look at some of those roles.

Band and Class Leaders

As already noted John Wesley was much impressed by the Moravians whom he had first met on his voyage to Georgia in 1735 and he adopted a number of their practices. One of these was the division of his followers into small bands for study and prayer. Initially the bands were single sex groups ²⁹ and his first reference to them was in 1738 when he remarked on the creation of ten bands - eight of men and two, soon to rise to six, of women³⁰ and he happily acknowledged the assistance given by both sexes.³¹ So, by and large, women led women's bands and therein nurtured their caring and pastoral skills. By 1742 Wesley's organization had developed and classes of twelve persons were formed, sometimes single sex, but often mixed. There had been a financial crisis in the Bristol congregation that year and so it was decided that the classes should contribute a penny (1d.) per member. Soon the leaders who collected this money found that they were being asked to take on a more pastoral role and Wesley realized that this offered a great opportunity for caring for the members of his emerging societies. So he insisted that everyone must be a member of a class, but

²⁹. *JWL* vol. 1 p 272

³⁰. *JWL* vol. 1 pp. 260, 272

³¹. *JWL* vol. 1 p.3 - (Sept. 21, 1739)

membership of the bands was voluntary. Basically the bands consisted of people with like spiritual experiences, but the classes were made up of men and women with varying experiences who could thus build up each other. As many classes had a majority of women members inevitably many leaders were women and they exercised a caring ministry and nurture in spiritual growth to their members. They also came from across the whole spectrum of society, thus Lady Maxwell, Lady Margaret Hastings Ingham, Hannah Ball, Sarah Mallett (Boyce) and Sarah Bentley led classes.

The classes also had a disciplinary function for to be expelled from the class virtually meant being expelled from the society. As has been shown the purpose of the classes was primarily spiritual with little sex differentiation and this put women on an equal religious footing with men and gave women opportunity for leadership which was not available in the Church of England. The women chosen as leaders had to be sure of having received salvation themselves and be filled with a desire to pass the knowledge of this saving grace to others. Their own lives had to be conspicuously blameless and their integrity irreproachable - any who fell short were quickly removed. Occasionally certain women found that, by virtue of their abilities, they became the leaders of a men's class, but very seldom did a man lead a women's class. As the classes were not public services, and, indeed at this stage Wesley's followers still attended the local parish church, there could be no objection to women exercising leadership within the class context. Within the small close-knit group of the class meeting women were expected to participate fully and so learned the art of public speaking and telling of their faith. Hence the class meetings enabled women to provide a pastoral ministry through Bible Study, prayer and testimony. This in itself was remarkable in the world of that time, but Mary Hainsworth, the wife of an

itinerant, found herself leading a men's class and a certain John Hargreaves, a member of her class, felt that 'she stood spiritually and intellectually head and above every other member of the Society'.

Prejudices about women leaders

Although it may be very plain, according to Scripture, and the fitness of things, that women are not born to rule, the economy of Methodism has wisely provided for the employment of female-leaders, thereby affording to devout and intelligent women one of the most useful and honourable spheres to be found in the universal church.... There is, however, such an incongruity in men's meeting with female leaders as must prevent it from coming into general practice; but there are some exceptional instances in which a female stands out in a Society so distinctly superior to all the rest of the members that the incongruity is reduced to minimum.

Source: William Jessop, An Account of Methodism in Rossendale and the Neighbourhood (Manchester 1880) p.293

Frances Pawson paid tribute to the bands and classes and their leaders when she wrote 'I cannot repeat all the good things I have heard from Mrs. Crosby, Mrs Downes and others. I can only add, that those little parties, and classes, and bands, are the beginning of the heavenly society in this lower world.'³²

From the many examples that could be cited we shall look at just two women who acted specifically as class leaders:. Elizabeth Ritchie (Mrs Mortimer) of Otley and Hester Ann Rogers (Roe).

Elizabeth Ritchie (1754-1835)

Elizabeth Ritchie was born at Otley, Yorkshire on 2nd February 1754. She was the second child of John and Mary Ritchie. Her father had been for many years a naval surgeon, then having retired from the sea he settled in Otley and continued to

³². Sutcliffe. J., *The Experience of the Late Mrs Frances Pawson....* (1813) p.84

practise as a doctor. They were Wesleyan Methodists and John Wesley often stayed with them. Elizabeth had a happy, though strict, childhood, but was delighted at the age of 12 to go to live with a Mrs H., who, as well as giving her a good education also allowed her freedom to enjoy more worldly pleasures. They attended the Church of England and Elizabeth began to despise the Methodists, however, when Mrs H. moved to London Elizabeth returned home. Here she met John Wesley again, but refused to attend his service and went to the parish church. The curate there was evangelical and his sermon touched Elizabeth, who then began to keep a very personal diary. When Wesley again visited Otley in June 1772 Elizabeth joined a class and by 1774 had progressed from class member to leading a class herself. She was rather overawed at the task, but, totally convinced of the importance of the office, she carried it out with great care and understanding. Agnes Bulmer, her biographer wrote:

Elizabeth Ritchie - class leader

Clear in her own conceptions, unhesitating in her purposes and uniformly vigilant, devout and prayerful, she endeavoured to impress on those who sought her counsel, the same decision earnestness and spirituality of mind. Her manner was attractive, lively, unembarrassed, kind, familiar.

*Source: Agnes Bulmer, *Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Mortimer*, (1859)*

Until 1780, because of her own ill-health and that of her parents, Elizabeth lived at home, but later she began to go further afield. She joined John Wesley on some of his journeys and undertook others on her own. Elizabeth was not a preacher: her ministry was exercised through the classes and bands, by counselling, encouraging and nurturing the spiritual life and progress of the members.

Elizabeth exchanged letters with many fellow Methodists, including from

1772, John Wesley. In 1790 she went to live at the City Road Chapel House, London, where she acted as housekeeper in place of Hester Ann Rogers. Elizabeth nursed Wesley during his last illness, often reading to him and was at his bedside when he died. At the request of Dr Whitehead she wrote an account, later published, of his last few days, part of which Whitehead read at the funeral. After Wesley's death Elizabeth became very depressed, but with the help of friends, especially Mary Bosanquet, she resumed her letter writing and religious work, becoming a class leader at the Foundery, though she no longer kept her diary or itinerated.

As far back as 1786 Elizabeth had rejected a proposal of marriage from Harvey Walklate Mortimer, who then married someone else. However, in 1801, when he was a widower with six motherless children, he and Elizabeth married. Harvey died in 1819 but, until doctor's orders forbade it, Elizabeth continued with her class and public speaking. Elizabeth Ritchie died in London on 9th April 1835 and was buried at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London.

Hester Ann Rogers (1756-94)

Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers was another woman who worked particularly with the classes and bands and Wesley appreciated her care of new converts.³³ Hester Ann Roe was born in Macclesfield, Cheshire on 31st January 1756 where her father was the Anglican vicar. The family was very opposed to Methodism, but Hester heard Samuel Bardsley, the Wesleyan itinerant, preach and dated her conversion from 11th November 1774. Her family were furious and virtually disowned her, but Hester, offered to act as her mother's servant as long as she might attend Methodist meetings. Her mother, thinking it would not last, agreed, but Hester was persisted and after eight

³³. *JWL* vol. 7, p.96 (Letter, Dec. 9, 1781)

months her mother relented. She first met John Wesley in April 1781 and they began a life-long correspondence. That same year Wesley appointed her a class leader and she also became a sick visitor. Her MSS journal ³⁴ describes the methods she employed.

Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers - class leader

I opened the Hymn book on that precious hymn, “O for a Heart to praise my God” etc. - and in singing it, was filled indeed with the Divine Presence and love unprintable. Prayer was as a Gate of Heaven, and I sensibly felt the words given me to speak were not my own. I think I never was so entirely led out of myself and influenced by a divine power - while the dear people seemed as melting wax before the fire.

Source: MSS Journal (Aug. 30, 1781) (Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, Manchester)

When James Rogers was stationed in Macclesfield in 1782 Hester became a close friend of his wife, Martha, but, was shocked, in December 1783, when Martha said she hoped Hester would marry James after her death. Martha died on 15th February 1784, leaving two sons. After much soul-searching Hester and James married on 19th August 1784 and nine days later, John Wesley sent them to Dublin. They remained in Ireland until 1790 and while there Hester led several classes and started her *Spiritual Letters* (1796), which, together with extracts from her diary, was used extensively as a devotional book. She also wrote poetry and articles for the *Arminian Magazine*. Her husband appreciated her work with the classes, especially with new converts, and indeed credited her with being the instrument whereby up to two thousand of those who joined the Society in Dublin were brought to Christ. By 1790 Hester’s health was declining, so Wesley brought them home to City Road Chapel,

³⁴. MSS Journal is in the (Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, Manchester –(hereafter MARC)

intending Hester to act as his housekeeper, but she was not well enough. Both Hester and James were at Wesley's bedside when he died in March 1791. The family moved to Belmont Road Chapel, Birmingham in 1793 and on 10th October 1794, after giving birth to her fifth child, Hester died in her husband's arms. Dr. Coke preached her funeral sermon in October 1794 and recalled her work as a class leader and evangelist.

Tribute to Hester Ann Rogers - Dr. Thomas Coke, 1794

Mr. Rogers...would give a very few to her care, desiring her to complete the class out of the world and soon by her conversation and prayers and attention to every soul within her reach, would the number spring up to thirty or forty; and ...(her husband) would transplant all the believers to other classes, and keep her thus continually working at the mine.

Source: The Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers with a Sermon Preached on the Occasion of her Death, by the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., [Appendix by her husband] (1833) p. 206

Chapter 6: Invitations and Hospitality aid the spread of Methodism

Just as hospitality had been a feature of the early church, so it was true of early Methodism in all its branches. Families tended to be large and fairly close-knit so, as word of Methodism and its teaching spread, friends and relations heard the news, invitations were extended and homes were opened to those who would talk about their new found faith and to those who wanted to hear.

John Wesley's Journal, 1756

Fri. 20 Aug. - I rode to Chelmsorton-in-the Peak. Although the poor people had no previous notice, they supplied the want of it by sending to the neighbouring villages. Between seven and eight the house was pretty well filled, and many of them were extremely thankful.

Source: John Wesley's Journal, vol.4 p.185 (20, August 1756)

In particular the itinerant nature of Methodism, especially in the early years, meant that the travelling preachers were very dependent upon the good will and hospitality of those who listened to their preaching and accepted the message. Before there were any purpose-built meeting houses or chapels preaching often took place in the open-air or in the home of a hospitable follower. Small societies were established and, when strong enough, having 'outgrown' the original meeting place a chapel was erected. In many cases women were among the first to be attracted to Methodism, opening their homes to the preachers and providing facilities and also the congregations for the preaching. One has only to read Wesley's *Journal* and *Letters* to see how often he himself partook of local hospitality on his travels up and down the country, for instance he wrote to Hannah Ball on 7th June 1783: 'If I possibly can I will spend a night with you as I go from London to Bristol next month.'³⁵ The same

³⁵. *JWL* vol. 7 p.180

hospitality was afforded to his itinerants. One of Wesley's preachers was John Bennet, who came from Chinley in Derbyshire and when Wesley visited the village he was entertained by a Mrs Goddard who persuaded him to preach and so a Methodist preaching place was established there in 1744.³⁶ John Nelson described how Methodism came to Leeds via his preaching in Birstall when three women from Leeds attended, were converted and formed the first society in that city.³⁷

As well as giving the opportunity for Wesley and his itinerants to talk publicly with people, staying in private homes would have provided opportunity for more personal in-depth conversations with the host and hostess and their family. This would have been especially important where they were class or band leaders³⁸ or dedicated workers in the local chapel. Also a 'private place' must have given the busy itinerant a time of peace and quiet for devotion and reflection, to say nothing of respite and relaxation, so necessary for maintaining the impetus of their evangelistic work.

Just two examples from Wesleyan Methodism to show how personal contact aided the spread of Methodism will suffice here. **Sarah Bentley** (1767-1847) came from Yorkshire and she had a simple quiet faith which she passed on to others even when faced with ridicule. She joined the Methodist Society in York around 1800. For nine years after her conversion she talked about her faith to individuals, but in 1809 she was persuaded to become a class leader. Until 1842 she led her class

³⁶. *JWJ* vol.3 p.142 fn.

³⁷. Jackson, T., ed, *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers Chiefly written by themselves* (1865 3rd ed.) vol.1 p. 60; Hellier, J.E., "The Mother Chapel of Leeds" in *Methodist Recorder Winter Number*, 35 (Christmas 1894) p.24

³⁸ 'bands' were like-minded people who would meet together 'to reprove, instruct and exhort one another'. Wesley had first set bands up while he was in Georgia.

diligently, with sincerity and directness, urging and reproving when and where necessary. Sarah died on Christmas morning 1847, aged 80.³⁹

Mary Bennett, the daughter of Captain Edward Bennett, was born in 1743 and when John Wesley visited Chester Mary and her mother heard him preach. Mary joined the Methodists in 1755, aged 12. Her father took the family to Neston to get away from the Methodists, but to no avail as they got a cottage and began to hold religious meetings. In 1760 Mary married George Lowe of Chester and provided much hospitality for John Wesley and his preachers.⁴⁰

An interesting example not only of hospitality and generosity, but also of the relation between the different branches of Methodism⁴¹ appears in the obituary of **Mrs Hannah Frost** (1768-1852) of Dorking, Norfolk as recorded in the 1852 *Primitive Methodist Magazine*. The family was comfortably off and, despite opposition from her husband, she invited Wesleyan preachers to the village and a society was organized in 1809. When her husband died in 1818 she, as a well to do widow, built the Wesleyans a chapel. Then, when the Primitive Methodist missionary, George Lee came to Dorking she invited him to her house to stay and preach and she became a class leader. A Primitive Methodist chapel was built, in 1836, principally at her expense. In 1842 one of the travelling preachers was accommodated at her house, but nowhere being found for the other and the chapel being too large for the then congregation part of it was adapted as a house for him. The cost was £42 and of that Mrs Frost contributed £41. The following year there

³⁹ Morrow, Thomas M., *Early Methodist Women* pp.106-119

⁴⁰ *Methodist Magazine* 1809 pp. 187-91, 229-39; Bretherton, F.F., *Chester...*, pp. 62-65

⁴¹ The main branches of non Wesleyan Methodism were Primitive Methodism (1811); The Methodist New Connexion (1797) and the Bible Christians (1815).

was a revival which meant a gallery was needed in the chapel, and she provided half of the £40 required. As well as all this she gave generously to overseas missions and left most her property to the Missionary Society.⁴²

Non-Wesleyan family networks

The use of family networks was perhaps even more marked in the non-Wesleyan Connexions. Why should this be? It may have something to do with the people who were attracted to, or touched by, these denominations. In the case of both the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians many of their members came from farming backgrounds and rural settings, and some of these were poor communities. Rural Methodism has always been a close knit community, with family ties to other groups in nearby villages and a great deal of what might be called cross-fertilization. Marriage and other connections developed into an extensive network, so that a 'happening' in one village soon became known in the others. Thus, as families and friends visited each other, heard the Gospel message and were affected by it, invitations were extended to the preachers, both travelling and local, to preach in the nearby village. As much of this travelling would have to be on foot hospitality for the day, at very least, and often overnight would be offered. When longer missions were undertaken arrangements were made for the missionaries, so that their work could have the greatest effect and, at the same time, not be too much of a burden on their hosts. Many of the homes in which the preachers stayed were poor and conditions cramped, so their personal study and devotions would have to be fitted in early in the morning or late at night when the house was quiet. This also meant that the day-light hours could be used for family visiting, meetings and especially 'conversation evangelism' - that is

⁴² *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1852) pp.449-53 [hereafter *PMMag*]

talking to individual people face to face. This conversation ministry, which spoke to the hearts and minds of men and women who needed someone with whom to share their experiences - both spiritual and physical was an important factor in the spread of Primitive Methodism and the Bible Christian Connexion. Both the preachers and the members made time for enquirers and by sharing their hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, by showing a loving care and concern for the whole person - body and soul - they spread the Gospel by word of mouth, by report, as much as by formal preaching services. So invitations to other towns, villages and areas were given following upon report brought back by travellers and traders. For example, **Sarah Kirkland**, regarded as the first female travelling preacher of Primitive Methodism, went to Ambaston at the invitation of Robert Winfield, then she was asked by some of her listeners there to go on to Chaddesden and, while there, received a further request to go to Derby. Similarly, a woman, having heard another female itinerant, Elizabeth Smith, preach at Shefford invited her to visit her own village of Market Illsley, which led to the Primitive Methodist missionaries going further afield into Berkshire and Wiltshire.

The Bible Christian experience closely mirrors that of the Primitive Methodists with regard to requests to go to other villages and the hospitality received. **Elizabeth Dart** (1792-1857), the first Bible Christian female itinerant, received invitations from many places to preach and her diary tells both of the effectiveness of her ministry and its strain - physical, mental and spiritual.

Elizabeth Dart

Sunday evening after I had been speaking, and while engaged in prayer the Lord sent his convincing spirit amongst the people...This was a day of labour to my body as well as my soul,

having spoken three times before this, - walked seven and rode four miles without taking any refreshment from dinner, till one o'clock the next morning. Nothing but the love of souls could have induced me to labour and endure this.

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical Sketches of Holy Women vol.2 (Leeds, 1828) p.204

In January 1818 Elizabeth wrote that 'This month I had two letters inviting me to go down to Boscastle to help them. Sister Reed was down before me. I went not intending to stay, but she was going away, and I was obliged to stay in her place.'⁴³ A year later **Catherine Reed** (c.1798-1875) was sent to the Kent Mission in 1820 and then invited by a Mr Gunn to visit London. Although apprehensive, she felt it was her duty to go and so Sunday, 29th April found her preaching in Webb Square at 11.00 a.m.; in the open air in Harefields at 3.30 p.m. and in Harefields Chapel at 6.00 p.m. Crowds attended all three services and many were 'deeply affected'.⁴⁴ Subsequent visits drew large congregations to both Catherine's and Ann's services, to a large extent, because of the novelty of hearing a female preacher. **Mary Toms** (1795-1871), who went on Tuesday, 29th July 1823 to establish the Isle of Wight Mission,⁴⁵ after some difficulty eventually found a bed with a Mrs Pooke, a Wesleyan. Then, on the Sunday, at East Cowes the novelty of a young woman, standing on a borrowed chair, singing, and preaching in the open-air brought crowds to hear her - some listened attentively, others scoffed and laughed. When Mary announced she would preach again the following week, a room was offered. So many wanted to hear 'the woman preacher' that once again she held an open-air service. Many were convinced, including a well-to-do couple who came out of curiosity to hear a woman

⁴³ Taft, Z., vol 2 p.206

⁴⁴ Bourne, F.W., *The Bible Christians: Their Origin and history (1815-1900)* (1905) pp.109-115

⁴⁵ Woolcock, J., *A History of the Bible Christian Churches on the Isle of Wight* (1897) pp.17-18

preach and befriended her. Soon Mary received more invitations than she could accept and other preachers were sent to help her. Another Mary, **Mary Ann Werrey** (fl.1820-25), is rather a mystery, but in 1823 she felt called to go to Scotland. After a sea voyage she arrived in Blyth, Northumberland, in late November. Wesleyan Methodist church members looked after her and encouraged her longing to go Scotland. It seems that things did not go according to plan and Mary Ann decided to return to her friends in Blyth. Unfortunately her health had suffered, and although she was able to do some preaching, it was not as much she would have liked. Mary Ann continued to struggle with illness and Bourne assumed that she died in Northumberland and never did achieve her dream of going to Scotland.⁴⁶ Certainly her name disappeared from the Stations in 1825, but was this really the end of her story? There are several rather tantalising hints which will be covered in the section on preachers. However, to continue with the present theme of hospitality we should note that Dr A.W.G. Court, said Mary Ann was nursed back to health and moved with her friends the Barwicks to Edinburgh and quoted from an account in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* of 2nd May 1825 to back up this statement. (see chapter ? p. ?).

This pattern of invitation and hospitality, which we have seen in early Methodism, was continued throughout the ensuing years with visiting preachers being invited and afforded hospitality in different circuits. A survey of the obituaries and memoirs in the connexional magazines of all dates reveal how often hospitality was shown. Phrases like ‘house soon opened for the preaching of God’s word; ‘the toil-worn servant of God always found an asylum in her house’ and ‘a room for the use

⁴⁶ Bourne, op.cit. p.145

of the preachers, where they all found a welcome home at any time they chose'.⁴⁷ are frequent and indicate how such care was regarded as 'doing the work of God' by providing home comforts for the preachers, who had come to proclaim the Gospel of salvation.

In more recent times very often invitations still came through family connections. For example I remember, the local preachers in my own family being asked to take services in neighbouring circuits and further afield where relations or friends lived. Then the preacher would be invited to a meal by a member of the congregation. This was also the true for the students from the theological colleges or university Methodist Societies, when they went out on preaching appointments, often having travelled considerable distances. Personally, I remember going from Leeds to Bradford, by bus (naturally) and at 'high tea' being told by the hostess 'don't mind crunching the celery, dear'!

Hospitality was the norm in wartime with church members making welcome members of the armed services from the local barracks, air-fields or ports, not only in the church, but in their homes. It is still an accepted part of Methodism that 'strangers', be they preachers or not, are made welcome and part of the family.

⁴⁷ *PMMag* (1852) pp. 17,137,392

Chapter 7: Women and early social work

The social climate of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries meant that women of all classes often led rather isolated and lonely lives. When Wesley became aware of this he could see that here was a field in which his women helpers could participate more readily than men.

Visiting and Visitors: Sick Visiting

Many of the class leaders were also visitors to the members of their classes, but there was another group of men and women whose ‘ministry’ was visitation. Wesley felt this was a vital part of women’s work in the church and he devoted a sermon, ‘On Visiting the Sick’ (Matthew 25:36), to the subject. In three sections he considered ‘(I) what is the nature of this duty? What is implied in ‘visiting the sick? (II) How are we to visit them? In what manner may the labour of love be most effectually performed? How may we do this most to the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbours? (III) By whom is this duty to be performed? The answer is ready - by all that desire to ‘inherit the kingdom of their Father.’ Then, having pointed out that both ‘the old’ and ‘young’ might engage in visiting Wesley continued: ‘But may not *women*, as well as men, bear a part in this honourable service? Undoubtedly they may; nay they ought; it is meet, and right, and their bounden duty. Herein there is no difference; “there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.” Indeed it has long passed for a maxim with many that “women are only to be seen, not heard.” And accordingly many of them are brought up in such a manner as if they were only designed for agreeable playthings! But is this doing honour to the sex? or is it a real kindness to them? No; it is the deepest unkindness; it is a horrid cruelty; it a mere Turkish barbarity. And I do not know how any woman of sense and spirit can submit

to it. Let all you that have it in your power assert the right which the God of nature has given you. Yield not to that vile bondage any longer! you, as well as men, are rational creatures. You, like them, were made in the image of God; you are equally candidates for immortality; you too are called of God, as you have time, to “do good unto all men.” Be “not disobedient to the heavenly calling.” Whenever you have opportunity, do all the good you can, particularly to your poor sick neighbour. And every one of *you* likewise “shall receive your own reward, according to your labour.”⁴⁸

As the travelling preachers often moved every year it was essential, if the local society was not to be destabilised when the itinerant left, for there to be an established group of lay people as pastoral visitors to continue the care of the society. These people felt that they had a particular calling to do this work. More often than not the people visited were in some sort of trouble and so the callers had to be sensitive, helpful and concerned for all their needs. These visitors were also conscious of their mission as evangelists and were often able to offer spiritual comfort and Christ to those they visited. The sick were regarded as particularly in need of succour. It was felt that those who were seriously ill or near to death were in danger of everlasting hell and that the visitor might offer them a last chance to save their souls. Then again it was realized that many who were ill were often brought to the point of considering the purpose of their life and its ultimate end and therefore it afforded a good opportunity for the sick visitor to guide their footsteps into the paths of eternal salvation. The connexional magazines are full of examples of death or sick bed conversions.⁴⁹ Hannah Ball, for example, recounted her experience when she

⁴⁸. *Arminian Magazine* (1786) where it is untitled, but numbered Sermon XXXIV; cf. *The Works of John Wesley* (ed. Albert C. Outler, 1986) vol.3 (Sermons 3) pp.384-97, especially pp.395-6

⁴⁹. *Arminian Magazine* (1785) pp.404-7

visited a sick patient, whose doctor, an unbeliever, arrived. The doctor wished Hannah to leave, but she stood her ground believing that the doctor was there to deal with the physical illness while she was concerned with the patient's soul.⁵⁰ Hester Ann Rogers also reported on her sick visiting, commenting that her visits to those who were ill had sometimes resulted in the neighbours being influenced and inviting her to call on them.⁵¹

Wesley on sick visiting: letter to the Rev. Vincent Perronet, December 1748

It is the business of a Visitor of the sick:
To see every sick person within his district thrice a week;
To inquire into the state of their souls, and advise them, as occasion may require;
To inquire into their disorders, and procure advice for them;
To relieve them, if they are in want;
To do anything for them which he (or she) can do;
To bring in his accounts weekly to the Stewards.
Upon reflection, I saw how exactly, in this, also, we had copied after the primitive Church. What were the ancient deacons? What was Phebe the deaconess, but such a Visitor of the sick?

Source: The Works of John Wesley: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design, vol. 9 p. 274 [ed. Rupert E. Davies, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1989]. The letter was published as A Plain Account of the People called Methodists

Non-Wesleyan experiences

The members of the non-Wesleyan denominations engaged in visitation as assiduously, if not more so than their Wesleyan contemporaries. As the early Primitive Methodist and the Bible Christians were more evangelically inclined, than the, by now, more settled and conformist Wesleyan Church visiting of all types was seen as vitally important for spreading the Gospel message. Each travelling preacher was expected to visit 30 families a week, exhorting, praying and engaging in

⁵⁰. MSS letter to John Wesley, Aug. 26, 1776 (MARC)

⁵¹. MSS letter to "my dear friend" May 20th, 1780 (MARC)

conversation. This ‘conversation ministry’ was an essential part of visiting and practised by both preachers and ordinary members. The ‘conversation’ was to be ‘serious’ or on ‘solemn questions about death, judgment, and eternity.’ Other than on Sundays, the Primitive Methodist visitors were prepared to talk about ‘worldly affairs’ as long as it was ‘in a proper way’, so that ‘the conversation assumed a religious tone; and the people were showed that in their daily labour they were yielding service to God, by doing the work his providence had appointed them.’⁵² Once again, by looking at the obituaries in the connexional magazines one can see how often the subjects were commended for their ‘visiting’.

Elizabeth Braithwaite

Our sister being placed in comfortable circumstances had an opportunity of visiting the poor and needy, and her sympathy and liberality were often manifested. She frequently repaired to the chamber of the sick and dying, and administered consolation to the saint, and pointed the penitent sinner to the world’s Redeemer.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1852) p.13

Eliza Haycock

She was fond of visiting the sick, and interceding for them at a throne of grace, and ever ready to perform the meanest office to assist and comfort them in their affliction. Like her Lord and Master she delighted to do good to any who needed her friendly aid, and she often wept with those that wept.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1852) p.646

Similar examples of visiting the sick can be found in the connexional magazines of the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christian Church.

Visiting Backsliders

⁵² *Primitive Methodist Minutes* [hereafter *PMMins*]. (1824, small minutes) p.6, *PMMag.* (1824) pp.145-6

Another type of visiting was that of calling on backsliders. Inevitably there were members who ‘fell away’ from their first enthusiastic acceptance of Methodism, but they were not abandoned. Methodism felt concerned about such backsliders and endeavoured to win them back to faith. Wesley himself was convinced that certain of his women helpers had a special forte for visiting and, hopefully, redeeming backsliders. Again he wrote to Hannah Ball and Hester Ann Rogers about their work in this field.⁵³

John Wesley to Hannah Ball, January 24, 1771 and Hester Ann Rogers, May 29, 1788

My Dear Sister,....

I am glad the providence of God led you to Wallingford, were it only for the sake of poor Miss Hartly. She departed from us for a season that we might receive her again for ever. This should be an encouragement to you to labour with other backsliders. No one is ruined while he is out of hell.

My Dear Hetty,.....

In this day of God’s power I hope many of the backsliders in Cork will be brought back; there are great numbers of them in and about the city, and many are of the genteeler (sic) sort. It seems you have a particular mission to these; perhaps they will hear none but you. I hope you have already found out Mrs Forbes (Captain Forbes’s wife), and that now she is more than almost persuaded to be a Christian.

Source: J. Telford Letters of John Wesley vol.5 p.218; vol.8 pp.60-1

Non-Wesleyan examples

With the ethos of Primitive Methodism being very evangelical concern was felt for any members who began to have doubts or to become lukewarm in their adherence to the denomination and some of the choruses in a number of hymns in

⁵³ . JWL vol. 5 p.218; vol. 8 p. 61; MSS Journal (of Hester Ann Rogers) (MARC)

Bourne's *Small Hymn Book* could be adapted to suit difference occasions. For example, 'See how the Scriptures are fulfilling', with its chorus 'Save poor sinners, save poor sinners, save poor sinners from their sins' has a footnote saying that 'this chorus admits of variety, as 'Save backsliders etc.,' - 'whole families,' - 'our children,' - 'our parents,' - our neighbours,' etc.⁵⁴ Margaret Cowling, we learn, was very concerned if any of her class were absent and 'her visits, advice, entries and tears, proved how deeply she was interested for their present and eternal welfare' and again, 'she never left returning prodigals willingly until they had received the blessing they sought.'⁵⁵ In 1848 the obituary of Jane Coates reports that 'she ...was a powerful wrestler with God for the unsaved, and accompanied her prayers by Christian living. By tract distributing, visiting from house to house to administer spiritual instruction to the dwellers therein, she tried to reclaim the unsaved, quicken the lukewarm, encourage the timid, and lead all to the Redeemer of the world.'⁵⁶ Mary Hewett, a Quaker, became a Bible Christian, despite considerable family opposition. She began by visiting the sick, praying and talking with them, before becoming a local preacher, going on to be a travelling preacher.⁵⁷ Ann Gilbert, another Bible Christian converted in 1760, described how her visiting:

'One Sunday I found my mind much pressed to go and meet a few back-sliders who had lately been joined in class at a neighbouring village. When I got to the meeting, the leader was reproofing some young people for indecent behaviour, he desired me to give out a hymn and go to prayer, which having done I admonished the young people...(and) *exhort* and entreat them to repent. Presently their laughter turned to weeping, and one person who had been a backslider for twenty-three years, cried aloud for the

⁵⁴ Bourne, Hugh, *Small Hymn Book* (1825) No.25

⁵⁵ *PMMag.* (1847) p.389

⁵⁶ *PMMag.* (1848) p.63

⁵⁷ . Taft, Zechariah, [hereafter Taft]. *Biographical Sketches of Holy Women* (vol. 2, 1828) p.143

disquietude of her soul...'⁵⁸

Similar examples of visiting backsliders can be found in the connexional magazines of the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christian Church.

Prison Visiting

Before long the sick visiting was extended into visiting prisons. As early as 1730 William Morgan, a member of the Holy Club, started visiting prisoners in the Castle Prison in Oxford.⁵⁹ He persuaded the other members to join him in this venture and so, after consulting his father and the Bishop of Oxford who were very supportive, Wesley and the others often visited the prisoners. Students from Christ Church and Merton ridiculed them and so Wesley formulated a series of questions and answers to counteract these attacks insisting that they were merely following Christ's own example of 'doing good' and his command 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of these the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

Holy Club - 'doing good'

...IV. Lastly, whether ... we may not try to do good to those that are in prison? In particular whether we may not release such well-disposed persons as remain in prison for small sums? Whether we may not lend smaller sums to those that are of any trade, that they may procure themselves tools and materials to work with?

Whether we may not give to them who appear to want it most a little money, or clothes, or physic?

Whether we may not supply as many as are serious enough to read them with a Bible and *Whole Duty of Man*?

Whether we may not, as we have opportunity, explain and enforce these upon them especially with respect to public and private prayer and the blessed sacrament?

Source: The Works of John Wesley: Letters I 1721-1739 vol. 25

⁵⁸. Taft, Z. *Biographical Sketches of Holy Women* (vol. 1, 1825) p.50

⁵⁹. Telford, J., *Life of the Rev. John Wesley AM* (hereafter Telford) p.60; *JWL* vol.1 p.65 cf.. [*JWL* Oxford edition vol.1 pp.337-9]

Some people were impressed enough by this prison visiting to donate money which enabled Wesley and his friends to help prisoners, especially debtors, to make a fresh start in life. One person in particular, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, not only did this, but actually visited prisons herself.⁶⁰ In addition to her other visiting Hannah Ball went into prisons.⁶¹

So, with his own experiences in mind, it comes as little surprise that prison visiting formed an important element in early Methodism and Wesley endorsed the work of Sarah Peters. A local preacher, Silas Told, touched by Wesley's sermon on 'I was sick and in prison and ye visited me not' made this his life's work. Silas had at once time been a teacher at the Foundery charity school where doubtless he had come into contact with Sarah Peters who was a band leader there. Sarah became involved with Silas Told's work and helped to organize services for the prison inmates. John Wesley gave an account of her work in his *Journal*, which was later reprinted in the *Arminian Magazine* of 1782 as a memoir, in which he called her 'a lover of souls, a mother in Israel....always loving, always happy. It was her peculiar gift, and her continual care, to seek and save that which was lost; to support the weak, to comfort the feeble-minded, to bring back that which had been turned out of the way.' Then he described Sarah's visit to Newgate prison on 9th October 1748 to see a certain John Lancaster, who, among his other thefts, had stolen money from the Foundery. He had sent for her to visit him, however, when she and Silas Told arrived they discovered that six or seven others, including a woman, also under sentence of death wished to see them as well. After Sarah had sung a hymn, read a portion of Scripture and prayed

⁶⁰. New, Alfred, *Coronet and the Cross* (1858) p.78

⁶¹. Cole, Joseph, *Memoir of Miss Hannah Ball*.....(1839) p.24

the assembled company dissolved into tears and she promised to visit again and to pray for them. This she did and several of them were converted. Sarah's attempts to get the sentences commuted were unsuccessful and all were executed on October 28th. Sarah Peters was taken ill five days later and died on 13th November, probably from jail fever.⁶² To-day we may be a little sceptical about such conversions and so, no doubt, were John Wesley and his followers, but they realised that some facing death might grasp at any comforting straw and anyway who were they to say that the conversions were not sincere.

Elizabeth Evans, famous as Dinah Morris of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, is just one example early Methodist women who engaged in prison visiting. In particular, she supported the condemned child killer Mary Voce. In 1801 or 1802 Mary Voce was accused of having poisoned her child, imprisoned in Nottingham, tried at the Assizes and condemned to death. Miss Richards, a prison visitor, who was allowed to be with her until her execution, arranged for Elizabeth to be there too. Both women accompanied Mary to her execution.

Mary Voce's Final Hours

...at this time she was in great distress, and felt her sins too great a burden for her to bear, all she wanted was mercy. At seven o'clock we all kneeled down to prayer; and ten minutes before eight o'clock, the Lord in mercy spoke peace to her soul; she cried out - Oh how happy I am! The Lord has pardoned all my sins, and I am going to heaven; she never lost the evidence for one moment, and always rejoiced in the hope of Glory.

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical Sketches of Holy Women...(vol.1 (1825) pp.151-152

⁶². *JWJ* vol. 3 pp.381-87; *London Magazine* (1748), p.426; *Arminian Magazine* (1782) pp.128,133-36; Tyerman, L *The Life and Times of the Rev John Wesley, M.A.* (3 vols. 1890) vol.2 pp.27-9; Church L. F..*More about the Early Methodist People* (1948) pp.196-199; *The Life of Mr. Silas Told* (written by himself, 1786), (1954 edition) chapters 7-9

Similar examples of prison visiting are doubtless to be found in the connexional magazines of the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christian Church.

Later visiting after Wesley

The tradition of visiting instituted by Wesley and his early followers continued. Inevitably women were involved with all aspects of this, but particularly as class leaders visiting their members, offering them support and spiritual help and at times practical assistance. In the interests of avoiding too much overlap with other chapters we will leave to one side the work of the deaconesses who were much engaged in sick visiting and supporting women in prison situations (see chapter 13). The role played by the ministers wives too is covered later (see chapter 11).

The 1932 Union of Union decreed that all members should be entered in a class book and placed under the pastoral charge of the class leader. Class leaders sometimes arranged fellowship meetings and visited their members regularly. In 1974 the office of pastoral visitor was instituted as it was recognized that there could be a subtle difference between being a class leader and good visitor: differences in the persons themselves - good class leaders are not necessarily good visitors - and in the make-up of the church - members and the church community roll (or adherents). It was felt that people with a looser connection to the church might relate more to a pastoral visitor than to a class leader, who could be perceived (even if mistakenly) to be trying 'to get them into the church.' The Division of Ministries (Church Membership Committee) produced series of leaflets one of which was '*So you are a Pastoral Visitor!*' It described the purpose of visiting: in general, as a personal

expression of the love and concern of the church; and in particular, in special circumstances, to give support in cases of sickness, age, or family problems. It emphasised that the visitors should 'know what we intend to achieve by any particular visit.'⁶³

Notes for Pastoral Visitors

The Visitor....You are going not to give or just to get but to share.
Visiting the Sick....Sympathy and understanding are most important.

Visiting the Elderly...are often housebound. The visitor is one of the windows on the world for them....You are the Church Magazine.

Visiting Members who do not attend....Remember you are there to represent the love and concern of the Church. You are not the Local Authority Attendance Officer. Try to understand the problems behind the absence.

Visiting Members who do attend...will get to know his (her) members better if he (she) does take the opportunity of personal contact.

The Membership Ticket...provides an opportunity for a visit, but it must not be the only visit during the year.

Source: 'So you are a pastoral Visitor!' (Division of Ministries, (n.d.))

Conclusion

Much of the social work done by Methodist women was done quietly and privately throughout the nineteenth century, but with the coming the Forward Movement and the establishment of the Central Halls, when the social conscience was awakened there came greater opportunities for women to take a more active role in the Church. The Forward Movement began in the 1880s to address the plight of the urban poor. It was a determined effort to bridge the widening gap between Wesleyan Methodism and the working classes. One feature was the building of Central Halls,

⁶³ .Church Membership Committee *'So you are a pastoral Visitor!'* (n.d.)

which were secular in architecture and furnishings. The activities they offered were intended to be a counter attraction to public houses and the music halls. When there was little on offer in the way of social welfare the Central Halls provided much needed help and support. Eventually when the Welfare State system came into being the impact of the Central Halls diminished and much of their social work was taken over by the State.

The Central Hall Ethos

‘What were the characteristics of the Central Hall? First, evangelistic preaching of a simple and powerful type....‘Preaching was designed to secure a verdict.... It is important to note that great missionaries like Wiseman and Chadwick always backed up their preaching with Bible Studies and class meetings....

‘Secondly, a social witness of a basically individualistic style despite avowals of collectivism....

‘A third feature was...the ‘fellowship of activity’, the creation of cultural or semi-cultural interests around the church or hall building, which can be seen either as a broadening of the Church’s outreach or as a creeping secularization of the Church’s life...

Source: J. M. Turner in ‘Methodism 1900-1932’ in A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain vol. 3 1983 pp.311ff.]

Just to give one example of the scope of the work of the Central Halls Birmingham Central Hall offered advice, counsel and often practical assistance. Reports show that the Mothers’ Meeting ran a Saving Bank, a Clothing Club and a Dispensary Club. On Saturdays children street sellers met in the afternoon; and the Girls’ Club organized a restaurant. A boarding house, Shaftesbury House, was run by a deaconess for 19 factory girls. Also there was ‘rescue work’ which sought to re-unite families and temperance work to counteract the evils of drink. In addition to

the work carried on by the Central Hall itself all the churches connected with it had their own social welfare programmes.

Hence the influence of the all the Central Halls spread widely throughout the cities where they were located touching the lives of many people.

Chapter 8: Education

Susanna taught all her children herself and most of them were good scholars. Her discipline was strict, but fair. The children were taught good manners and a real sense of right and wrong. At that time girls seldom received much education, but both Susanna and Samuel felt strongly that their daughters had as much right to learn as the boys, so very unusually the Wesley girls were taught alongside their brothers. As an educator Susanna was true to the age in which she lived, but more enlightened than most and so, by comparison with many families, the Wesleys were well educated. In later life Susanna kept up her role as the family educator and advisor by writing many letters to all the children and a number of her ideas formed the basis for John Wesley's organization of Methodism.

As we have seen Wesley owed a great debt to the early education he had learned at his mother's knee and he became troubled by the lack of learning offered to children. Obviously, given his religious and evangelical stance, he was concerned for their 'souls' - their spiritual well-being, - but it went much deeper than that. He felt that all children should, at very least, be taught the basic skills, both academic and practical, to enable them to live an industrious, worthwhile and, hopefully, a God-fearing life. Doubtless Wesley also realized the truth of Isaac Watts' phrase, 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do'⁶⁴, and felt that being occupied with lessons would help children to keep out of trouble. So he encouraged those who were trying to teach children and also set up schools himself.

Sunday Schools

Tradition has credited Robert Raikes with founding the Sunday School

⁶⁴ . Watts, Isaac *Divine Songs for Children* 20 'Against Idleness and Mischief'.

Movement in Gloucester in 1780. Be that as it may, there were a number of forerunners one of whom was Hannah Ball who, in 1769, started a school for the ostler children who worked in the inns of High Wycombe. In February she said that she had been ‘praying with some children which I met every Sabbath day to instruct in the principles of Christianity.’⁶⁵ She wrote to Wesley on December 16th, 1770 to tell him that ‘The children meet twice a week, every Sunday and Monday. They are a wild company, but seem willing to be instructed. I labour among them earnestly desiring to promote the interest of the Church of Christ.’ Wesley encouraged her to persist with them saying, ‘It pleases Him sometimes to let us sow much seed before there is any visible fruit. But frequently much grows upon a sudden, at a time and in a manner which we least expected.’⁶⁶ Sophia Cooke, the daughter of John Cooke a surgeon in Gloucester, is said to have established a school in 1777 in Pye Corner, a squalid part of the city perhaps encouraged by Wesley, and it is possible that she suggested to Raikes that he start his school and certainly she became one of his first teachers. On 10th August 1786 she became the second wife of Samuel Bradburn, one of Wesley’s early preachers.⁶⁷ By 1785 the Rev. John Fletcher and his wife, Mary (nee Bosanquet), had a large school in Madeley and had planned to have others. Lady Maxwell, having heard of these Sunday schools, instituted one in Edinburgh in 1787 and another one a few miles away, paying the teachers herself.⁶⁸ Wesley was very enthusiastic about the value of such schools and encouraged their establishment in many parts of the country. The Sunday Schools were originally set up to improve

⁶⁵. Cole, Joseph, *Memoir of Miss Hannah Ball*....(1839) p121

⁶⁶. *JWL* [Standard Ed., 1931] vol. 5 p.218

⁶⁷. Cliff, Philip B., *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980* (1986) pp.22,24; *JWL* [Standard ed.] vol. 7 pp.323,334

⁶⁸. Lancaster, John, *The Life of Darcy, Lady Maxwell*....(1826)

the behaviour of children by teaching reading, writing and religious principles, but after Wesley's death Jabez Bunting objected to the teaching of writing on a Sunday and the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1827 formulated rules to regulate the schools.

Day Schools

Education was important to the early Methodists for several reasons, first, John Wesley realized that it was necessary to equip his preachers for their work in proclaiming the gospel and building up the converts. To a large extent initially this education was a matter of self-help, aided by the material that John, himself wrote and published. Secondly, and following on from this, was the importance of continuing the religious and spiritual development of the converts by enabling them to study the Bible and Wesley's own writings. Then, thirdly, Wesley felt it was important to teach children, especially the poor, primarily, it must be said, as a way of saving their souls and instilling good moral behaviour into them, so that they would become law-abiding, useful citizens.

In Oxford he and other members of the Holy Club taught poor children and letters from some of the Holy Club, such as John Gambold and John Clayton, give some idea of the work of these classes.

A Letter from the Rev. John Gambold to a Friend: Wrote about the time when Mr. Wesley was in America.

....The school was, I think, of Mr. Wesley's own setting up; however, he paid the mistress, and clothed some, if not all of the children. When they (members of the Holy Club) went thither, they inquired how each child behaved, saw their work (for some could knit or spin), heard them read, heard them (sic) their prayers or their catechism, and explained part of it. In the same manner they taught the children in the workhouse....

John Clayton's letter from Oxford to John Wesley, dated 1st August 1732, notes that he had been twice to the schools on Tuesday and Saturday and he reported that all the children, except one who was apt to play truant, were going on 'pretty well'. He had obtained permission to go into St. Thomas' workhouse twice a week and was hopeful that 'it will be a noble field for improvement.'⁶⁹

John wrote to his mother asking for her advice on the education of children and in a long letter, dated July 24, 1732, Susanna Wesley replied recounting the ways she cared for and educated her own large family.⁷⁰ Her comments doubtless influenced John when he established his school at Kingswood.

In 1739 John Wesley accompanied George Whitefield, a member of the Holy Club, to Bristol and listened to him preaching in the open air at Hanham Mount. Whitefield made plans to establish a school for the miners' children in Kingswood, Bristol, the same year, laying the foundation stone on 2nd April but then left Wesley to organize it. It seems that Wesley would have liked a little more guidance from Whitefield about his plans for he wrote: '... we went to the stone which our brother Whitefield laid [April 2]. I think it cannot be better placed; 'tis just in the middle of the Wood, two miles every way from either church or school. I wish he would write to me positively and decisively that for this reason he would have the first school there, or as near as possible.'⁷¹ In November Wesley wrote an account of the school, which it was hoped, would be finished building by the following spring or early summer. He gave an idea of its purpose.

⁶⁹. *JWJ* vol. 8 p.277

⁷⁰ *JWJ* vol. 3 pp.34-39

⁷¹. *JWJ* vol. 2 p.183 fn.2 (Moravian Letter) [24 April 1739]

School for the miners' children at Kingswood, Bristol

[‘It is proposed, in the usual hours of the day, to teach chiefly the poorer children to read, write, and cast accounts; but more especially (by God’s assistance) to ‘know God, and Jesus Christ, who He hath sent.’ The older people, being not so proper to be mixed with children (for we expect scholars of all ages, some of them grey headed) will be taught in the inner rooms, either early in the morning, or late at night, so that their work may not be hindered.]

Source: John Wesley’s Journal vol. 2 p.322

John Cennick was appointed as the first master of the school and the school continued until 1803, but as Whitefield and Cennick turned more towards the Calvinistic theology, rather than Wesley’s Arminianism, they severed their ties with it and started another school. While Wesley founded Kingswood School in 1748 because having established his itinerant preacher organization, he soon realized that the itinerant life made it difficult for travelling preachers to provide education for their children. Kingswood School aimed to educate children of Methodists ‘in every branch of useful learning...’.⁷² In fact, by 1749 there were four schools in Kingswood, two day schools for boys and girls, an orphan one for girls and this ‘New School’ as Wesley called it.⁷³ Molly Maddern, the wife of the English master at Kingswood School ran one of the schools for girls, which Wesley called ‘a truly Christian school’ and where the girls were taught ‘what women need to know’ - presumably housewifery as well as reading, writing and accounts. Unfortunately the life of the school was short. It is not within the compass of this study to deal with the work and life of the ‘New School’ (later Kingswood School), but a passing mention

⁷². Wesley, John, *A Short Account of the School in Kingswood* (1749); Best, G., *The History of Kingswood School*, (1998); By Three Old Boys, *The History of Kingswood School*, (1898)

⁷³. *JWJ* vol. 3 p.356 & fn.; Best, op. cit. (1998) p.20

must be made of Sarah Ryan, who Wesley, perhaps unwisely, given her background and previous history, appointed as a housekeeper in Kingswood.⁷⁴

Wesley started a school for poor children comprising two teachers and sixty children when he acquired the Foundery in 1739 which was run for many years by Silas Told, as noted earlier. Another venture, was the Orphan House in Newcastle, established around 1742/3,⁷⁵ and although there is no record of orphans being housed there doubtless the education of poor children would be one of its functions.

Wesley on Education of children

2.....I determined to have them (children) taught in my own house, that they might have an opportunity of learning to read, write, and cast accounts (if no more) without being under almost a necessity of learning heathenism at the same time....I found two such school-masters...

3. They have now under their care near sixty children... The rules of the school are these that follow:

First, no child is admitted under six years of age.

Second, all the children are to be present at the morning sermon.

Thirdly, they are at school from six to twelve, and from one to five.

Fourthly, they have no play-days.

Fifthly, no child is to speak in school, but to the masters.

Sixthly, the child who misses two days in one week, without leave, is excluded the school.

Source: The Works of John Wesley: The Methodist Societies... vol.9 (ed. Rupert E. Davies, 1989), 'A Plain Account of the People called Methodists...' p.278

Mary Bosanquet and Sarah Ryan, whom we shall encounter more fully later, founded at school at Leytonstone. The writings of Mary and Sarah show that both

⁷⁴. There was dispute as to whether Sarah Ryan was appointed as housekeeper at Kingswood School or the New Room cf. Rack, Henry, op.cit (1989, 2001) pp.268, 358; Edwards, M., *My Dear Sister* (n.d. c.1980) p.50; Bates, E. Ralph, 'Sarah Ryan and Kingswood School' in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (May 1972) pp.110-114.

⁷⁵. Vickers, J. A.,(ed) *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (2000 & online) pp. 261-62; 284;27

considered that they had been ‘set apart’ by God for this work. They were particularly concerned about orphans who had no one to care for them. One of the first children they took in was Sarah Ryan’s motherless niece, Sally Lawrence, aged four. Soon the little family grew as five more orphans joined them. When Sarah’s health failed they recruited Ann Tripp as a governess. Over the five years of the community’s life at Leytonstone around 35 children and 34 adults came and went, with usually about 15-20 in residence. They were mostly girls, but occasionally boys were accepted. When the children arrived they were bathed and if anyone was ill nursing care was available, then they were given a uniform of dark purple cotton. In many cases the teaching of good language and manners was necessary and all the residents ate together at a long table. The daily timetable was very structured with the children rising to attend ‘family prayers’ at 6.30 a.m., and breakfasting at 7.00 a.m. on ‘herb tea or milk porridge’. School started at 8.00 a.m. and lasted until 12.00 noon. The education was very practical as because of their circumstances, the children would, need to be able to earn their own livings, so the curriculum covered, reading, writing, accounts, religion and household skills, such as cooking, sewing and nursing.⁷⁶

Life of the community at Leytonstone

As we intended them to work for their bread, either as servants, or in little trades, we endeavoured as early as possible to inure them to labour, early rising, and cleanliness. The eldest of the children arose between four and five, the younger not much later. [After family prayers and breakfast] The small children then went out into the garden till eight. At eight the bell rang for school which continued till twelve. Then, after a few minutes spent in prayer, they came down to us; at which time we either worked out with them, or if the weather did not permit found

⁷⁶. Moore, Henry, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher* (1817) pp.50-52,54-55

them some employment in the house, endeavouring at the same time to give them both instruction and recreation. We invented various employments for those hours, in order to remove the appearance of idleness... At one we dined; about two the bell rang again for school, and at five they returned to us, and were employed as before till supper time. Then, after family prayer, they were washed, and put to bed by eight. Four or five of the bigger girls were each week kept out of the school by turns, and employed in housework, cooking, etc., that they might be accustomed to every business; and there was work enough in so large a family....

Source: Henry Moore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher* (1817)
pp.54-55

Although the original intention had been to care for the children sometimes women who were ill were taken in and nursed. The community also became the centre of Methodist worship for the area as will be covered later. In 1768 the school moved to Cross Hall in Yorkshire, but after 13 years Mary's finances were all but gone and Cross Hall had to be closed when she married the Rev. John Fletcher of Madeley.

Other followers of John Wesley were concerned with the education of young people, especially boys and many of the schools started were due to local initiatives. For example, Miss Mary Bishop, later Mrs Mills, ran two private fee-paying residential schools in Bath in the 1760s and 1770s, until ill health forced her to retire for a while in 1774. As well as corresponding with Wesley about the running of her schools she was also a class and band leader in the society in Bath. However around 1781 she opened a boarding school, in Keynsham, near Bristol, which existed for about eight years where Wesley visited her.

John Wesley to Mary Bishop, Warrington, May 21, 1781

MY DEAR SISTER, -

When Molly Maddern taught a few children at

Kingswood, I saw a truly Christian school. To make the children Christian was her first care; afterwards they were taught what women need to learn. I saw another Christian school under the care of Miss Bosanquet.....

....I hoped to see a third Christian school at Publow; and I did so for a season. But I cannot say that for some years it has quite answered my expectations....More of the world seems to have crept in...

I want your children to be trained up in quite the manner that Miss Bosanquet's were. Although they were very genteel, yet there was something in their whole manner which told you they belonged to another world...

Make Christians, my dear Miss Bishop, make Christians! Let this be your leading view....Let everything else which you teach be subordinate to this. Mind one thing in all! Let it be said of the young women you educate,

Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye,

In all her gestures sanctity and love.

But what power do you want to execute this! Ask and it shall be given you!....

Your affectionate friend and brother,

Source: John Wesley's Letters (Telford) vol.7 pp.62-63 cf. p.74

Mrs Hannah Owen and her three daughters ran a girls school at Publow, near Bath, which accommodated up 30 boarders including some daughters of the itinerant preachers. Wesley visited the school on a number of occasions and regarded it highly, writing, on September 16th, 1772: 'I went to Publow,... Here is a family indeed. Such mistresses, and such a company of children, as I believe, all England cannot parallel.' though later he felt its standards had fallen.⁷⁷ The school had closed by 1780 when Mrs Owen and her two younger daughters moved to London. Elizabeth, the eldest daughter remained behind, married William Pine, Wesley's printer in Bristol and opened a school for poor children in Pensford before she moved to Bristol.

Advice to women on reading and study

⁷⁷. *JWJ* vol. 5. p.484; *JWL* vol.5 p.162, vol. 7 pp. 62-3, 74

Perhaps rather unusually, but doubtless influenced by the example of his mother, Susannah, in teaching her own family, both boys and girls, John Wesley, in letters to several of his women correspondents, advised them on their reading. In particular a letter to Miss Margaret Lewen, probably in June 1764, goes into great detail. After telling her she needs to know God to ‘enjoy Him in time and in eternity’ he points out that all is contained in the Bible and that it is therefore important to understand this, so she should spend at least two hours each day reading and meditating on both the Old and New Testament, aided by commentaries, including his own *Explanatory Notes*. Although Wesley feels a little reluctance in doing so he recommends a number of his own tracts as aids in her further studies. Miss Lewen is advised to ‘acquire knowledge’ in Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, Logic, Ethics (or Moral Philosophy), Natural Philosophy, History, Chronology, Metaphysics, Poetry and Divinity. Anyone undertaking this course had to be very committed as Wesley expected them to spend five or six hours a day in study and course was designed to take between three and five years.⁷⁸

Reading Course for Miss Margaret Lewen, 1764

Your studying hours (if your constitution will bear it) might be five or six hours a day; perhaps from nine to twelve in the morning, and from two to four or five in the afternoon. And whenever you begin to be tired with books that require a strong and deep attention, relax your mind by interposing history or poetry or something of a lighter nature.....

This course of study, if you have the resolution to go through it, will, I apprehend, take you up to three, four, or five years, according to the degree of your health and of your application. And then you will have knowledge enough for any reasonable Christian. But remember, before all, in all, and above all, your great point is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent....

⁷⁸. *JWL* vol.4 pp.247-9

Source: Letters of John Wesley (Telford), vol.4 pp.247-9

Of course, much of this advice on reading and study was also given to Wesley's male correspondents, especially to his itinerants who needed to be able to communicate with all levels of society in their work of proclaiming the Gospel.

As the Sunday School movement grew in the latter part of the eighteenth century initially its main concern was to take children off the streets. At first, reading, writing and arithmetic was taught, but soon the church realised that these 'schools' could be used for Christian instruction. In 1820 the Wesleyan Conference decreed that weekly meetings for children should be set up in every town and connected with the local Methodist church. In due course primary and secondary day schools were established in various parts of the country which catered for both boys and girls in the subjects taught, but this subject is beyond the present brief.⁷⁹

Non- Wesleyan educational interests

The non-Wesleyan churches also set up Sunday Schools which gave Christian religious instruction related to their own beliefs. So a brief mention of this follows.

Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism, was very interested in education. He himself had been fortunate enough to receive a good grounding and had continued to improve his knowledge through reading and study. He was anxious that his followers should have the rudiments of learning and having written tracts himself he ensured that they, and those of others, were distributed to interested listeners. Bourne instituted Tract Missions whereby visitors went out in

⁷⁹ See *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* vol. 3 chapter vii p. 279-308 on Education. *The Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1906* p.466 state the total number of day school scholars in 1905 as being 123, 834, of which 41,256 were girls, 43, 581 boys plus 38, 984 infants (sex not specified).

pairs to visit a particular area leaving their tracts, returning a fortnight later to exchange them for others and to engage in discussion, prayer and exhortation. These missions served two purposes: they educated the people; they gave the visitors training in becoming preachers and teachers. Indeed, when Mary Porteous, one of the female itinerants had to retire from travelling for a while in 1834/5 because of her own and her daughter's illnesses, she opened a day school in Newcastle-on-Tyne for young girls. Mary Elston of East Holton, Lincolnshire, who died in harness, was a widow of limited resources, but she 'had great delight in teaching the rising generation to read, and training them for the service of God; and in her infant school impressions were made which ultimately led to the conversion of some of her pupils. She was thus usefully employed when called to 'leave life's stage' - she died in her school, surrounded by her scholars.'⁸⁰ Several other examples could be given, but the obituary of Mrs Asenah Woodward shows that Primitive Methodism was actively concerned with promoting learning. She and her first husband, James Smith, played a large part in the building of a chapel and schools at Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire. After her husband's death Mrs Smith continued to manage the affairs of the infant school, in particular, using much of her own resources, so that the school could continue in future years.

Schools at Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire

They took a principal part ...in the erection of boys, girls, and infant -schoolrooms...and afterwards in the establishment and support of the three schools. These schools are rendered a great blessing to the children of poor families in the neighbourhood; they furnish interesting fields of usefulness to three intelligent and pious teachers; are important auxiliaries to the Sabbath-school; and they form an effectual breakwater against the tide of that persecution, which will not supply, to the children of the poor, a secular education during the week, on moderate terms, unless it -

⁸⁰ *PMMag.*(1848) p.62

or rather those who cherish it - shall be permitted to enforce upon them a sectarian and erroneous religious education on the Sabbath-day.

Source: *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1851) pp. 387-88

Within the Bible Christian Connexion, in common with the rest of Methodism, much emphasis was placed on the education and training of children, especially those whose parents belonged to the society. This, as we have already noted, led to the setting up of many Sunday schools, usually connected to the local Methodist churches. In Cornwall, for example, when Wesley was at Redruth in 1776 he spoke to 50-60 children.⁸¹ However, in this paper we are mainly concerned with the education of girls so we now turn to the later period.

Later Education for Girls

Education was a matter of hot debate in the nineteenth century between the religious denominations and the government. As already seen John Wesley and his fellow workers, both male and female, were concerned about the training of children. Primarily, of course, they were concerned for their spiritual welfare, with teaching them to read and write and with keeping them off the streets. Inevitably, before long these schools began to teach more than the three Rs and developed into higher grade schools, becoming known as 'middle-class schools' (equating to later secondary schools). So when, in 1860, the government proposed a system of 'payment by results', rather than free elementary education the Nonconformist churches, in particular, protested that the poorest people who needed the free education would be hit the hardest. The Principal of Westminster College, John Scott, urged those in

⁸¹ For the development of Sunday Schools and education in Cornwall see Shaw, Thomas *A History of Cornish Methodism* (1967) pp.59-63, 116-119

charge of Methodist schools, teachers, managers, ministers to 'educate, not merely instruct'.

John Scott on Education

'As long as the Wesleyans pretend (used in older sense of (claim) to give education to the poor, they will give them an education which it will be worth their while to receive.'

Source: Methodist Education Committee Appendix (1861) p.55, quoted in *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (1983) vol. 3 p.294

In 1870 elementary education was introduced and School Boards set up to ensure that they took advantage of it. The government decided to support the voluntary schools, but schooling was not entirely free and as Methodism had no great financial resources some schools were transferred to the School Boards. Although it was agreed that Methodism provided the most efficient education at the time, financial considerations and the problems of maintaining its schools meant that more and more schools were transferred into the state system, though insistence on the freedom to receive religious instruction was paramount.

Methodism's itinerant system meant that ministers faced problems in the education of their children: a problem which Wesley appreciated and sought to overcome as already noted. Here we are concerned with the education of girls and shall look briefly at some of the Methodist girls' schools and the headmistresses who were responsible for them.

Farringtons and its forerunners

The first important Methodist's school for girls was started by Hannah Elizabeth Pipe (1831-1906). The only daughter of William, a Wesleyan local preacher, and Susanna Pipe she was born in Manchester. Unfortunately her father

died when she was nine, leaving the family in straightened circumstances. Susanna worked hard and thus was able to ensure that Hannah had a good education becoming a teacher. In 1848 she opened a school in Manchester and her mother joined her. When the school was successful in 1852 they moved to a larger house where they were able to take in boarders as well as day girls. Most of her pupils were the daughters of non-conformists and her aim was to provide as good an education for girls as for their brothers. She, a dedicated teacher, devoted the rest of her life to further this aim. Finding locally few other teachers to follow her methods eventually in 1856 she and her mother moved to London and rented Latham Lodge in Clapham Park, renamed Laleham Lodge, where they took in 15 boarders mainly from Wesley Methodist families. Being horrified that most of the existing girls' schools were very poor Hannah stayed true to her belief that girls should receive as good an education as boys. Laleham Lodge was so successful that in 1860 the school moved to a larger house in Clarence Road where 25 boarders were accommodated with fees being 100 guineas per annum. Susanna Pipe died in 1871 and Hannah missed her support. However, she opened a preparatory department, Laleham Lea to prepare younger girls for the senior school and she became engaged in philanthropic work involving the girls in voluntary social work. The death of her mother had taken its toll and her health suffered so in 1900 Hannah retired to Limpsfield and the Misses Swindells, who had been in charge of the preparatory department, took over. She died in 1906 and Laleham Lodge School closed in 1908.⁸² However, her vision and work was not to be lost entirely for many Methodists now wished to provide an education of girls to complement that of The Leys in Cambridge for boys, founded in 1875. As early as

⁸² See Oxford DNB entry on Hannah Pipe for more details and further reading suggestions.

1908 a committee had been set up to explore this possibility. One of the project's prime movers was Sir George Hayter Chubb, the Vice-Chairman and Treasurer of The Leys and so a number of influential Methodist laymen invited contributions to buy shares in a Private Limited Company to finance the project. A committee was formed and began the search for a suitable site. The stipulation was that the site should be 'in a healthy and open position, near London, with sufficient ground to allow for future extension and within a short walk of a suitable Wesleyan Methodist place of worship.' Eventually, land in Chislehurst, Kent, which had originally been the home of the Farrington family was bought. So, Farringtons School for Girls opened on 21st September 1911 with 14 pupils. The first Headmistress was Miss Alice Hollingdrake Davies, described as a 'staunch Methodist and a woman of very strong principles', who had studied at Royal Holloway College. The school numbers grew, but in 1917 the school was evacuated to Huntley Hotel near Teignmouth, Devon. Returning to Chislehurst after the end of the war the school embarked on major extensions and bought Murray Downs to serve as a junior school. The new buildings were opened by Queen Mary in June 1925 and she kept in touch with the school giving permission for her Royal Cypher to be incorporated into the school's Coat of Arms. A chapel was built in 1934.

When the possibility of another war arose Miss Davies took precautions including the making of a trench large enough to accommodate all the school if necessary. She retired in 1939 and was succeeded by Miss Gladys Bradley. When the Ministry of Supply's Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Department commandeered the premises Farringtons moved to Trecarn Hotel, Babbacombe, Devon. Requisition of the hotel by the Royal Air Force in 1940 and a fall in the

number of pupils forced the school to close for the duration of the war. The school magazine enabled the old girls and staff to keep in contact but once the war was over the Farringtons site had to be refurbished. So, early 1946 saw many staff 'camped' out in the rather devastated premises endeavouring to get the place habitable again before the school reopened, with 42 pupils and six staff, on 3rd May 1946, under its new Headmistress, Miss Doris Fisher. Numbers doubled within the next year and Shepherd's Green, a nearby house became the junior school with Elizabeth Moat as its headmistress. Elizabeth had been on the staff from 1911 so when she retired in 1957, she had been connected with school for 45 years. Once the school had re-established it embarked on a further expansion programme, including science laboratories, a music room, a swimming pool and sports hall.

Miss Frances Wilson, former the head of the West Cornwall School for Girls in Penzance, was headmistress from 1957-1968 and she was followed by Miss Janet Smith (1968-1973). Both coped admirably with the changing attitudes of society which now challenged the previous strict formality of boarding school life. When Miss Smith left in 1973 to marry and become a missionary in Nigeria Mrs Freda Hatton, (1973-1987), who had been a member of staff since 1967, was appointed. This was a departure as she was married and not a Methodist. Once again, more extensions took place and the school built up a reputation for music with the head of the junior school, Ruth Fagg, writing many hymns and songs, which were performed by the girls.

In 1984 a serious fire in the junior school necessitated its removal to the main school site. Having occupied temporary mobile classroom in the old walled garden, eventually, a brick building was erected so that in 1986 the juniors were re-housed in

time for the school's 75th celebrations. During the 1980s however, there was a general decline in boarding, so in 1994 the governors decided to merge with a local girls' school, Stratford House. Stratford House had opened in Bickley in 1912 and as it had similar traditions and ethos to Farringtons the merger made sense. As the Farringtons site offered space for further development the two schools were located there with a new Art and Technology, named Stratford House, being built. Under Mrs Stock's guidance the two schools successfully came together on the Farringtons site. Mrs Catherine James followed Barbara Stock as head in 1998. In September 2004 the school reverted to its original name of Farringtons School. Two years later (September 2006) a nursery department, 'Busy Bees at Farringtons' was opened as a day care facility for children aged 3 months to 4 years. In January 2008 the Mayor of Bromley opened the new purpose-built Foundation stage classroom and facilities. The school accepted boys into Year 7 in 2001 and later the school became fully co-educational. In 2016, the head, Mrs Dorothy Nancekievill, who had succeeded Mrs James, opened a new two-storey teaching block.

Queenswood

The first school, known as the Educational Home for the Daughters of Wesleyan ministers, was founded in 1869, in Clapton, East London. It transferred to King's Park, Clapham Park in the late 1870s and was named Queenswood. When it was closed by Conference in 1893 Dr. David Waller (Wesleyan Education Committee Secretary 1881-1911) decided it should be re-launched as a limited company. So Queenswood reopened as 'a middle class school for girls' on 23rd September 1894, adopting as its motto 'In Hortis Reginae' (In Queen's Gardens').⁸³ Waller's

⁸³ .The motto was taken from the educational writings of John Ruskin, who stressed the importance of

daughter, Marion, was the first headmistress and she outlined the aims of the school.

Aims of Queenswood, 1894**Marion Waller**

The first aim of the school is not to obtain good examination results, but rather to educate the girls in the broadest and truest sense of the word, to teach them the value of what are called 'the little courtesies of life'. to inculcate a realization of the dignity and power of womanhood, thus fitting them to live good and useful lives.'

Source: quoted in Shared Aims (G.M. Best, 2003) p.36

When Marion Waller resigned to be married in 1897, but, unfortunately she died in childbirth a year later. Miss Ethel Mary Trew (1869-1948), who had been teaching at the West Cornwall College, Penzance and then an assistant mistress at Queenswood was asked to become headmistress. At first, rather reluctant, but she finally agreed and held the post until 1943. A strong personality she gave her life to the school, making it 'the consuming passion of her life, a zeal which ate up all other interests'. Described as a 'benevolent despot', rather domineering, she was also understanding with the problems encountered by her 'girls'. Although adhering to Miss Waller's aims, Miss Trew insisted on a liberal education, with most emphasis being placed on the arts and music rather than the sciences. During her tenure of office the number of students and their academic achievements steadily increased. On 19th October 1917, because of World War I, the school was evacuated to The Hayes, a conference hotel, in Swanwick, Derbyshire, returning to Clapham in December 1918. It was recognised as 'efficient' by the Board of Education in 1920. Now the numbers had reached 200 it was decided to move from Clapham and, eventually Miss Trew selected the present extensive site of Sheepwell House, Hatfield, supervised the removal in 1925 and oversaw the various extensions and developments

education for girls (see *Shared Aims* (Best, G.M. 2003) p.36

to the property. By 1932 a Preparatory School had been opened at Mymwood. Sheepwell House, known as the Head's House, was burnt down, and then replaced by an identical building. As she grew older Miss Trew became more authoritarian and life at the school rather restrictive. Miss Trew opposed any evacuation during World War II and around 40 bombs fell on the Queenswood property, including one, in 1944, which brought down the ceilings of her own house. The strain told and Miss Trew retired that year, but maintained some control over the estate, becoming Principal for one year which proved unfortunate. She finally retired fully in September 1948 and died on 7th December 1948 aged 79 and was buried at South Petherton, Somerset.

Miss Enid Mary Essame had read history at Newnham College, Cambridge in 1928, and then trained as a teacher at King's College, London qualifying in 1929. She joined the school staff at Queenswood in 1929, becoming known as 'Emma' (from her initials). Soon Miss Essame was promoted as head of history and a housemistress. In 1934-35, having been identified as a potential headmistress she was offered a year in America to study their education, which included teaching at the American University in Washington, D.C. She became friends with Sir Josiah Stamp, the chairman of governors of Queenswood, who became a great support when she, as nominally the headmistress, felt frustrated because Miss Trew refused to relinquish control. Eventually, Essame became headmistress, in 1943, when she brought a more liberalizing outlook to the school. Academic standards rose and the school became more involved with life outside the school walls. In the 1960s Enid Essame gave the older girls 'extraordinary freedom' and generally instituted a more democratic regime advocating women's equality with men, though the basic ethos of Queenswood remained. After 23 years as Head Miss Essame retired in 1971 and she

lived in Potters Bar with her friend Christine Marriott, who had been the domestic bursar at Queenswood from 1955. She enjoyed an active retirement, pursuing numerous interests. She died in Potters Bar Hospital on 19th December 1999 aged 93. A thanksgiving service was held at Queenswood in May 2000 and an oak tree planted in her memory.⁸⁴

Her successor, Miss Margaret Ritchie (1971-81), continued her good work for the next 10 years then Mrs Audrey Butler (1981-96) extended the school's modernisation in its academic and non academic courses, leisure and sporting activities and by embarking on an extensive building programme. In 1984 Mymwood was closed. Mrs Butler was succeeded as Principal by Miss Clarissa Farr (1996-2006) and the school was now regarded as dynamic and forward-looking seeking to produce leaders and thinkers. Pauline Edgar (2006-2016) followed her and then Mrs Johanna Cameron (2016-) became the present Principal.⁸⁵

Aims of Queenswood, 2003

The school's values remain founded on self-discipline, self-esteem, mutual respect and co-operation, but it is also outward-looking, conscious of the need to respond to the changing expectations of parents, pupils, and society. The school's Christian ethos encourages the girls to live together in harmony in an atmosphere of inclusion and tolerance, promotes involvement with the wider community as well as with parents. It sees the hallmarks of a Queenwoodian as being the search for excellence, a spirit of adventure, and a recognition of individuality. Concerns for others and a sense of responsibility remain strongly present in all Queenwood girls.'

Source: G.M. Best, Shared Aims (, 2003) p.36

Trinity Hall, Southport

⁸⁴ Best, op.cit. pp.36-37; NDNB 'Enid Mary [Emma] Essame'

⁸⁵ See Queenswood website for further information.

Some interested and benevolent people supported a Mrs Thornton and a Miss Gibson in their desire to commence a School for Ministers' Daughters. This resulted in the opening of "The Five Elms" on 30th September 1869". At the Conference of 1870 this school was transferred to the Connexion and thus brought under the direction of the General Schools' Committee. Early in 1871 a house was offered for a rent of £150 and after due consideration it was accepted and named "Beechholme". The extensive premises included a large garden able to provide facilities for outdoor activities and provide produce for the school. The Five Elms and Beechholme properties were able to accommodate 70 students. Miss Henley, daughter of the Rev John Henley, had charge of The Five Elms while Miss Rabett looked after Beechholme. Then John Fernley of Stockport, a very successful Wesleyan Methodist cotton manufacturer, gave land on the corner of Duke Street and Princes St., which also adjoined the Trinity Wesleyan Methodist Church, to the Connexion. The property deed was dated 5th July 1871. Trinity Hall School with 50 students opened in October 1872. Mrs Thornley, widow of the Rev Edwin Thornley assisted by five Governesses was the first Principal. It was intended to be a "School for the education, instruction, and improvement of the daughters of Wesleyan ministers", supported by connexional funds, in order to provide religious education and training. Miss Burgess, daughter of the Rev Joseph Burgess was Principal in 1875 when there were 57 students, aged eleven to sixteen at the school. That year a total of 135 girls were being educated at The Five Elms, Beechholme and Trinity Hall.⁸⁶ As the numbers increased accommodation became a problem, so, at first, entry was restricted, but, from time to time, extensions were added to the buildings. Originally the girls left at

⁸⁶ See *The Wesleyan-Methodist Connexional Record and Year Book* 1874 p.178 & 1875 pp.187-88

the age of 16, but increased opportunities in higher education meant that, from 1906, they were offered the chance to stay longer. Then, in 1926, “Wintersdorf”, 10 Trafalgar Road, nearby, previously run as a school, came onto the market and was purchased. This acquisition doubled the intake and made it possible both to admit the daughters of laymen and provide courses for girls from the ages of 13-18. In due course Winterdorf became a separate Junior School for girls between 10 and 14 years of age. Much was made of the healthy location of the school in Southport. Soon the accommodation again proved inadequate and more additions were made. Miss Hay, Principal (1878-1890) and Miss Caroline Holland Peet (1903-27), despite financial stringencies, managed to keep the school to the forefront of education and built up a strong tradition of academic prowess as well as encouraging artistic and social activities. Miss Lynette Feasey, MA (Sheffield & Cantab)⁸⁷ (1928-35?) continued the development, as did Miss E. M. Lobb (1936-57) with “Heukensfeld”, 8 Trafalgar Road being purchased for use as classrooms. Unfortunately, in 1954 dry rot was found in the original Trinity Hall School building meaning that the last time it was used was in the autumn term of that year. From January 1955 the school was housed and the girls taught at the Birkdale premises. In July 1970 Trinity Hall School closed for good. Now (2016) the Old School House on Talbot Street is the only building of the ones built by the founder, John Fernley, still standing.

Trinity Hall, 1939

Miss E. M. Lobb, Headmistress

Trinity Hall is an attractive and well planned building with reading rooms, drawing rooms, form rooms and sitting rooms for the older girls, and large, airy bedrooms, divided into cubicles. Windersdorf is situated in Birkdale, with a pleasant garden, flanked by sand hills.

⁸⁷ .*Who's Who in Methodism 1933* p. 316

Source: The Methodist Conference Handbook, Liverpool 1939

Mrs Marjorie Walton Lonsdale joined the staff of Trinity Hall in 1952, becoming Headmistress in 1957 and remaining so until the school closed. The school prospered until the 1960s when, unfortunately, there was a financial deficit and the school closed in 1970. However, there is a Trinity Hall corner at Kingswood School, Bath, so some part of its history lives on. [CHECK]. Mrs Lonsdale was Vice President of the Methodist Conference in 1961.⁸⁸

Penrhos College, Colwyn Bay

Penrhos College was founded by local Methodists as a girls' school in 1880. The generosity of the Rev Frederick W. Payne, a Wesleyan Methodist minister and wealthy benefactor, who lived in Colwyn Bay provided the necessary funds for its establishment. He also gave money to found St John's Methodist Church (opened 1888) which was used by both Penrhos College and Rydal Mount, the local Methodist boys' boarding school.

Penrhos College started in a couple of three-storey houses 'with basements' on Colwyn Bay promenade. For a number of years there were only around 30 pupils, but, in 1895, the governors purchased the Hydropathetic Establishment in Colwyn Bay from the Pwllcrochan Estate. This was an extensive property near the beach with wonderful views and the school developed, adding many buildings and making full use of the 25 acre site to provide a sanatorium, gardens, playing fields and tennis courts. For the first two terms Miss Wenn was the Principal and she was replaced by Miss M.K. Pope who retired in 1894. Rapid development during the Principalship of Miss Rosa Hovey (1894-1928) included the building of a gymnasium and more class

⁸⁸ For more information see *Southport Visiter* (sic) website e.g. *Last Reunion*

rooms (1898) as well as other improvements to the property (1900-1917). For example, a preparatory department, Penrhos Junior, was established in 1910 on Oak Drive. Miss Elsie Wainwright (1928-38) was Principal when the quality of the education provided was deemed 'highly efficient' both with regard to its staff and school activities. In 1938 Miss Constance Smith (1938-66) oversaw the evacuation of the school to Chatsworth and its return to Colwyn Bay in 1945. The curriculum, extended during the time of Miss Mary Waddington (1967-74), together with other activities, was further developed and modernized when Mr Nigel Peacock became Principal (1974-93). Mr Peacock's successor, Mr Christopher Allen (1993-98) was unfortunate, in that during the 1980 and 1990s the change in attitude to boarding school education, especially towards single-sex schools, and the economic climate in the country made things difficult. So, in 1995, Mr. Allen and Mr Nigel Thorne, Headmaster of Rydal Boys School, Colwyn Bay considered the idea that the two schools might merge. A partial merger, basically involving the preparatory departments and Sixth Forms, took place in 1995, though the different transfer ages to the senior school caused some headaches. In practice, the girls were based at Penrhos, the co-educational Sixth Form at Rydal and the co-educational Preparatory departments at Pwllcrochan. This system lasted until 1999 when Penrhos closed and the girls moved to the Rydal site, while the Preparatory departments remained at Pwllcrochan. The complete merger took several years to become a reality. However, eventually the new Principal, Michael James, appointed in 1998, oversaw the full integration and the Penrhos site was sold in 1999. All these changes necessitated an extensive building programme.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ see www.rydalpenrhos.com/history for further details; and Best, op.cit. p.38-39

Kent College, Pembury, Kent

The Kent Wesley Methodist Schools Association, having opened Kent College for Boys at Canterbury in January 1885, went further and, in September, laid the foundation stone for a girls' school in Bouverie Road, Folkestone, which opened the following year. Miss De La Mare was Principal with the following remit:

'She shall exercise a maternal control over the pupils and give due attention to their general welfare, having regard to their health and cleanliness, the cultivation of a Christian and ladylike deportment, the provision of a sufficient supply of nourishing food, the sanitary conditions of the dormitories ...the practice of safe and wholesome games and recreations... [and] the daily observance of family worship.'⁹⁰

When Miss Lillie Cudleigh (1890-1899) was headmistress the school made steady progress, with increasing numbers and some academic success. She was followed by Miss Christina Elizabeth Brunyate, a graduate of London and Cambridge Universities. An inspiring teacher she was concerned that each girl should fulfil her potential, whatever that might be, and so she widened their horizons, both academically and socially. When Miss Brunyate left in 1918 to become Principal of Southlands College Miss Frances Hargreaves took her place. Once again academic courses were extended and a purpose-built laboratory equipped. The school and its pupils grew in confidence as the school song, written in 1927, shows.

Kent College, Pembury School Song, 1927

Onward and upward be always our aim...with purpose and mind
intent on one thing, on the triumph of all that is right and fair.

Source: quoted in Shared Aims (G.M. Best, 2003) p.28

Unfortunately, from the point of view of Kent College, in 1928 the Board of

⁹⁰ quoted in Best, p.28

Management of Methodist Schools asked Miss Hargreaves to be responsible for starting a new school, Hunmanby Hall, near Filey, North Yorkshire. So Miss Marion Walker, the senior mistress, became Head. The school went through a difficult time in the 1930s because of the economic conditions in the country and inevitably numbers fell. When the outbreak of war with Germany seemed imminent Miss Walker removed the school - lock stock and barrel - to Penzance, but after Neville Chamberlain's peace mission it returned to Folkestone. However, the governors decided to look for a larger and 'safer' site and in July 1939 Hawkeswell Place, Pembury, near Tunbridge Wells, was bought. As it turned out Pembury was even more dangerous as it was in the flight path of the German bombers! This included being hit by a V1 Flying bomb, having a German aeroplane shot down in the grounds and the crash of a Hurricane which resulted in the death of its pilot.⁹¹

In 1942 the school became one of the Methodist Residential Schools and a junior house was opened in 1945. During Miss Grace Tilley's time as Headmistress (1949-1966) a programme of building work resulted in increased numbers and higher academic standards. Both Miss Tilley and her successor Miss Edith Margaret James (1966-83) had had experience of Methodist Girls Schools, both as pupils and staff. The school became more outward looking and the range of activities was increased. Miss James was convinced of the importance of single sex education and resisted the entrance of boys to Kent College, Pembury so successfully that numbers grew and more buildings had to be erected by 1982 to accommodate the 500 pupils. For the first time the school had a Headmaster when, in 1983, the Rev. John C. A. Barrett came from Kingswood, the boys' school, to be Head.

⁹¹. *Folkestone Herald* (28th September 2006), *Kentish Express* (28th September 2006), Kent College's WW2 Tribute, *Kent College, Pembury* (Winter 2010) [all articles in pdf]

It is possible to concentrate on the educational needs of girls away from the emotional pressures that can seriously affect academic performance, especially in a boarding environment, and...girls can be encouraged to choose freely from a range of subject options, without the role stereotyping that can discourage girls from choosing traditional boys' subjects in a mixed school.

Source: quoted in Shared Aims (G.M. Best, 2003) p.28

He was followed in 1990 by Mrs Barbara Crompton (1990-2002), under whose guidance there was much development - buildings, academically, and in extra-curricular activities. On her retirement Anne E. Upton became the next Head (2002-2007) and she was followed by Sally-Anne Huang (2008-2015). To-day, under the Headship of Ms Julie Lodrick (2016-) the school caters for 555 girls and stress is placed on the individual and her potential ability to develop. The fostering of a spirit of kindness and community is one of the College's focuses. Many boarders come from overseas which gives an added dimension to the experience of the girls.⁹²

Kent College, Pembury's Aims, 2003

Within a dynamic environment, established values and tested methods combine with the best of new educational initiatives. The girls are expected to work hard and to discover their strengths and fulfil their potential through an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. Worship and the exploration on Christianity are important parts of school life. Kent College expects all the girls to contribute to the community and thousands of pounds are raised annually for charities of the girls' choice. The school aims to empower its students to be adventurous and positive, and to develop the self-reliance and confidence to take risks so that they can look forward to the future with optimism and find fulfilment in their lives.

Source: quoted in Shared Aims (G.M. Best, 2003) p.29

⁹². See www.kent-college.co.uk/ for further details.

Hunmanby Hall School, Filey, Yorkshire

In 1928, as already noted, Miss Frances Hargreaves was asked by the Methodist Board of Management to leave Kent College, Pembury to start a new school at Filey. It had long been felt that there ought to be such a school in the north of England and Hunmanby Hall was acquired when that estate came onto the market in 1927. Intended primarily as girls' boarding school it was the only one founded by the Board and its object was to provide a good modern education to prepare the pupils for the professions as well as running a home. It was hoped that the girls would stay at least until they were 16 and if possible to the age of 18. Although the religious basis of the school was Wesleyan Methodist arrangements were made for girls of other denominations to attend their own chosen places of worship. The school, under the headship of Frances Hargreaves BA, opened on 20th September 1928 with all 72 available places taken. The school quickly gained a good reputation, especially for pastoral care, and numbers increased. In July 1940 during World War II the Hunmanby Hall School staff and pupils were evacuated when its premises were requisitioned by the army. The Seniors went to Wheatley Lawn, Ben Rhydding and High Clere, Ilkley, while the Middle and Junior sections went to Armathwaite Hall and Bassen Fell, near Keswick. In Ilkley there was close contact with the Wesley Deaconess Order as both the Warden, the Rev. Harold Beales, and the ex-Warden, the Rev. Dr. W. Russell Maltby, acted as Chaplains and some of the College staff assisted with lessons.⁹³ Miss Hargreaves was able to keep overall supervision of both sites. The school returned to its own premises in Filey in the winter of 1944/5 to find that the property needed much attention, including the removal of the military's occupation,

⁹³ Graham, E.D. *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1978* [Peterborough, 2002] p. 260

both indoors and outside. After 27 years service Miss Hargreaves retired in 1955. Unfortunately the new head, Helen M. Darby, B.Sc. had to retire through ill health after several years, so 1967 saw Miss Mary M. Bray, JP in charge. She left in 1979 and the deputy head, Miss Joan Jefferson, MA, took over and became head (1979-87). When she needed to leave for personal reason Miss Jean Rutherford, MA succeeded her as the final headmistress of Hunmanby Hall (1987-1991).

Although Hunmanby Hall School was in a wonderful rural and seaside location that, in fact, proved its undoing as, when the tide turned against boarding, particular single-sex education, in the 1980s, the school found it difficult to recruit day pupils to boost the numbers with its catchment area being only 180 degrees. The problem was exacerbated when Ashville College, Harrogate built a boarding house for girls in 1985. In July 1991 Hunmanby Hall closed as the projected number of 170 pupils for the coming September meant that it could no longer be regarded as viable.⁹⁴

{Heads	Frances A.Hargreaves, BA	1928-55
	Helen M. Darby, B.Sc	1955-66
	Mary Bray, JP	1966-79
	Joan Jefferson, BA	1979-87
	Jean Rutherford, MA	1987 1991

Other Girls Schools

Several other girls' schools were in existence in different parts of the country, at various times, for example, East Anglia and Cornwall, but as time went on they either merged with other independent or state schools. It is not our purpose here to

⁹⁴ For a personal memory see the website www.hunmanby.com/hallhist.html

record their histories. However, it would be remiss not to note their existence.

West Cornwall School, Penzance

Methodist Secondary education for girls in Cornwall seems to have had its origin from the establishment of Redbrooke College for young ladies. Redbrooke House sited on Camborne Hill in 1877 started with about 20 boarders plus a number of day girls. In 1879 it was acquired by Camborne Wesleyan Trust and provided grammar school standard education. After the 1902 Education Act in 1906 the College was purchased by the local education authority. Now a County School for Girls it became known as the Redbrooke-Rosewarne School, but still maintained its connection with Camborne Wesley Church, using the schoolroom as additional accommodation.

West Cornwall School, originally called College, was founded in 1883 and in 1884 was established at 34 Chapel Street, Penzance. Although primarily a school for girls there was a kindergarten which accepted small boys. The first headmistress, known as the Lady Principal, was Mrs Isabella D. Shirley Richardson (1884-1892), a widow, aged 44. Her successor, Miss Waller (1892-1894) left to be married, being followed by Miss Hall (1894-1899) and then by Miss Charlotte Emma Hanna (1899-1929), but, unfortunately she had to retire due to ill health after a fall in Chapel Street caused her to break her hip. In 1929, York House was purchased from the Bolitho family. From 1929-1939 the school was run from both sites while extensions were made to York House. Thus, in 1929, the West Cornwall School was finally united on the York House estate, Penzance. Miss Edith Haskell Killip. MA (1929-1949) served as headmistress of the now united school for twenty years. Miss

Killip, was the daughter of Wesleyan minister, Rev Hassell Killip. Edith Killip was born while he was stationed at Malmesbury (1888-1891), so, although her entry in *Who's Who in Methodism 1933* gives no birth date one can surmise that she must have been born between those dates! She was educated at Trinity Hall, Southport and Durham University and proudly described herself as a 'Fellow of the University of Durham'. She is named as Headmistress in the advertisement in both the 1930 and 1947 *Minutes of Conference*. She was succeeded in 1949 by Miss Frances E. Wilson, BA (1949-57) who then moved on to Farringtons School. Miss Doris M. Peacock, BA (1957-60) was the next Head. Then Miss Jean Marshall followed her in 1960 remaining until the closure of the school in July 1967? The closure, though unexpected, was perhaps inevitable given the decline in pupil numbers and a debt of over £30,000.⁹⁵

The Board of Education for Methodist secondary schools was established in June 1903 and in due course the West Cornwall School for Girls, Penzance was listed among them. The advertisements in the *Minutes of Conference* of 1929 and 1932 simply describe the school as 'a well-equipped Residential School for Girls. Situated in one of the Healthiest Spots in England.' While the 1932 *Uniting Minutes of Conference* and the 1933 editions have rather more extensive details:

West Cornwall School for Girls, Penzance.

Recognised by the Board of Education.

Beautiful new premises at York House in high position overlooking Mount's Bay, with 12 acres of sub-tropical gardens. The alterations include the most modern and hygienic installations in cubicles, Bathrooms, and other domestic arrangements. Climate of Cornish Riviera especially suitable for children from

⁹⁵ I am indebted to the Rev Ian Haile who traced a book, *West Cornwall School Remembered 1884-1967* (Oats, Vanessa) and provided many details. Much other information comes from advertisements in various *Minutes of Conference*

the Colonies, or whose health requires special care. All higher and University Examinations prepared for under a Staff of Honours Graduates. Kindergarten and Preparatory Department for boys and girls as boarders or day pupils. Further particulars from the Head Mistress:

Miss E. H. Killip, M.A.

Fees: 75 gns p.a. Ministers' daughters taken on greatly reduced terms. 50 gns (1932)

Allowance made for train fares beyond Bristol (1932) Exeter (1933)

Source: Uniting Minutes of Conference (1932); Minutes of Conference (1933)

East Anglian School for Girls

At the other side of the country was another girls' school. In order to introduce the East Anglian School for Girls it is necessary to look briefly at the beginnings of Culford, the Boys' School. It was founded by James Floyd, a chemist and Mayor of Bury St Edmunds. He was anxious that the children of non-conformist parents should have the opportunity to go to such a school. He, the Chairman of the District, the Rev George Follows, and local Methodists raised money to buy an existing boarding school in Northgate St which had been started by Dr J. H. L. Christien, the Congregational Pastor. The Methodist Education Committee agreed to give financial support and so the new 'East Anglian Wesleyan Middle-Class School' came into being. It opened on 25th January 1881 with 15 boarders and 10 day boys. In 1885 Samuel Leigh, the headmaster and lay preacher, persuaded the governors to move the school from Northgate St to Highgate House, which had 10 acres of land and therefore offered more opportunities for development.

The school's original premises in Northgate St were converted into a

Methodist girls' School. This girls' school called "Ripley House" later became known as "Ripley College". Hence the date for the foundation of the East Anglian School for Girls is 1885 (or thereabouts!). The first real information about the school is to be found in the advertisement in the 1936 *Minutes of Conference*:

**EAST ANGLIAN SCHOOL
BURY ST EDMUND'S**

The School stands in delightful surroundings on the edge of A beautiful old-world town. The Main School comprises a Spacious **Assembly Hall, large Dining Hall, Science Laboratory, Gymnasium, Library, and Class-rooms**; there are **11 acres of Playing Fields**. [A good **Domestic Science** is provided 1937]

Boarders are accommodated in **attractively furnished Houses**, each close to the School, and each with its own garden and tennis-courts.

Separate **Preparatory Department**, into which girls are received from the age of 6.

The Staff consists of Graduate and Specialist Mistresses; the **Education** given is **thorough**, and every girl receives **personal and individual attention**.

Inclusive Fee for Residential Girls: £75 per annum.

Prospectus from the

HEAD MISTRESS: Miss K.M. BARON HAY, B.A.

Telephone: BURY ST EDMUNDS 257

The advertisement in 1940 not only states that the school was a 'Methodist Residential School for Girls from 7 to 19 years', but also adds that 'For the duration of the War the School has been removed to Cadgodan House in the spacious park of CULFORD SCHOOL, in a safe situation 4 miles from Bury St Edmunds.' Miss Baron Hay had retired in 1940/41 as in 1941 Miss Myra S. Johnson, B.A. is named as the Head Mistress.⁹⁶ By 1946 the School had returned home to Bury St Edmunds and had come under the auspices of the Board of Management for Methodist residential Schools. Miss Johnson remained Head until 1948 when her successor was Miss

⁹⁶ . *Minutes of Conference* 1940 & 1941 p. 11

Monica Tuck, B.A. Over the years there was a close connection between the East Anglian Girls' School and Culford School, which probably stemmed from the wartime association. So this inevitably led to the idea of the schools coming together as a co-educational unit. In 1972 Miss Tuck became the joint Head as the girls joined Culford School with the girls being bussed back and forth from Bury St Edmunds for lessons. During that year Ashley Dining Room and the boarding house complex was built. Finally in 1974 the union was completed when the girls joined the boys at Culford with their former school premises being sold to the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Ultimately they sold the property on to Hopkins Homes and it was demolished in 2005 to make way for Providence Place housing development.⁹⁷

After 40 years as a girls-only school the merger of the East Anglian School for Girls' and Culford School in 1972 made it one of the first United Kingdom boarding schools to become co-educational.

Non-Wesleyan Girls' Schools

Turning to the non-Wesleyan girls schools we find that the earliest was the Primitive Methodist The Ladies College, 5 The Cedars, Clapham, London (1874-1881 or 1887), which was to be a Connexional Institution. As the rules for Elmfield College, York restricted entry to *boys only* pressure grew for some educational opportunity to be provided for girls. In 1867, the Primitive Methodist Conference expressed the hope that one would soon be established, but, it was 1874 before the Connexional Girls' School Committee started to raise funds through a share issue.⁹⁸ In 1876 the Rev. William Rowe was appointed Governor and Secretary, with his wife as the Lady Principal. By 1877 the College had made a good start with 31 pupils, and

⁹⁷. See Culford School website www.culford.co.uk for further information

⁹⁸. *PMMins* (1874) pp.40, 41, 83, 109

was practically full in 1878. The head teacher was Miss Rowe, presumably the Governor's daughter, supported by a carefully chosen and competent staff plus visiting music teachers.⁹⁹ The few students who stayed long enough to be entered for University local examinations did well. The curriculum was quite wide ranging and several girls attended the University Extension Scheme Lectures in 'English History, Political Economy, and Heat'.¹⁰⁰ Many glowing tributes were received in 1878 so obviously it was meeting a need - if only that of the more prosperous Primitive Methodist families! So the outlook seemed bright and hopes were high, but, during 1878-9, the average number of students was only 33 and the small number caused concern: the decline was attributed to the depressed state of trade in the country, but things had improved by 1880, so that the Directors were able, in 1881, to pay a small dividend, which, although not large, at least proved 'that the College was in a sound and prosperous condition' and justified the faith of those who had believed in the importance of female higher education enough to provide the capital to set it up.

The 1881 Report is the last we have and thereafter all real trace of the Ladies College is lost. However, there are a few further hints: in 1882 William Rowe superannuated, but, for the next three years, his address was 'St. Lawrence's Ladies School, Sister's Avenue, Clapham Common, London'.¹⁰¹ Could this mean that the Primitive Methodist Ladies College, 5 The Cedars was taken over by another educational enterprise and renamed? It seems likely that the fall in numbers contributed largely to its demise and made it no longer viable as a Connexional Institution. After several years silence, in 1885, the Ladies College is mentioned

⁹⁹. *PMM* (1878) p.191

¹⁰⁰. *PMMins* (1878) pp.89-91

¹⁰¹. *PMMins* (1882) pp.4, 150; (1883) p.149; (1884) p.158

when Conference set up a Committee of enquiry into its Connexional Institutions, so there must still have been some links. However, in 1886, there is special mention of a Committee for the Ladies College being re-appointed, so maybe we can assume the College did not pass the initial review. The Committee's remit was 'to complete its work, and furnish the shareholders with a balance sheet.' The following year the Committee was instructed 'to wind up the affairs of the company...'¹⁰²

So that seems to be the end of a very enterprising venture into the realms of higher education for girls, especially for the daughters of the more prosperous Primitive Methodists. However, although the Ladies' College itself might have been dead the idea of education for girls certainly did not lie down! Some sections of the Connexion were obviously still hankering for a Primitive Methodist girls' school as it was mentioned at the Annual Speech Day and Prize-giving at Bourne College, the boys' school in Quinton, Birmingham, in 1892 when the vice-chairman hinted 'at the possibility of a girls' school being established at The Quinton, or not far from thence, at some future time...'¹⁰³ This seems to have been more of a pious hope than anything else as in the 1898 Conference Address we find:

'the question arises as to what is being done for the daughters of these families (i.e. 'our well-to-do families'). It is much to be regretted that we have not a single girls' college, and we would commend to our leading laymen the desirability of steps being taken at once to supply this great need.'¹⁰⁴

As far as I can determine nothing was done and thereafter there was silence.¹⁰⁵

Edgehill College, Bideford, Devon

¹⁰² . *PMMins* (1885) p.116; (1886) p.122; (1887) p.127

¹⁰³ . *Bourne College Calendar* 4 (1890-2) p.165

¹⁰⁴ . *PMMins* (1898) p.183

¹⁰⁵ Graham, E. D. *Three Colleges: Primitive Methodist Secondary Educational Ventures* (Eighth Chapel aid Lecture 1998, Englesea Brook) pp.24-30

Edgehill College for Girls came into being as a direct result of the Bible Christian Shebbear College for Boys. When the members of Bible Christian Connexion wished to have a good education for their girls, the 1882 Conference set up a small Committee to consider the feasibility of starting a girls school. The 1883 Conference received its findings with mixed enthusiasm, but asked the Rev. William Bryan Reed to undertake its establishment. 'Edgehill Estate', in North Down Road, Bideford, was bought for £1,650 adapting and furnishing the building, plus the purchase of 10 more acres of and other expenses brought the total outlay to £4,667 17s. 6d.¹⁰⁶ Reed was appointed Resident Governor, which position he held for 26 years until he became a supernumerary in 1909. Miss Wooldridge, daughter of a Bible Christian minister, was chosen as Headmistress. At the start of the first term, in January 1884, 14 girls entered the school, but soon news spread and by the end of the year there were 42 students. When the number increased to over 70 the following year more accommodation was required. Although of Bible Christian foundation, Edgehill was undenominational and open to all and soon developed a good academic programme.

However, after this promising start, tragedy struck in the summer of 1887 when a fever epidemic killed Mrs Reed, three of the girls and an estate worker. The school closed and the girls were sent home while the source of the outbreak was investigated. There was concern about whether parents would feel confident enough to send their daughters back when the premises were declared free from infection. Fortunately, when the autumn term started 57 out of the 72 returned.

Miss Woolridge, who married the widowed Governor, the Rev W. B. Reed,

¹⁰⁶ . Bourne, F.W. *The Bible Christians: Their Origin and History (1815-1900)*, (1905), pp.482-87

was an enthusiastic teacher, inspiring her pupils so that the College achieved some notable successes and appreciative comments from educationalists. In 1904, after two decades of existence, the Governor, reporting to the Bible Christian Conference, remarked that both academic and less academic students, had been given a firm grounding and so enabled to take good positions in life. He submitted a proposal for a further extension to the premises. That the proposal received support from the United Methodist Free Churches and the Methodist New Connexion is significant as they and the Bible Christians were exploring the idea of coming together as the United Methodist Church. These other two denominations, which had no girls' schools, were very impressed by Edgehill, not only, with the premises, the teaching and the balance sheet, but also with its spirit. Obviously, they hoped that the daughters of their members would benefit. A new wing was open on 3rd October 1906 and numbers increased rapidly with 106 being in residence the following term.

On the retirement of, Mr and Mrs Reed, in 1909, the Rev. William Treffry was appointed Governor and Miss Edith O. Johnson, B.A., became Headmistress. The latter was not a Methodist and her appointment on her academic qualifications reflects the open-mindedness of the Managing Committee. During her 15 years at Edgehill academic work flourished, improvements to the property were made, and the school became involved in work in the community.

After seven years Mr. Treffry returned to Circuit work, being succeeded, in 1916, by the Rev. Richard Saunders Hall. During the three years of his Governorship the numbers in the school increased necessitating yet more accommodation, so, in 1917, the Kiltrasna property with 12½ acres of land and 2 cottages, was bought as a hostel. Unfortunately, just a few months after the arrival of the Rev. Dr. David

Brooks as Governor, there was a disastrous fire during the night of 5th June 1920. The fire could not be contained and in due course the Insurance Assessor declared it 'totally destroyed'. The girls were accommodated in local homes in Bideford and telegrams sent to all parents: 'Edgehill Fire all safe.' Very few personal belongings were saved and all records were lost. However, the school work went on and soon the girls were meeting in the schoolroom of the United Methodist Church. The pressing question was whether the school should be rebuilt. Insurance money would cover the liabilities leaving a small surplus, so some advocated abandoning the school altogether. Others, realising there was more to Edgehill than just the buildings, argued for rebuilding.

The Trustees met in the afternoon after the fire at Kiltrasna and, encouraged and indeed challenged by the founder of the school, W. B. Reed, decided to explore rebuilding the College. The Minutes indicate how the Trustees faced up to the problems: of losses, future insurance, accommodation provision during the interim period, sale of salvage and the understandable concerns of the Rev. George Parker, the financial Secretary of the United Methodist Church.

Dr. Brooks felt unable to cope with the rebuilding, but fortunately the Rev. John Moore, recently retired as Home Missions Secretary and Warden of the United Methodist Deaconess Institute, was one of the College Trustees. He outlined all the possibilities in an inspiring speech and persuaded the Trustees to rebuild. Thereupon, in a typically Methodist gesture (!), Moore was asked to become Bursar and oversee the work and he agreed. Temporary accommodation had to be found for the girls so North Bank, a nearby house was rented and on 20th July it was resolved that:

'we arrange to accommodate 140 pupils at Edgehill during the

coming year, that “North Bank” be taken furnished for £150 a year for one year, with the option of a further term; that “Culworth” be taken for three years at a rental of £120 a year; and that since these two houses, with “Kiltrasna” will only provide for 110 pupils, the local Committee endeavour to secure another hostel for the remaining thirty pupils.’

Before long “Whitehill” was bought and the four houses, with the use of the United Methodist Church’s Schoolroom, meant the College could operate fairly normally.

Obviously it was important for the school to come together as an entity as quickly as possible, so several plans were drawn up for rebuilding the whole school, but the cost was always too high. Eventually, a scheme simply to build classrooms, but with scope for extension when funds permitted, was accepted and the builders moved in. Inevitably costs soared when the old walls were found to be structurally unsound, but the Trustees carried on with quiet dogged determination. So, on 5th May 1922, the new building was opened. John Moore had been the mainstay of the project, but failing health forced his retirement in July 1922. Who was to succeed him? Then, although they were rather reluctant to undertake such a big enterprise of getting the College settled again, Mr. and Mrs Treffry acceded to the Conference’s decision to appoint them to Edgehill as Governor and Matron¹⁰⁷. It was obvious that maintaining the four hostels was not cost effective and that over £500 a year could be saved by centralising the domestic arrangements. Plans were drawn up, financial arrangements made and by 28th July 1926 tenders were requested for ‘clearing the site, stacking the stone and removing the useless material.’ In due course the opening day arrived amid great rejoicing.

After 15 years (1909-24) the Headmistress, Miss Johnson, resigned and Miss Enid Cuthbertson Hill, who had taught at Penrhos, succeeded her and quietly and

¹⁰⁷ Pyke, Richard, *The Golden Chain* (1914?) pp.132-135

dedicatedly continued the good work of the College. From the beginning the School management had been entrusted to a Committee appointed by the Bible Christian Conference and this was continued by the United Methodist Conference after the 1907 Union. As the school had already been serving the educational needs locally, a formal application for grants from the Board of Education and the County Council was made in 1919. Edgehill having always been 'recognised' by the Board of Education the application was readily accepted with seven members of the Governing Body now being appointed by the County Council. Happily, the representatives proved sympathetic to the educational aims and the religious freedom of the school. In 1934, it was said: 'The one and only aim of all is a sound education, at a moderate fee, in an atmosphere of real religion.' So the girls were trained and equipped to go out into the world, to enter the professions and any other area where a sound education was an asset.¹⁰⁸

After Methodist Union in 1932 Edgehill, with the other non-Wesleyan secondary schools, came under the auspices of the Methodist Education Committee and its successors. The last *United Methodist Church Minutes of Conference 1932* and the *Uniting Minutes* of 1932 have full page advertisements which include a large picture of 'Edgehill Girls' College, Bideford, North Devon'.

EDGEHILL GIRLS' COLLEGE
BIDEFORD, NORTH DEVON
 'United Methodist Secondary School' [UM Minutes]
A Methodist Residential Secondary School [M Minutes]
Head Mistress: Miss E. CUTHBERTSON HILL, B.A. (Hons.
London
Assisted by an Efficient and Fully Qualified Staff
 Educational Results are Good. The School Buildings are
 Beautifully Situated in the Kingsley Country. There are good
 Playing Fields and Courts. We have Our Own Farm.

¹⁰⁸. Pyke, Richard, *Edgehill College 1884-1934* (1934)

Sources: United Methodist Church Minutes of Conference 1932 p. xxii; The Uniting Minutes of the Methodist Church 1932 p.17

Miss Hilda Lawson Brown, M.A. (1924-55) was appointed as Headmistress in 1947 and during her time she reviewed all aspects of the school's life and introduced a greater element of freedom. Miss Annie Mary Shaw, M.A. (1955-75, died 13th July 2011, aged 92) who had previously taught at ? and ? became Headmistress in 1955 and her years there saw the closer integration of the boarders and day girls and the arrival of the school's first male teacher. As noted before the 1960s proved to be a challenging time for residential single sex boarding schools. The full page advertisements in the 1970s *Minutes of Conference* give details of the College's location, buildings, opportunities for extra-curricular activities, preparations for academic and music examinations and entrance requirements. Much information about the Co-education Preparatory School is given. During Miss Shaw's headship the building programme continued and the catchment area for day girls was extended while discussions about the possibility of entering the state system took place with Devon Education Authority, which had funded day places at the school. However, as the Authority was not prepared to co-operate as hoped and Edgehill reverted to full independence in 1976 when the government withdrew the Direct Grant option.

Day boys had been accepted into the Junior school for many years, and taken as boarders from the 1960, prior to their transferring to Shebbear so Miss Shaw hoped it might be possible to merge the two schools and thus become co-educational. However, the Governing Body did not agree. The appointment of Mr Joseph Sheppard (1976-80) as Head ensured that the links with Shebbear were enhanced.

Miss Ballantyne (1980-85) developed the curriculum, boarding facilities and extra-curricular activities plus a small centre for dyslexic children. A joint governing body, which had been in abeyance, of Edgehill and Shebbear was reinstated in 1982. Unfortunately, Miss Ballantyne died in 1985 and the deputy Head, Miss Wakeford, took the helm for almost two years. Then Mrs Elizabeth Burton (1987-2002) became Head in 1987 and yet again there was development in buildings and the curriculum, including a nursery, which was open to children of local families, and a new 350 seat Theatre (October 2001), available for use by the local community for concerts and meetings, was opened. In 1991/2, the Board of Management proposed the amalgamation of Shebbear, the boys' school, and Edgehill, but both schools were opposed to the idea and so it was scrapped and the two Colleges retained their separate identities. Boys were admitted to the senior school making the whole school co-educational and in 1997 the College had 448 boarding and day pupils, aged 3-18. After the retirement of Mrs Burton in 2002 Mr Barry Edwards was appointed as Headmaster.

The property at Edgehill seems to have unlucky in having a number of fires starting with first one in 1920 (see above). On 5th March 2006 fire caused costly damage to the main school, with, two years later, another one on 11th May 2008 and then on 30th March 2013 the former boarding house of Kiltrasna, which had been derelict for several years, was destroyed. The death of one of the girls during training for the Ten Tors expedition made national headline news in 2007.

On 28th October 2007 the Methodist Board of Education announced that Edgehill College and Greville College would merge and become known as Kingsley School at the beginning of January 2008. This merger had been forced on both the

schools because of falling numbers and difficult economic circumstances locally and nationally.¹⁰⁹ In January 2009 Edgehill and Greville College came under the aegis of the Board of Management for Methodist Independent Schools, so the name of Edgehill College last appears in the advertisement in 2008 *Minutes of Conference* and Kingsley School is listed in the 2009 one.

The motto of Edgehill was ‘Beyond the best there is a better’ and it seems likely to remain part of Kingsley School’s ethos as it ‘is proud of its three great pasts’ under the present head, Mr Peter Last (2017).

Other Schools

It is certain that there were various local Methodist girls’ schools, but tracing them in detail would entail much research not possible for this project. Two seem to have been listed in the *Minutes of Conference* for a number of years. Stoneycroft, Birkdale, Southport, was one which described itself as ‘Approved by the Board of Education’. The Principals were ‘The Misses Davies’, one of whom was Rachel Emily LL.A, the daughter of the late Rev. Isaac Davies, a Wesleyan minister. She had been educated at Trinity Hall School and is described as ‘Schoolmistress. Class Leader’. Presumably, the other Principal was a sister.¹¹⁰ The other school, in the north-west of England, was St Helen’s, Cockermouth. The fact that the first advertisement for it is in the 1933 *Minutes of Conference* makes one speculate that its origins might have been non-Wesleyan!

¹⁰⁹ . Greville College (boys), founded in 1954, was part of the Anglican Woodard Foundation, which in 1994, merged with Stella Maris Convent Catholic School (girls), founded in 1929. The Kingsley school is thus a co-educational institution comprising Edgehill and Greville. For further information see <http://www.kingsleyschoolbideford.co.uk/abc>

¹¹⁰ . *Minutes of Conference* 1929, 1930, *Who’s Who in Methodism* 1933 p.299

**A METHODIST SCHOOL IN THE
NORTH OF ENGLAND**

GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL, recognised as efficient by
The Board of Education, in an unrivalled situation in its own
grounds. Graduate Staff. Many examination successes.
Excellent health record. Fees Economic and Inclusive.
[Private Swimming Pool in the School Grounds (1937)]
TWO ENTRANCE SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED
ST. HELEN'S, COCKERMOUTH
PRINCIPAL: Miss WHEELER

Source: Minutes of Conference 1933 p.20, 1937 p.21

Local records would surely provide further information of these and others. For example, there are a number of advertisements in the *Winter Number of the Methodist Recorder 1896*. Some of which are obviously for girls' schools (Ladies Collegiate School, Principal Mrs Sibly, whose husband had been associated with Queen's College, Taunton and Penrhos, Knighton, Radnorshire, Principal Miss Wall, the very name suggests she might have been educated at Penrhos, Colwyn Bay (see pp. 84-85)¹¹¹; then the details about Holmesdale Gardens, Hastings, Principals The Misses Bramley (daughters of the late Rev J. Bramley and sisters of John Bramley, MA Head Master of Queen's College, Taunton seem to imply a definite Methodist connection. As both the following mention that references may be made to 'Ministers and Parents' also could suggest their relationships to Methodism - Marquess Villa School, Gauden Road, Clapham, Principal Miss Hunt and Brentwood, Southport, Principals Briggs and Miss Holt. From the very fact that advertisements were placed in the *Methodist Recorder Winter Number 1896* one could guess that Leigh Bank College for Girls, Leamington Spa, Principals Miss Ivens and Mrs Adlard; Girls' Grammar School,

¹¹¹. Census returns for 1851, 1871, 1891 1901 and 1911 provide information about Mary Lousia Wall (1842-1920) and her sister Fanny (1850-1929) apparently a governess at the school. Both were buried in Knighton. See also website for the Collegiate School, Knighton which may have succeeded their establishment and also Kelly's Directories (1895, 1901) for private schools in South Wales.

Ripon, Principal Mrs Abrahams; School for the Daughters of Gentlemen, The Grange, Buxton, Derbyshire, Principal Miss Aldom; Ladies College, The Mount, Darlington, Principal Miss Fernley; Southfield, Hornsea, East Yorkshire, Principal Miss Mary Skinner and Portland House, Penrith, Principal Miss Rodham could also show a connection. Inevitably, much of this is speculation, but provides the opportunity for further research! As does delving into the records of Methodist schools in Ireland or the Channel Islands a project which cannot be undertaken at the moment,.

Southlands College

A detailed examination of Southlands Training College, Wimbledon cannot be undertaken here, so a brief account must suffice. A comprehensive survey, with helpful references, is to be found in the paper given by Mary Ludlow, 'Southlands: A Moving Story' in *Vital Piety and Learning: Methodism and Education*.¹¹²

Westminster College was founded in 1851 in Horseferry Road, London to train teachers to work in Methodist day schools. At first it catered for both men and women, but soon an additional college was required and so Southlands College opened, in 1872, in Battersea as a teacher training college for women. It quickly gained a reputation for the teaching of reading, especially in infant schools. For the first 41 years (1872-1913) of its existence Southlands College had a (male!) minister as its Principal, but in 1914 Miss M. Atkinson Williams was appointed and served until 1918. She and Miss Christina E. Brunyate (1918-1931), who had been head of Kent College, Folkstone, saw the College through World War I and its aftermath. When the Central Hall era and the Forward Movement opened up more opportunities for women the courses offered by Southlands College were well subscribed. In the

¹¹². *Vital Piety and Learning: Methodism and Education*: Papers given at 2002 Conference of the Wesley Historical Society (ed. Lenton, John H., 2005)

early 1900s some women had taken degree courses, but, in 1930, the Board of Education restricted colleges of education to following a two year certificate course. From 1927-1929 the College was housed in Dover, but, in 1929, it moved to Wimbledon Parkside, where good enlightened teaching trained the women to go into the schools. The next Principal, Miss Florence M. Wood, MA, (1931-49), took the Wesleyan Methodist Southlands into Methodist Union in 1932 and saw it through the trials and tribulations of World War II. Between 1940 and 1946 the College was evacuated to the Methodist holiday home of 'Highbury' in Weston-super-Mare. Miss Wood was succeeded by Miss Myra S. Johnson (1949-65), who had been head of East Anglian Girls' School, and she extended the horizons of the College, both academically and socially.

Methodist educational influence

The Wesleyan movement has exercised an educational influence altogether out of proportion to the number of its schools because of the good quality of the men and women teachers trained at its colleges.

Source: W.O. Lester Smith, To Whom do Schools Belong?: An Introduction to the Study of School Government, (1942) p.56 [quoted in A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain vol. 3 (ed., Davies, R., George, A.R., Rupp, G., 1983) p.306]

In the 1960s Southlands admitted men and extended its courses, both the certificate and degree ones, to cope with and keep abreast of the changing social conditions in the country. The next Principal, Miss Mary Pauline Callard (1965-77) was born in Torquay. Personally, familiar with Methodist education she had been educated at Queenswood and taken degrees in Commerce and Social Studies. Immediately after the war she served with the United Nations Relief and

Rehabilitation Administration in Austria, after which she lectured in Statistics and Sociology at Exeter University before going to Southlands. In 1975, the College joined with the local Roman Catholic (Digby Stuart); Anglican (Whitelands) and the Froebel College to form the Roehampton Institute of Higher Education. On Pauline Callard's retirement in 1977 once again Southlands had a male Principal, Douglas Milbank, (1977-85). In 1997 Southlands relocated to Roehampton Lane, near to Digby Stuart and Froebel Colleges. When the University of London in 1979 ceased to validate degrees of public sector institutions the University of Surrey agreed to do so. William Hart, a non-Methodist, (1985-93) became Principal when Mr Milbank retired and in due course he was succeeded by Michael Leigh(1993-2002). In 1997 The Roehampton Institute became the University of Surrey Roehampton.

Conclusion

Right from the beginning all the branches of Methodism had rightly been concerned with education. In the first instance the chief aim was to take 'children off the streets' and teach them spiritual and moral values, then to educate them to take their rightful place in the world. As the years passed and Methodism developed education became even more important, for the right training of children, especially in Christian values, meant more pupils were able to become potential teachers and ministerial students. So the wheel turned full circle. Methodist educationalists have played a great part in this and none more than the dedicated women who 'led', along with their staff, the various girls' schools and Southlands College which trained so many women to teach, not merely as a 'job', but as a vocation and indeed a Christian duty and privilege.¹¹³

¹¹³ . While not specifically related to the part play by women an overview of Methodist education can

Chapter 9: - Women with an ‘extraordinary call’ - Wesleyan Methodism

In a previous chapter reference was made to Thomas Maxfield and the beginnings of local preaching, so now what about the women who preached? It has been well known and recorded that women occupied the pulpits in the Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian Connexions, both as local preachers and itinerants.¹¹⁴ To these we will turn later, but for the moment we need to see how John Wesley faced the problem. The movement he started had a great impact on the lives of the men and women of his time and many lay people felt impelled to pass on their new-found faith and experience, beyond the confines of the band and class meeting discussed previously. In the case of men there was no fundamental objection to this, once Wesley had accepted that Maxfield had ‘a call to preach’, but when women wanted to do the same there were reservations, though the giving of testimonies and even exhortations was not frowned upon, as we have seen, because these mostly took place within the family or in classes. Even occasional speaking in services was permitted, but preaching a sermon was quite a different matter.

John Wesley’s view

John Wesley himself was not against women giving short exhortations, but he was not willing to sanction their actually preaching sermons. Even though Wesley gave guarded support to women, such as Sarah Crosby, Mary Bosanquet and Sarah Mallett, to mention but three, because their work patently resulted in the salvation of sinners,

be found in [Best, G. *A Historical Perspective on Methodist Involvement in School Education after Wesley* [2010]

¹¹⁴. Graham, E. D., *Chosen by God: A list of the Female Travelling Preachers of Early Primitive Methodism*, (Bunbury, Cheshire, 1989, 2nd enlarged edition, WHS 2010); Graham, E. D ‘Chosen by God: the female travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism (Ph.D., University of Birmingham, 1987); Milburn, G. E. and Batty, M. eds., *Workaday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (1995) pp. 165-190

nevertheless, on the 25th March 1780, he wrote to George Robinson at Grimsby that he was not prepared to allow women to preach, stating, 'I desire Mr. Peacock to put a final stop to the preaching of women in his circuit. If it were suffered it would grow, and we know not where it would end.'¹¹⁵ However, before too long the matter was rather taken out of his hands and he felt each case should be judged on its merits, thus he was forced to give tacit, even if reluctant, approval. So we shall look at some of these women.

Sarah Crosby (Mrs) (c.1729-1804)

Sarah Crosby was born on 7th November 1729 near Leeds. What little is known of her early life comes from a letter she wrote to John Wesley on 17th August 1757, in which she said that, following her conversion on 29th October 1749, when she was nearly 20, she '...laboured to persuade all with whom I conversed to come to Christ, telling them there was love, joy, peace etc. for all that come to him.'¹¹⁶ Impressed by the preaching of George Whitefield and John Wesley Sarah joined the Foundry Society in October 1750 and two years later became a class leader. She appears to have been deserted by her husband in February 1757 and in the summer went to live with Sarah Ryan and Mary Clark in Christopher's Alley, Moorfields, near the Foundry. At times Mary Bosanquet joined the group, who worked among the poor and needy of the area. Soon Sarah found that her 'social work' was not enough in itself and she longed to persuade others to repent and embrace her faith. The more her own faith developed the more Sarah felt an urge to speak the word of God. Convinced that God had spoken to her in a vision, saying 'Feed my sheep' she

¹¹⁵. JWL vol. 7 p.9

¹¹⁶. *Arminian Magazine* (1806) - 'The Grace of God Manifested in an Account of Mrs Crosby, of Leeds.' pp.420-21; Taft, vol. 2 p. 26-39

responded by declaring ‘Lord, I will do as thou hast done.’¹¹⁷ On 7th January 1761, at the invitation of Mr and Mrs Dobinson, who were trying to start a Methodist society in Derby, Sarah travelled there to assist them. A class meeting was held on 1st February to which 27 people came. The numbers increased so rapidly that soon it became impractical for her to speak to the people individually, so she recorded that ‘I therefore gave out a hymn, and prayed, and told them part of what the Lord had done for myself, persuading them to flee from all sin.’¹¹⁸ Worried that she was virtually preaching Sarah consulted Wesley. She was greatly comforted and encouraged by his reply which showed that he was beginning to accept that women might preach.

Letter to Sarah Crosby, February, 1761

John Wesley

...I think you have not gone too far. You could not well do less. I apprehend all you can do more is, when you meet again, to tell them simply, “You lay me under a great difficulty. The Methodists do not allow of women preaching; neither do I take upon me any such character. But I will just nakedly tell you what is in my heart.”...I do not see that you have broken any law, Go on calmly and steadily. ...

Source: Letters of John Wesley (Telford) vol.4 p.132-33; Z. Taft, Biographical sketches of Holy Women vol. 2 p.43

From this time Sarah received many invitations and travelled extensively to visit societies, chiefly in Yorkshire and the north. She often held two or three meetings in a day and, as she records in her journal most of the gatherings were ‘profitable’, ‘good’, or ‘refreshing’.¹¹⁹ Sarah maintained her correspondence with Wesley, who supported her public speaking, writing on 18th March 1769, to give her advice about her preaching.

¹¹⁷. *Arminian Magazine* (1806) - ‘...an Account of Mrs Crosby, of Leeds.’ p.470

¹¹⁸. *Ibid.* p.518

¹¹⁹. Taft, Z. *Biographical Sketches of Holy Women* vol. 2, (Leeds, 1828) pp.65-85

I advise you,..., (1) Pray in private or public as much as you can. (2) Even in public you may properly enough intermix *short exhortations* with prayer; but keep as far from what is called preaching as you can: therefore never take a text; never speak in a continued discourse without some break, about four or five minutes. Tell the people, 'We shall have another *prayer meeting* at such a time and place.'...As soon as you have time, write more particularly and circumstantially; and let Sister Bosanquet do the same.

Source: Letters of John Wesley (Telford) vol.5 pp130-31

When Wesley visited her area her journal reveals that Sarah travelled with him to various meetings.¹²⁰ From 1777 Sarah's travels became less frequent, probably due to rheumatism, and by 1793 she had settled in Leeds, with Ann Tripp and together with others they formed a group of women preachers under the name of 'the Female Brethren'. Even when Sarah was in her 70s she still met classes and bands and delighted in meeting old friends. On 20th and 22nd October 1804 she had class meetings, the following day a band meeting and on the Sunday she went to two services at 7.00 a.m. and again in the evening plus a society meeting. Sarah died the next day on 24th October 1804. Her memoir, consisting chiefly of extracts from her letters and journal was edited by Mrs Mortimer and published in 1806.

Mary Bosanquet, whom we have met before in connection with her school in Leytonstone, (see pp. 66-68?) also became well known for her preaching.

Mary Bosanquet (Mrs Fletcher) (1739-1815)

Mary Bosanquet was born into a well-to-do family at Leytonstone on 1st

¹²⁰ Taft, vol.2 pp.63-68

September 1739. Around the age of seven she was introduced to Methodism by a family servant and through her sister met Mrs Lefevre, which friendship made her decide to become a Methodist.¹²¹ Her family was appalled and did their best to dissuade her, but she remained convinced eventually leaving home. Apparently Mary had inherited a considerable sum of money and a property, 'The Cedars', near her family's house from her grandparents, so she was able to rent two unfurnished rooms in Hoxton Square. Through the Foundery Society she met John Wesley, Sarah Crosby and Sarah Ryan. The latter, whom we have met before, became a particular confidant. Sarah Ryan returned to London from Bristol in 1762 and the two lived a structured religious life together. When, in 1763, 'The Cedars' became vacant Mary decided to live there and, as we have seen, found an orphanage and school along the lines of Wesley's school at Kingswood. Her father 'made not the least objection, only added with a smile, if a mob should pull your house about your ears, I cannot hinder them.'¹²² Mary and Sarah moved to Leytonstone, on 24th March, with Mary providing the finance and Sarah the practical experience. The school became a very tight-knit community with an hour each evening spent in reading and prayer. Before long, people from outside the 'family' asked to come to the prayers and soon the group numbered 25 and, as with Sarah Crosby, noted earlier, the need for preaching was felt.

Extract from Mary Bosanquet's Journal

...A poor woman...came to ask if she might come in, when we made prayer. We told her at seven every Thursday night she should be welcome. She soon brought two or three more, and

¹²¹. Little known of Mrs Lefevre (?1723-1756), but it seems she became a Methodist about two or three years before her death. After her death 90 of her letters were published by her husband and 12 years later John Wesley reprinted 55 of these plus another letter she had sent to him. *Works of JW: Letters II 1740-1755* [Oxford, ed. Frank Baker, 1982] pp.540-1,546-47,551,553,573-74 cf. *JWW* vol.13 (1772) cf. Moore, H., *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher...*(1817) pp.4,9,12,17

¹²² . Henry Moore, *Ibid.* p.45

they others, till in a short time our little company increased to twenty-five.... Some few were offended, and came no more; but most appeared under conviction, and those we appointed to meet on Tuesday night, reserving the Thursday for the public meeting, which still kept increasing, and in which we read a chapter, and sometime spoke from it.

*Source: The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher,...(Moore, Henry 1817)
p.47*

At their request Wesley sent a preacher, a Mr. Murlin, the very next Sunday and within a fortnight a Society of 25 members was formed. At first, Mary and Sarah continued, despite some opposition, with their Thursday gatherings: reading and expounding Scripture passages to the large numbers who came. Inevitably this practice reached the ears of the exclusively male Wesleyan Methodist Conference which, meeting at Manchester in August 1765 had, among its questions one about St. Paul's words 'It is a shame for women to speak in the Church.' (I Cor. 14.35). Wesley's reply was a model of diplomacy or even evasion!

Women speaking Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1765

Q. 'How can we encourage the women in the Bands to speak, since "it is a shame for women to speak in the Church?" I Cor, xiv 35

A. I deny, 1, That *speaking* here means any other than speaking as a *public teacher*. This St. Paul *suffered not*, because it implied "usurping authority over the man," I Tim.ii,12 Whereas *no authority* either man or woman is usurped, by the *speaking* now in question. I deny, 2. That *the Church* in that text, means any other than in the great congregation.

Source: Minutes of the Methodist Conference (Manchester, August 30, 1765) [1812 ed.] p.51

Sometime around 1765/6 Sarah Crosby joined Mary Bosanquet and Sarah Ryan at Leytonstone and the three worked together ministering to the little community there.

Wesley was impressed by their work and wrote in his *Journal*:

‘February, Thur.12 1767. I preached at Leytonstone. Oh what a house of God is here! Not only for decency and order, but for the life and power of religion!’¹²³

The following year Mary decided to move her orphanage to Yorkshire. Several reasons prompted this decision, first, she had always longed for her ‘family’ to live in the country and she hoped that the fresh northern air would be beneficial for Sarah Ryan’s health, secondly, as her financial resources were becoming depleted she hoped that living there would be cheaper and lastly, she had received an invitation from Richard Taylor to relocate to Yorkshire at his expense. So, on 7th June 1768 the community moved north. At first they stayed with Mrs Taylor’s parents, but early in August were able to take possession of a farmhouse, Cross Hall, not far from Leeds. Unfortunately, Sarah died a week or two later, on 17th August, and was buried in Leeds Old Churchyard. As Mary had no experience of running a farm profitably her capital continued to decrease and things were in a sorry state when, in 1781, after 13 years, she married John Fletcher, the Vicar of Madeley in Shropshire. The property was sold and the occupants dispersed.

As we have seen earlier while Mary Bosanquet and Sarah Ryan had their school in Leytonstone they held public prayer meetings at which they read a chapter and expounded from it. The meetings so popular that a Methodist Society was formed. Like Sarah Crosby they were preaching in all but name. Mary continued this practice after she moved in 1768 to Cross Hall in Yorkshire, where people came from miles to her services. In time these developed so that a sermon was included,

¹²³. *JWJ* vol.5 p.195

though she always refused to preach from the pulpit, preferring to stand on the stairs. Wesley was still rather wary of Mary Bosanquet's and Sarah Crosby's activities and wrote, as we have noted, to Sarah with advice about how the women should conduct their meetings to avoid being accused of preaching.

In 1771, Mary Bosanquet sent a long letter to John Wesley about female preaching and her attitude to it, asking his advice. She explained that she and Sarah Ryan had been taking 'little kind of prayer meetings, etc.' which had been blessed, but some people had raised objections, based on scriptural injunctions about women keeping silence. Needless to say Mary put a different interpretation on these texts,¹²⁴ believing them to mean that women should not usurp the position or authority of men and that just as some women like Deborah in the Old Testament, and Mary and the woman of Samaria in the New, 'ministered' in certain circumstances, so she had an extra-ordinary call which was why she acted 'in an extra-ordinary manner'. In his reply of 13th June 1771 Wesley agreed with her

'I think the strength of the cause rests there - on your having an *extraordinary* call. So I am persuaded has every one of our lay-preachers; otherwise I could not countenance his preaching at all. It is plain to me that the whole work of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of His providence. Therefore I do not wonder if several things occur therein which do not fall under the ordinary rules of discipline. St. Paul's ordinary rule was 'I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation', yet in extraordinary cases he made a few exceptions; at Corinth in particular.'¹²⁵

Some people asked Mary why she did not become an itinerant, but she said that was not her call; others wanted to know why she insisted on 'calling it a meeting'

¹²⁴ . II Timothy 2:12; I Corinthians 14:34; 11:5; cf. Taft, Z. *The Scripture Doctrine of Women's Preaching*, (1820), pp. 19-21; Davies, R. E., George, A. R., Rupp, E. G., eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols.; vol. iv (1988) pp.168-71.

¹²⁵ . JWL vol. v. p.257 cf. Taft, vol.1 pp.21-23

rather than saying that she was going to preach, to which she replied that it was less ostentatious, gave her more freedom and caused less offence. To those who asked why she did not become a Quaker Mary answered 'I think the Spirit of the Lord is more at work among the Methodists,... Besides, I do nothing but what Mr. Wesley approves...' ¹²⁶

After her marriage to the Revd. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire, Mary carried on with her ministry and regularly 'preached' to mixed congregations, among whom clergymen were frequently to be found. Indeed, John Wesley is said to have recorded: 'that he heard the sainted Fletcher preach an excellent sermon in the church in the morning and Mrs Fletcher a 'more excellent sermon in the schoolroom in the evening.' ¹²⁷

In 1803 Mary Fletcher wrote to Mary Taft (nee Barritt), another preacher, (see p. 128), telling her that although she was unable to travel far afield now she had her own preaching room with large congregations and

'For some years, I was often led to speak from a text, of late I feel greater approbation in what we call expounding, taking part or whole of a chapter, and speaking upon it.....I do look upon the call of women as an extra - not an ordinary call; therefore I strove, and do strive now so to act, not out of custom but only when I have a clear leading....' ¹²⁸

More early Wesleyan women preachers

Within the period of Wesley's lifetime six other Wesleyan women, in different parts of the England and Ireland are worthy of a brief mention, if only to

¹²⁶. Ibid. p.25; Burns, J. *The Life of Mrs. Fletcher* (Halifax, 1851) pp.127-28

¹²⁷. Ritson, Joseph, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (1909) p. 133

¹²⁸. Taft, vol. 1 p. 20

show the spread of Methodism and the involvement of women. They are Mary Sewell, and Sarah Mallett in East Anglia; Ann Gilbert and Elizabeth Tonkin (Collett) in Cornwall and Margaret Davidson and Alice Cambridge in Ireland.

Mary Sewell (late 1750s-1786)

In October 1781 John Wesley was in Norfolk where he was delighted to find a group of ‘female teachers’:

‘Tues, 30, October - I went to Wells...where ... Miss Franklin had opened a door, by preaching abroad, though at the peril of her life. She was followed by a young woman of the town, with whom I talked largely, and found her very sensible, and much devoted to God. From her I learnt that, till the Methodists came, they had none but female teachers in this country; and that there six of these within tenor twelve miles; all of whom were members of the Church of England.’¹²⁹

Zechariah Taft wrote that Mary Sewell was about 20 when she began her public ministry and continued to exercise it till her death, preaching, often in the open air, throughout East Anglia and Lincolnshire with great effect. He commented:

‘Her word was made "quick and powerful" to some, who are now ashamed to acknowledge that a feeble woman was the instrument of their salvation. But the day is at hand which shall declare it.’¹³⁰

It is not known exactly where Mary Sewell started to preach, but the note in Wesley’s *Journal* records that a William Lamb heard her give an exhortation at Haddiscoe around 1779 and the eminent scholar of early Methodism, Dr. Adam Clarke, on his visit to the Norwich circuit in 1784 heard her preach from Ephesians 2:8 ‘For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.’ Clarke was so much impressed that he commented that whereas he had ‘formerly been no

¹²⁹ *JWJ* vol. 6 pp.338-39 & fn.

¹³⁰ . Taft, I. p.326-8

friend to female preaching' his views had modified somewhat and now he felt that 'if God give to a holy woman, a gift of exhortation and reproof, I see no reason why it should not be used.' He also found evidence of the good Mary had done elsewhere in the circuit.¹³¹

When Yarmouth was part of the Norwich Circuit the oldest register of the Great Yarmouth Circuit (1785), recorded that among the five local preachers was 'Thurlton, Sister Mary Sewell'. Mary was a class leader at Thurlton and was named on the membership list of 1786, but not in 1787, as she had died on October 29th 1786.

Interestingly it seems that there were two female Wesleyan preachers in Norwich Circuit about the same time for the 1785-7 list of members at Loddon includes the name of Sarah Mallett.

Sarah Mallett (Mrs Boyce) (1768-1846)

Sarah Mallett was born at Loddon, Norfolk probably on 18th February 1764. Her family heard the Methodist preachers when they visited the area and became members. Sarah's uncle, William Mallitt in his account of her life, stated that Sarah went to live with him in Long Stratton on 3rd January 1780. An impressionable girl, subject to fits and visions, she soon became convinced that she should 'call people to repentance.' However, she continued to fight against 'her call' even making herself ill, but, according to Mallitt, while she was in of her seizures she 'preached' to the many people who came to hear her.¹³²,

Sarah Mallet's Call, March 1785

¹³¹. from the journal of Adam Clarke, quoted in Clarke, J.B.B. ed. *An Account of the Life of Adam Clarke*, 3 vols. (1833) vol.1 pp.215-16

¹³². *Arminian Magazine* (1788) pp.91-3, 130-33, 185-88, 192-93, 238-42

It was imprest on my mind, to speak in public for God: and those words were continually before me, *Reprove, rebuke, exhort!* Nor could I by any means drive them out of my thoughts. But I could not bear the thought, having been in time past no friend of women's preaching. I therefore resolved never to do any such thing, be the consequence what it would. From the moment it seemed as if the powers of darkness overwhelmed my soul: and I was forced to withdraw from the family, and pour out my soul before God.

Source: Arminian Magazine (1788) pp.186-87

John Wesley met her in December 1786 and convinced of her call to preach he gave her encouragement and support. He noted the encounter in his *Journal*:

'Mon.4 December - I found her in the very house to which I went, and went and talked with her at large....Some years ago it was strongly impressed upon her that she ought to call sinners to repentance. This impression she vehemently resisted, believing herself quite unqualified...She fell into a fit, and while utterly senseless, thought she was in the preaching-house in Lowestoft, where she prayed and preached for near an hour, to a numerous congregation. She then opened her eyes, and recovered her senses...In a year or two she had eighteen of these fits, in everyone of which she imagined herself to be preaching....She then cried out, 'Lord, I *will* obey Thee; I *will* call sinners to repentance.' She has done so occasionally from that time and her fits returned no more.'¹³³

So Sarah felt that she had had no option but to accept her 'preaching' as God's will and began her public ministry at the local Methodist chapel in February 1786. Zachariah Taft stated that, in Sarah's case, not only Wesley, but also the 1787 Wesleyan Conference, 'designates, authorizes, and so to speak, *ordains* her as a preacher in his connexion.'¹³⁴ This, he felt, opened the way for other females who wished to preach. Sarah herself wrote that, although some of the preachers were not happy about her preaching, she was encouraged when Wesley sent her 'a note from the Conference, by Joseph Harper', who was appointed to Norwich that year.

¹³³ . *JWJ* vol. 7 pp.226-7

¹³⁴ . Taft, vol. 1 Preface p. iv and p.84

Note to Sarah Mallett, 1787

We give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallett, and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connection (sic) so long as she preaches the Methodist doctrines, and attends to our discipline.

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical sketches of Holy Women, vol.1 p.84 cf. J. Conder Nattrass, 'Some notes from the Oldest Register of the Great Yarmouth Circuit.' Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, vol. 3 (1902) p.74

As can be imagined after such backing Sarah met less opposition from the male preachers. Most of her preaching was done in East Anglia and she described her methods thus: '[I] take a text and divide it, and speak from the different heads. For many years when we had but few chapels in this Country, I preached in the open air and in barns - and in wagons.'¹³⁵ On 15th December 1789, John Wesley wrote that he was pleased 'to hear that prejudice dies away and our preachers behave in a friendly manner' and went on to advise Sarah about the conduct of her services.

Advice to Sarah Mallett, 1789**John Wesley**

Never continue the service above an hour at once, singing, *preaching*, prayer and all. You are not to judge by your own *feelings*, but by the word of God. Never scream. Never speak above the natural pitch of your voice; it is disgusting to the hearers. It gives them pain, not pleasure. And it is destroying yourself. It is offering God murder for sacrifice.

Source: Letters of John Wesley (Telford) vol. 8 p.190

This letter shows that even if Wesley did not actually encourage women preachers, and certainly never appointed one as an itinerant, several were travelling preachers in all but name. Until very recently there seemed to be little information

¹³⁵. Taft, vol. 1 p.84

about Sarah's activities after Wesley's death, however David East has filled in many gaps and dealt with many misconceptions.¹³⁶ For example, that she gave up preaching either because she married or because of the 1803 ruling forbidding women to preach. Taft implies that she carried on preaching, but was not listed on the plan under **her** own name, but with her husband, Thomas Boyce, whom she married on 18th August 1793. Thomas, who died in 1813, was a local preacher, for 32 years. East refers to letters, especially to Mary Tooth and Martha Grigson, which show that Sarah was indeed preaching, and often far afield. Sarah died on 22nd April 1846, aged 82.

Ann Gilbert (Mrs) (c.1735-1790)

Ann Gilbert was born around 1735 in Cornwall. Although she was initially influenced by hearing the preaching of "Captain Dick" Williams, a local preacher, in 1743, she was not fully 'awakened' until 1760 when other Methodist preachers visited the Truro area of Cornwall. She found great blessing in her class meeting and became a class leader at Gwinear. In 1771 Ann went to a service in a neighbouring village, but when the preacher did not arrive she gave out a hymn and prayed, having told the congregation that 'they need not be disappointed, for the Lord was present to bless them.' Then she felt 'such a manifestation of the love and power of God, that I was *constrained* to entreat and beseech them to repent and turn to the Lord.' After this experience Ann renewed her efforts as class leader and sick visitor, then one Sunday she felt impelled to go to a class in a nearby village where the leader urged her to speak to the young people present. The effectiveness of this venture convinced Ann that she ought to continue and she 'promised the Lord, if he would give me

¹³⁶. East, David, *My Dear Sally: The Life of Sarah Mallett One of John Wesley's Preachers* (More People Called Methodists series No.6) (WMHS, 2003) passim

strength, to use it (her strength) to his glory'. This he did, giving her 'an abundance of satisfaction', by restoring her health, deepening her faith and owing her labours with conversions. Ann felt that, although her life had had its difficulties - the loss of children and other 'worldly trials and losses' - God had sustained her. She consulted John Wesley about her public preaching and he gave her his support: 'Sister do all the good you can'. Taft reported that an itinerant wrote to Mary Barritt telling her that he had heard Ann preach in the chapel at Redruth to about 1400 people and that 'she had a torrent of softening eloquence, which occasioned a general weeping through the whole congregation. And what was more astonishing she was almost blind, and had been for many years.'¹³⁷ On account of her blindness Ann had to dictate her experience, recorded in the *Arminian (Methodist) Magazine* (1795). Ann Gilbert died on 18th July 1790. One of Ann Gilbert's converts was Elizabeth Tonkin.

Elizabeth Tonkin (Mrs Collett) (1762-1820)

Elizabeth Tonkin was born at Gwinear, Cornwall on 9th May 1762 and had a religious bent, encouraged by dreams, from an early age. At the age of 16 she joined a Wesleyan Methodist class, led by Ann Gilbert. When, in 1782, she went to live with a family in Foeck Elizabeth found no Methodist society there, but the family agreed to having services in their house. At this time Elizabeth had no intention of speaking in public herself, but when the appointed preacher could not come the congregation asked Elizabeth to give out a hymn and pray, which she did, hoping that would satisfy them. However, they 'told her plainly if she did not speak to them they would not go away for the night.' So she complied and then, to her dismay,

¹³⁷. Taft, vol. 1 p.51

discovered that ‘the people of their own accord, (had) published for her again the next Sunday.’ Thus Elizabeth started her public ministry, but was encouraged when the itinerant, the Rev. Joseph Taylor, said ‘Well, Betsy, I did not open your mouth, and I will not shut it.’ Soon Elizabeth discovered that there were other villages which did not have societies and, after discussing it with ‘Captain Dick’ Williams, a local preacher, and praying together he asked her to go to Roseland. Elizabeth received many more invitations to preach, but she faced considerable opposition.

Elizabeth married Mr. Collett in December 1785 and in spite of raising 11 children, managed to continue her public ministry. The Colletts kept open house for the travelling and local preachers and, having moved to Veryan Elizabeth continued to hold meetings and preaching services to entertain the preachers despite opposition. When her husband built a chapel at St. Erme Elizabeth preached at its opening and started a class meeting there. From around 1800 Elizabeth suffered from ill-health, but struggled on to continue her ministry and look after her family. Her correspondence with Mary Fletcher (Bosanquet) and brought her much comfort. Taken seriously ill on 17th October 1824 Elizabeth died nine months later on 26th July 1825 in her sixty-fourth year.¹³⁸

Women preachers were also active in Ireland and, in particular, within this period, the stories of two, Margaret Davidson and Alice Cambridge, are interesting.

Margaret Davidson (fl. mid-late 1800s)

Margaret Davidson was the first female preacher in Ireland. She was born into a poor family and lost her sight at the age of two through small-pox. Margaret received no formal education, but was converted in 1758 under the preaching of James

¹³⁸. Taft, vol.2 pp. 115-139

Oddie. Despite considerable opposition from her family she joined the local Methodist society. On 1st May 1765 Margaret heard John Wesley preach at Newtownards and her faith was greatly strengthened when she recalled ‘after preaching he took me gently by the hand and said “Faint not, go on, and you shall see in glory.”’¹³⁹ After this Margaret began to pray and speak to her family and friends and moved to Lisburn. There were revivals in the neighbourhood which gave her opportunity to extend her work and many who attended her meetings were converted. The atmosphere of revivalism and the novelty of a female (blind) preacher resulted in an effective ministry.

Alice Cambridge (1762-1829)

Alice Cambridge was born on 1st January 1762 at Bandon, Ireland. Her father belonged to the Church of Ireland and her mother was a Presbyterian. She was affected by the preaching of William Myles, the itinerant stationed in Ireland (1777-1782), and after her mother’s death in 1780 she joined the Methodist society at Bandon. Following her conversion Alice felt the urge to pass on her faith and visited Kinsale, Cork, Limerick and Dublin praying and exhorting: ‘she sometimes preached to soldiers in barracks, with considerable effect, being introduced by the religious wives of the officers.’ She is credited with being instrumental in the revival at Charles Fort. However, in 1791 ‘many of the Methodists, including some of the preachers, pronounced her public address irregular and such as ought not to be tolerated in the Christian church.’¹⁴⁰ So in January 1791 she wrote to John Wesley

¹³⁹. Smyth, Edward. ed. *The Extraordinary Life and Christian Experience of Maragaret Davidson* (1782) p.97 cf. *JWJ* vol.5 113

¹⁴⁰. Taft, vol. I pp. 269-70; Crookshank, C.H., *History of Methodism in Ireland* (Belfast, 1885-88) 3 vols. vol. II p.400

for advice and in one of his last letters he replied, encouraging her to be circumspect, but not to keep quiet if she felt God commanded her to speak.

Letter to Alice Cambridge, January 31, 1791

Mr. Barber has the glory of God at heart; and so have his fellow labourers. Give them all honour, and obey them in all things as far as conscience permits. But it will not permit you to be silent when God commands you to speak: yet I would have you give as little offence as possible; and therefore I would advise you not to speak at any place where a preacher is speaking at the same time, lest you should draw away his hearers. Also avoid the first appearance of pride or magnifying yourself. If you want books or anything, let me know; I have your happiness much at heart.

Source: Letters of John Wesley (Telford) vol.8 p.259

This was probably John Wesley's last word on female preaching. In 1802 the Irish Conference expelled her and other women who preached from membership of the Church. However, Alice persisted in preaching, often in the open air, to the large crowds who came to hear her. So, eventually in 1811, the Conference gave in and restored her membership, although it did not remove the ban on women preachers. She continued to work as an itinerant evangelist, even paying a successful visit to Northern Ireland in 1815 and leading a revival at Nenagh in 1825. Alice was unusual in being a woman who preached to mixed congregations in Ireland at that time. Alice Cambridge died on 1st January 1829.

Conclusion

As will be noted later [p.?] John Lenton has concluded that few of the 25 women preaching within Wesleyan Methodism in 1803 actually stopped when the Conference decreed that 'in general they ought not' to preach, and that most continued until age, infirmity or death drew their ministry to a close. He goes on to state that he

found 31 women who started to preach between 1803 and the 1870s, showing that those women who felt impelled to pass on their faith were determined to do so, regardless of the entirely male Conference's edicts. Though the Conference passed a number of regulations over the next few years the women continued to ignore them. However, for whatever reason, the number of women preachers did decline as time passed.¹⁴¹

Women in Wesleyan Methodism (1803-1870): Undaunted Women Preachers:

After Wesley's death in 1791 the stance of Wesleyan Methodism towards women's preaching hardened and the 1803 Conference, held in Manchester, considered the question: 'Should women be permitted to preach among us?' and decided that they should not.

Conference Resolution on Women's preaching, 1803

We are of the opinion that, in general they ought not. 1. Because a vast majority of our people are opposed to it. 2. Because their preaching does not at all seem necessary, there being a sufficiency of Preachers, whom God has accredited, to supply all the places in our connexion with regular preaching. But if any woman among us thinks she has an extraordinary call from God to speak in public, (and we are sure it must be an *extraordinary* call that can authorise it,) we are of opinion she should, in general, address her *own sex*, and *those only*. And, upon this condition alone, should any woman be permitted to preach in any part of our connexion; and when so permitted, it should be under the following regulations: 1. They shall not preach in the Circuit where they reside, until they have obtained the approbation of the Superintendent and a Quarterly Meeting. 2. Before they go into any other Circuit to preach, they shall have a *written* invitation from the Superintendent of such Circuit, and a recommendatory note from the Superintendent of their own Circuit.

¹⁴¹. Lenton, John H. 'Labouring for the Lord': Women Preachers in Wesleyan Methodism 1802-1932. A Revisionist View' in *Beyond the Boundaries: Preaching in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Wesley Westminster Series, No.8, ed. Richard Sykes, 1998)

It is obvious from this that any woman who felt the call to preach needed to be very convinced and strong-minded to carry out that call. Inevitably there were a number of 'irregular' preachers who ignored the regulation. John Lenton, in his paper to the 1996 Conference of the Wesley Historical Society, produced evidence to show that not only the women who were already preaching before 1803 continued so to do, but that many others became preachers in different parts of the country. So female preaching in Wesleyan Methodism during the nineteenth century was by no means absent, even though 'official Methodism was trying to hide what was happening.'¹⁴²

One important female preacher was Mary Barritt (Barrett), who started preaching in her early twenties. The whole Barritt family was described as a 'remarkable one' by Edwin Thompson as a result of his study.¹⁴³ John and Mary Barritt had at least four children, John, Martha, Robert and Mary and it is Mary in whom we are particularly interested here.

Mary Barritt (Mrs Taft) (1772-1851)

Mary Barritt, born at Hay, near Colne, Lancashire in August 1772 came from a farming family. Her mother was a Wesleyan Methodist, but her father was opposed to anything religious until just before his death. Her brother, John, had become a travelling preacher. Mary was converted at an early age and became convinced that she should tell others of her faith: 'I felt much concern for the happiness my neighbours and took every opportunity of talking to, and praying with, and for them.'

¹⁴². Lenton John H., Ibid.

¹⁴³. Thompson, E. *"This Remarkable Family": The Barritts of Foulridge 1750-1850* (typescript 1981)

Very quickly she not only went to every service she could, but also ‘began to exhort the people from house to house, and...began to pray in the prayer meetings.’

Mary Barritt starts her public ministry

The first time was one Sunday evening. After several had sung and prayed, one of the class leaders called upon me to pray. I did so; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon me in an extraordinary manner, so that I entered into the spirit of my duty, not of praying merely, but of exhortation...

I continued from this time to assist in the prayer-meetings, and very frequently gave a word of exhortation from a verse of a hymn, from any providential occurrence in the neighbourhood, or from what came immediately from above, just as the Spirit of the Lord led me.

Source: Memoirs of the Life of Mrs Mary Taft, formerly Miss Barritt, written by herself. (1827) pp.19-20

In 1789/90 her superintendent minister warned Mary that unless she stopped exhorting and praying he would expel her from the society, but even though this upset her Mary felt that ‘I durst not desist’. When she was 17 her brother and sister-in-law persuaded her to go with them to the Isle of Man, where, for a year, she continued to pray and exhort. Returning home she continued to do so for the next two, but became concerned about whether she should speak in public, for she said

‘At this time I was much prejudiced against women’s speaking in the church, and was led to reason much about it, and to examine myself very closely as touching my motives, and the spirit that influenced me. I was satisfied of the purity of my intention, and soon came to the conclusion - that if good, evident and lasting good, be done, and the Lord opens my way - in his name and strength I will continue; being fully sensible that God will not set his seal to a lie.’¹⁴⁴

Although she continued to be prejudiced against women ‘preaching’, Mary still felt compelled not ‘to shun the work he had assigned me.’ A new minister, Lancelot

¹⁴⁴. *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs Mary Taft, formerly Miss Barritt, written by herself.* (1827) p.23

Harrison, came to the Colne circuit in 1792 and he was very much against women preachers, but after Mary had spoken at a love feast and following a warning from a Mr. W. Sagar that 'it is at the peril of your soul that you meddle with Mary Barritt: God is with her - fruit appearing wherever she goes.' he became her 'firm friend and advocate.'¹⁴⁵ In her memoirs, written in 1827, Mary was at pains to point out that 'it has always been a rule with me, never to go to any place to labour, without a previous invitation from the travelling preacher, as well as the friends of the circuit I visited.' On very rare occasions, when she was absolutely convinced it was 'my duty and the will of God, for me to go, that I durst not at the peril of my soul neglect going' she broke this rule.¹⁴⁶ Over the next few years Mary travelled many miles in the north of England, preaching in all sorts of places and often facing hostility, but with great effect so that many including a number of later well-known Wesleyan ministers were converted as a result of her ministry. In a letter dated 1827 Mr Stobart of Hexham told Zechariah Taft of the effect Mary's preaching had on him during her visit in 1793, convincing him of the validity of women's preaching.

Letter from Mr Stobart, Hexham to Zechariah Taft, 1827

I went on my way rejoicing. I seemed to get a new commission to preach. All doubt was removed from my Mind, As well As others, of her being called of God to call Sinner to Repentance and to be a blessing to the Saints, and ever since, I have found a pleasure in pious females speaking the Word of God.

Source: MS letter in the Methodist Archives (Special collection, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester

Mary Barritt married the Revd. Zechariah Taft, a Wesleyan minister, in 1802.

The second volume of her memoirs, which goes up to the end of 1805, makes it clear

¹⁴⁵ . Barritt, M. *Life*... pp.25-6

¹⁴⁶ . Barritt, M *Life*...Preface p. viii-ix

that she worked virtually as another itinerant alongside her husband in his circuits. So much so that Joseph Benson was reputed to have written to Taft that Conference had been ignorant that 'he was taking a female to assist him in the ministry'.¹⁴⁷ After their marriage Zechariah Taft was stationed in the Canterbury Circuit where Mary found that Wesleyan Methodism was very different from that to which she had been used and that her preaching was so regarded with askance that a letter of protest was sent to the President of Conference. John Pawson wrote to the Leaders and Stewards, saying

...if he (God) is pleased to send by a woman also, who shall say unto him "What doest thou?"...I have long thought that it is far more difficult to prove that women ought not to preach than many imagine.... I have been no great friend of women preaching among us, but when I evidently see that good is done, I dare not forbid it.... I am an old man and have been long in the work, and do most seriously believe that if you do not hinder it, God will make Mrs. T. the instrument of great good to you. Many will come to hear her everywhere who will not come to hear your preachers.'¹⁴⁸

At first Taft paid lip-service to the Conference resolution, but then he became convinced of the validity of women's preaching for its own sake and not just because of his wife's talents. He wrote several articles on the subject¹⁴⁹ and a two-volume work, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of various Holy Women*.

Mary continued her work: meeting classes, praying and preaching, until her death in 1811. Wesley Swift described her as 'the nearest approach to a woman

¹⁴⁷ .See 'A Famous Lady Preacher' by Dr. Waller and the Editor, an Article from the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1809) pp. 538-44.

¹⁴⁸ . Copy of letter from John Pawson with regard to the preaching of Mary Taft, Birstal, Oct. 25th 1802 (pamphlet in MARC)

¹⁴⁹ .. Taft. *Z. Thoughts on Female Preaching* (Dover, 1803); *The Scripture Doctrine of Women's Preaching: stated and examined by Z. Taft* (York, 1820); A reply to an article to an article inserted in *The Methodist Magazine* for April 1809 entitled 'Thoughts on Women's Preaching' extracted from Dr. James McKnight; 'Thoughts on a Proper Call to the Christian Ministry' in *The Bible Christian Magazine* (1826); MSS correspondence in the Taft Collection in MARC

itinerant minister that Wesleyan Methodism ever knew.¹⁵⁰

It is not possible to say how many 'unofficial' women local preachers there were in Wesleyan Methodism in the period after 1803, but probably the most famous was Elizabeth Evans (1776-1849) immortalised by George Eliot, as Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*.¹⁵¹

Elizabeth Evans (nee Tomlinson) (1775/6-1848/9)

Converted in 1798 Elizabeth began speaking in prayer meetings and visiting the sick and prisons, in particular supporting the condemned child killer Mary Voce in Nottingham (see p.53). Elizabeth really started to preach around 1802/3. She travelled into Derbyshire and Staffordshire on a 16 week missionary tour. However, encountering much opposition and that many doors were closed to her, she returned to Nottingham. It must have been during this preaching tour that Samuel Evans, a local preacher from Roston Common, heard Elizabeth preach at Ashbourne and their marriage in 1804 provided the opportunity for them to preach together. Now that she was no longer a female preacher on her own Elizabeth faced much less opposition! Many villages experienced conversions and societies were formed. Elizabeth and Samuel first lived at Roston, then in Derby before settling at Wirksworth in Derbyshire in 1819, where Elizabeth formed a class of four members out of which grew four more classes. The names of both Elizabeth and Samuel appeared as local preachers on the Cromford plan up to 1832. After the Arminian Methodist (or Derby Faith) secession the 1832 Wesleyan Conference discussed the matter and apparently

¹⁵⁰. Swift, Wesley F. 'The Women Itinerant Preachers of Early Methodism' in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* vol.28, part 5 p.92 (1952)

¹⁵¹. George Eliot based Dinah Morris on her Methodist aunt Mrs Samuel Evans (1819-1880)

decided that women preachers should not be encouraged. It was suggested that 'Mrs Mary Evans while allowed to take appointments should be indicated on the plan by a simple asterisk, Mrs Evans declined the proposal, and she and her husband joined the Arminian Methodists.... But subsequently, they both returned to the Church of their youth.'¹⁵²

Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism, was impressed by Elizabeth Evans, recording that 'I was much instructed by her' (21st March 1810). A little earlier he had written:

'Her voice was low and hoarse at first from having preached so much the week past and having caught several colds, but she got well into the Power. She appears to be very clear in Scripture doctrines and very ready in the Scripture. She seemed to speak fully in the Spirit, and from the very little I saw of her she seems to be as fully devoted to God as any woman I ever met with.' (25th June 1809) ¹⁵³

According to her memorial plaque in Wirksworth Elizabeth Evans died on November 9th 1849 aged 74. ¹⁵⁴

Diana Thomas (1759-1821)

In the Welsh borders we find Diana Thomas, whose diary reveals that in 1809 she was authorized by the Kington quarterly meeting and William France, her superintendent minister, to preach in the circuit. According to the diary she travelled thousands of miles and preached in places stretching from Hereford in the south to

¹⁵² . Kendall, H.B., *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (n.d. 2 vols.) vol. I p.142; Taft, vol.1 pp.145-58; Parkes, W. in *Wesley Pieces* (ed. Taylor, P. 1996)

¹⁵³ . Bourne, H. MSS (Journal), 25th June 1809; Walford, John *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the late Venerable Hugh Bourne* (1855), p.216; Kendall, op. cit. p.142-4; Wilkinson, J.T. *The Life of Hugh Bourne 1777-1852* (1952)

¹⁵⁴ For many years it was in Ebenezer Chapel, Chapel Lane, but when the building was gutted by fire the tablet was placed in the Crown Yard Heritage Centre. Samuel died on December 8th 1858, aged 81.

Machynlleth in the north, from Aberystwyth in the west to Ledbury in the east. However, in spite of this her brief obituary notice in *The Methodist Magazine* of 1821 makes no reference to her preaching.¹⁵⁵

As we have noted, after Wesley's death opinion hardened so the story of Ann Lutton of Moira, in Ireland, shows that local practice was not always in line with the official ruling.

Ann Lutton (fl 1815-)

Ann was converted around 1815 and although she only preached to her own sex, many were converted. Apparently, not only was there no opposition from the travelling preachers but she was 'encouraged to proceed'. Taft comments that 'if female labours had always been properly countenanced amongst the Wesleyan Methodists, it is likely, no other religious denomination would have produced such a number of eminently useful females;.....Miss Lutton...was not only allowed, but also exhorted to use the talent committed to her care'.¹⁵⁶

However, the 1803 Conference edict meant that women preachers in Wesleyan Methodism found it increasingly difficult to exercise their ministry officially and even though, in 1804, there was a shortage of male preachers the Conference would not sanction the use of women. The 1803 regulation remained in force for more than one hundred years, and, in fact, was not repealed until women were officially admitted to the ministry in 1972, though the 'phrase 'address only her sex'

¹⁵⁵. Parlb, William, 'Diana Thomas, of Kington, Lay Preacher in the Hereford Circuit 1759-1821', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* vol.14 (1924, Part 5) pp.110-11 cf. *The Methodist Magazine* (1821), p.859

¹⁵⁶. Taft, vol. I pp.270-1

was deleted in 1910, with an addendum restricting the women to preaching in neighbourhoods in which there was no special opposition.¹⁵⁷ This was official Wesleyan policy up to 1918. A paragraph in the report of the 1885 Wesleyan Methodist Conference, Newcastle-on-Tyne reveals the tenor of Wesleyan thinking before these changes:

'The subject of 'female preaching' came up in connection with the printing of a woman's name as a Local-preacher upon a Circuit-plan. While the Spirit of the Lord is poured forth upon his handmaidens as well as his servants, we may not close the mouths of holy women to whom the Spirit gives utterance; but to copy the example of the Society of Friends, and acknowledge the public ministry of women in precisely the same manner as that of men, is both inexpedient and unscriptural.'¹⁵⁸

So *officially and in theory* women preachers were not recognized in Wesleyan Methodism until the twentieth century, but, as has been shown by recent research, grass-root Methodism did not (and does not) always adhere strictly to the official dictats!

¹⁵⁷. *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference* (1910) pp.365-6

¹⁵⁸. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1885) p.712

Chapter10: Women preachers in the non-Wesleyan Connexions

However, things were very different in the non-Wesleyan traditions where women were widely used, both as travelling and local preachers in. Briefly, women travelling preachers were used in Primitive Methodism from the very start in 1811 until 1862 and also in the Bible Christian (founded in 1815) itinerancy until 1874. Other Bible Christian women worked in China for many more years. As with the men these women of both churches were, often just for a very short time, local preachers before becoming itinerants, and then after retirement, usually because of marriage or ill-health brought on by the strain of the work, they reverted to local preacher status and continued to work zealously. Both Primitive Methodism and the Bible Christian Connexion had as many as 26 women travelling preachers listed on the Stations at any one time - Primitive Methodism in 1834; the Bible Christians in 1826. These women represented only a very small percentage of the women who preached in the local circuits throughout the nineteenth century. In many cases their stories cannot now be traced in any detail, and apart from brief obituaries in the connexional magazines many have vanished without trace.¹⁵⁹ We shall tell here the stories of just one or two of these dedicated women preachers from the non-Wesleyan branches to show how they faced difficulties and dangers to proclaim their faith.

Primitive Methodism

There are lengthy biographies of several female itinerants in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, in particular, Mary Ball; Mary Clarissa Buck; Mary Bu(i)rks;

¹⁵⁹. a random check through the *Primitive Methodist Magazines* (hereafter *PMMag.*) for 1848-53 indicates that there are many obituaries of women and that at least 24 of these were local preachers.

¹⁵⁹. *PMMag.* (1860) pp.329-33; (1877) pp.110-14; (1837) pp.451f.; (1861) pp.200-04; 206-08; 520-23;(1866) pp.426-28;(1837) pp.95-99,139-43,176-81,216-22,258-60, 336-38

¹⁵⁹. Kendall H. B., *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, (2 vols. n.d. c.1904-6) I. pp.176-7; *PMMag.* (1881) pp. 99ff; Herod, G., *Biographical Sketches* (n.d. c.1855) pp. 305ff; [a facsimile was produced in 2002]; Wilkinson, J.T., *Hugh Bourne 1772-1852* (1952) p.101; Wilkinson, J.T., *Life of William Clowes* (1961) p.38; Walford, J., *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of ...Hugh Bourne* (1855 vol. I p.413; Ritson, J., *Romance of Primitive Methodism* (1909) p.135

Lucy Hubbard; Elizabeth Johnson; Mary Port(e)ous; Rebecca Tims; and Elizabeth Smith.¹⁶⁰ There is an extensive biography of Sarah Kirkland, who is always regarded as the first female itinerant, although, as she retired before the first Conference was held, she was never actually stationed by the Connexion¹⁶¹, and a lengthy one of Elizabeth Smith. Then there is a very short one of the last female itinerant, Elizabeth Bultitude, even though she served for the longest time (1833-1862). A detailed look at these three gives a snapshot of the work done by the Primitive Methodist female itinerants.

Sarah Kirkland: first female itinerant of Primitive Methodism (c. 1794-1880)

Sarah, daughter of Rowland and Sarah Kirkland was born on 16th May 1794 at Mercaston, Derbyshire into a Wesleyan Methodist farming family. Preaching services were held regularly in her home, until the Wesleyans withdrew from the area. However, when the Primitive Methodists arrived there the preaching services began again and, after visits by Hugh Bourne (1811) and William Clowes (1813) - the founders of Primitive Methodism, - Sarah received her first membership ticket. She was encouraged to start preaching and, following the 1814 September quarter-day, Hugh Bourne planned appointments for her. Sarah took her first service at Sutton on the Hill where a young gypsy boy was so impressed that he virtually appointed himself her publicity agent and escort. The story of Sarah Kirkland has been covered in detail by many Primitive Methodist historians from Herod, Barfoot, Kendall, Ritson down to

¹⁶⁰ .Herod, op.cit. pp.305ff; Barfoot in *PMMag.* (1881) pp.99ff; Kendall, op.cit., vol. I, pp.92,176-77,194-95,210,226-34; Ritson, op. cit. pp. 134-138; Morris, G.M. 'Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815-1932 (Ph.D. thesis, Nottingham 1967) pp.197-8; Valenze, D.M., 'Prophetic Sons and daughters: popular religion and social change in England 1790-1850 (PhD. thesis, Brandeis University 1982) pp.89-91; Weller, J.C. 'The Revival of Religion in Nottingham 1780-1850 (B.D. thesis,, Nottingham 1957) pp.103-7; Werner, J.S. 'Getting into Liberty: The background and early history of the Primitive Methodist Connexion' (Ph.D. thesis, Wisconsin, 1982) pp.207-8, 216ff, 264

more recent researchers.¹⁶² With other Primitive Methodist preachers Sarah took part in missions, including camp meetings, in Staffordshire and Derbyshire. At Christmas 1815 at the invitation of Robert Winfield, she became the first Primitive Methodist missionary to go to Nottingham, where she had considerable success. In February 1816 Sarah was 'taken out' by Hugh Bourne as an itinerant and paid two guineas (£2.40p) a quarter. The novelty of a young girl, fired with extra-ordinary missionary zeal and enthusiasm, braving countless dangers, to proclaim the saving gospel throughout Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire captured the imagination of the crowds drawn to hear the Primitive Methodist preachers. Her travels were extensive, her impact enormous, and many were converted, including people who later played an important part in the development of Primitive Methodism, for example, George Herod.¹⁶³ Sarah Kirkland worked from 1814-1818 before her marriage, on 17th August 1818 at Bingham, Nottinghamshire, aged of 24, to fellow itinerant John Harrison.

Marriage Register, Bingham, Nottinghamshire

The parish registers of Bingham contain the following entry: John Harrison (a preacher of the Primitive Methodists called Ranters) a bachelor, and Sarah Kirkland (a preacher also of the same persuasion) a spinster, both of Bingham, were married in church by banns 17th August 1818.

Source: Nottinghamshire Record Office

[N.B. Herod, *Biographical Sketches* pp.321 & 361 gives the date as 11th August 1818]

John Harrison commented: 'We were joined together not only in the bonds of wedlock but in the bonds of love.' After marrying, Sarah continued for nearly two years as a recognised itinerant preacher of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Barfoot

¹⁶² .Herod, p.320; *PMMag.* (1881) pp.227-8.

incorrectly says that this is the only instance in which a female preacher has continued as an itinerant after marriage.¹⁶⁴ Soon after they married John became seriously ill and Sarah's activities were naturally curtailed, but by early 1819 they were able to take up their work again. After serving in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire the Harrisons were appointed as missionaries to Hull where they covered an extensive area, sometimes working together, but often independently as John comments in his Journal, 'We separated, that we might be more useful, and by so doing we succeeded in opening two places each night.'¹⁶⁵ The work load sustained by the pair during these months was formidable.¹⁶⁶ However, Sarah was now coming to the end of her itinerant ministry as her husband's health finally failed in November 1819 and Herod writes 'that she entered into his work' which probably means that as well as fulfilling her own itinerant duties she undertook as many of John's as possible. After resting for a while he returned to work too soon and became ill again, Sarah over-exerted her strength in consequence and, as she was expecting a baby, they were both forced to retire though they remained in Hull until the first Conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, held there on Tuesday, 2nd May 1820, after which they went back to Mercaston, where their son, a sickly child was born. John died suddenly on Sunday, July 22nd 1821 aged 25. After Sarah had become a widow the society in Hull asked her to return, but she remained at Mercaston looking after a small dairy farm and serving as a local preacher. In February 1825 she married William Bembridge, a fellow Primitive Methodist local preacher, and refusing a request to go to Hull, they continued their local ministry as preachers and class leaders in the Belper circuit until William's death in January 1880. After taking services at Somercotes and Alfreton

¹⁶⁴. Others were Jane Holliday (nee Ayre) and her husband William who worked in 'contiguous' circuits; Jane Ansdale continued after her marriage to William Suddard(s); Mary Porteous was married before she became an itinerant and allowed to continue to travel by special dispensation; several widows itinerated and a number of travelling preachers' wives were taken on in a 'temporary capacity', presumably as hired local preachers and paid a female itinerant's stipend.

¹⁶⁵ *PMMag* (1881) p.292

¹⁶⁶. *PMMag* (1881) pp.293; 357-8; Herod, pp.368, 384,330,331

Sarah was taken ill and died at the home of Mr and Mrs Calladine at Alfreton on 4th March that same year. Sarah was buried in Mugginton churchyard beside her second husband and a memorial service was held at Mercaston Chapel.

Sarah Kirkland (Harrison; Bembridge) - local preacher

No preacheress in the Primitive Methodists' body has travelled more miles, endured more hardships, introduced the gospel into more places, or been more successful in the great work of soul saving than she. We have been astonished many times, when we have heard the length of the journeys which she has performed, in order that there might be no disappointment in the place or places where it was announced for her to preach. In the capacity of a local preacheress, she has been known to walk thirty miles to preach, after attending to the affairs of her household.

Source: G. Herod, Biographical Sketches... (1855) p.335

Although Sarah Kirkland, the first female travelling preacher, and Elizabeth, the last one, are the two most frequently mentioned by Primitive Methodist historians and other researchers they were by no means the only women who engaged in preaching in the Connexion.

Elizabeth Russell (nee Smith) (1805-1836)

Elizabeth Smith was born on 10th January 1805 in Ludlow, Shropshire. Her father, when things got too much for him, both at home and work, decamped and went to sea, where he soon died. Mrs Smith, who apparently had a violent temper, was left with six young children, of whom Elizabeth was the youngest, so things at home were very difficult. Fortunately for Elizabeth she was taken in by her grandmother, Mrs Powell, who not only brought her up to be hardworking and thrifty, but sent her to the national school on weekdays. In due course she was apprenticed to a dressmaker and later became a dresser to an actress. At the age of 16 Elizabeth went first to work in London and then to a family in Water Stratford. She was becoming increasingly concerned about her spiritual state and, after a visit home when Elizabeth met a young

Primitive Methodist woman who asked one of the Primitive Methodist itinerants to write to her, she was converted at Christmas 1825, . Unfortunately, this caused problems with the family with whom she was living and they used the excuse that her health was not good and it might affect the children to ask her to leave. Returning to Ludlow Elizabeth built up quite a good dressmaking business and, having tried several chapels, joined the Primitive Methodists. One evening when the preacher asked for someone to pray Elizabeth did very effectively. Then she ‘spoke’ at Ludlow and by August 1826 was convinced that ‘I have been called to do some work for the Lord. And I must say the Lord seems to bless me in the administration of his word...’¹⁶⁷ In September the Quarterly Meeting received a request for a missionary to go to Presteigne, Radnorshire, South Wales. Elizabeth agreed to go. She set off to walk the 30 miles, but by nightfall, having walked all day, she was lost in a common full of peat bogs. She was rescued by the family she was seeking when they heard her singing the hymn ‘Jesu, lover of my soul’

Elizabeth Smith’s Salary, 1826

“You must raise your own salary!” She asked what it was, and he (the superintendent minister) replied two guineas for the quarter. “O”, said she, “I did not know that I was to have anything.”

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1837) p.98

In spite of some opposition, the mission was a success and collections defrayed its entire cost. Several of her letters, which appear in her obituary, contain fleeting references to her work, health, state of mind and that she had been discouraged by being ‘attacked by two clergymen’ who ‘reprobated the idea of a woman being useful in the work.’¹⁶⁸ After having worked in the Ludlow and Welsh Border areas, in 1828 the Primitive Methodist Conference stationed her in the Brinkworth Circuit,

¹⁶⁷. *PMMag* (1837) p.97

¹⁶⁸. *PMMag* (1837) p.178

(Berkshire and Wiltshire) where she started work on 6th July with five male colleagues. Elizabeth seems to have been used chiefly for ‘opening’ new areas and starting new societies, which then became strong enough to build chapels.

Circuit Report on Elizabeth Smith, 1829

Her preaching talents as a female are more than ordinary; her way is perfectly open, and she has been very useful.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1837) p.179

The 1829 Conference stationed Thomas Russell to the same circuit and they worked together as colleagues, often facing considerable persecution from hostile mobs, the authorities and slanderous tales.¹⁶⁹ Russell was thrown into jail in Abingdon where Elizabeth wrote to him telling him of progress. In 1831 Elizabeth and Thomas went on an extremely successful mission to Hampshire, with Elizabeth often travelling nearly 100 miles a week, preaching eight to ten times, visiting a number of families each day as well as taking class meetings. When, in 1832, a request came from near Winchester for a female to open a mission there Elizabeth was delighted to go and her Journal entries, and also those of Russell, record the ups and downs of the mission.

Mission in Winchester and Mitcheldever, 1832

At the March Quarterly Day we fixed for Miss Smith to spend as much time as possible on the Mitcheldever and Winchester side. She opened some new places, at one of which a number of young men strung up dead rats before her face and waved them at her. But she continued with closed eyes and so got through her service. But one place failed and she blamed me for it. But I said “Being near 40 miles away on another road how could I be there?” “Yes” was the reply, “you would have gone if your heart

¹⁶⁹. Russell, T., *Autobiography of Thomas Russell* (Revised, n.d.) pp.48,55; Russell, T., *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* (1869) pp.52f., 61; *PMMag.* (1837) pp.182, 216; Church, T., *Gospel Victories...* (1851) pp.86,91

had been in it.” I then replied, “I did go...met persecution”. This ended our debate, but not our grief for that village in that wood.

Source: Russell, T., Record of Events in Primitive Methodism (1869) p.86

By May it was evident that Elizabeth’s health was failing, but she insisted on continuing to work. Then, although the Shefford Circuit wanted her to stay, Elizabeth herself and the powers-that-be felt that, because she and Russell had become engaged in August 1831, she should move so ‘that there might be no foolish surmising amongst the people.’¹⁷⁰ So in the summer she was appointed to the Darlaston Circuit, Staffordshire. She wrote that religion in the Darlaston circuit was in a poor state and the whole area was in the throes of a cholera epidemic, which was making many people turn to the chapels in Tipton, Wednesbury, Bilston and Darlaston. Having avoided the cholera, Elizabeth succumbed to scarlet fever, but, on her recovery, started taking her appointments again. She and Russell married and his account of the occasion and the aftermath is worth noting! On the Saturday after wedding Russell returned to the Shefford Circuit, while Elizabeth remained to fulfil her appointments before joining him in mid-May when they preached together. Apparently the Shefford Circuit wanted them to stay there, but the superintendent minister, John Ride, thought it would not be appropriate, so Russell was stationed at Birmingham, where they worked for two years.

Marriage, Easter 1833

As Miss Smith and I had corresponded a year and a half with the intention of marriage.... I wrote accordingly and we arranged that on my return we would fulfil this most important

¹⁷⁰. Russell, T. *Autobiography* p.99

engagement. After visiting my friends, and preaching at Middlewich and Manchester, I returned to Darlaston, where Miss Smith was attending her appointments, and I preached for her on Friday night. On Saturday I went to Birmingham. On Sunday Mr. Hayes drove me to Stratford-upon-Avon, 22 miles in his conveyance open their place of worship. We had a good day. Then we returned the same evening and next morning early, it being Easter Monday I walked nine miles to meet Miss Smith and we were married at Tipton and in the afternoon attended our Dudley lovefeast...

...I had sent Mr. Ride intelligence of my marriage and of the new preacher. All was thought to be rapid work.

Elizabeth made up our accounts... and we had eight guineas to the good; and with this sum we set off on foot for our new station. The first day we reached Childrey and had a powerfull (sic) meeting, when two souls found salvation; during the next four days we reached Birmingham. We found the Birmingham Circuit was very extensive....

Source: Russell, T., *Autobiography* p.91; *Record* p.107, 118

From Birmingham the Russells moved, in 1835, to the Prees Circuit, Shropshire, and then onto the Longton Circuit. In October 1835 their 16 month old daughter died of small-pox and on 21st November Elizabeth became unwell, but after, eight weeks, recovered, at least partially. In February she expressed a desire to visit her home town, so Thomas took her to Newcastle-under-Lyme from whence she travelled to Ludlow. Unfortunately, she became ill en-route and was taken to John Graham's (the superintendent minister) house, a letter sent to Thomas was not received, but, having heard she was ill he immediately set off, arriving too late. Elizabeth's funeral was held on 1st March 1836 with a memorial sermon being preached by Mr. Graham at Ludlow on Sunday, 10th April.

Elizabeth Bultitude: the last Primitive Methodist female itinerant (1809-1890)

Elizabeth Bultitude, born on 12th August 1809 at Harwick, Norfolk into a large and very poor Wesleyan family, received no formal education. On the death of her father, when she was 13, the family moved to Norwich where they lived at starvation level. Elizabeth was converted at a Primitive Methodist camp meeting held at Mousehold Heath on 14th May 1826, but did not become a member until 1829. It soon became evident she had an aptitude for public speaking and on 20th December 1830 she received 'a note to preach', in March 1831 was an exhorter, by June a local preacher 'on trial'. During the next four quarters she was given 45 Sunday appointments and, in June 1832, became an itinerant, working chiefly in East Anglia, though she was stationed further afield in the last few years of her ministry. In the Soham and Watton Circuit she suffered persecution and was criticized for her clothes, commenting that 'What money I had would not allow me to dress smart enough for the people' [it is important to remember that the female itinerants were only paid around £2.10s a quarter, while the single male itinerants received around £3.15s plus expenses (1819)]. On retiring to Norwich as a supernumerary in 1862 Elizabeth received an annuity of £20.0s.0d., granted by the Conference until 1890, and reflected on her long ministry.

Elizabeth Bultitude's reflections

Here ends thirty years' labour. In all the thirty years I only missed two appointments, one, when there was a flooding rain, and the other a heavy thunderstorm; and being planned out of doors, I did not think it wise to go. I have walked thousands upon thousands of miles during the thirty years. I have visited from ten to forty families in a day, and prayed with them. I have preached five or six times in the week, and three, and sometimes five times on the Sabbath.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1891) p.565

In retirement Elizabeth continued to preach regularly, attend services and class meetings. After a long, painful illness she died at home, 70 Adelaide Street, Heigham, Norwich on 14th August 1890, aged 81. Buried in the local cemetery her memorial service, conducted by the Rev. Jonathan Scott, was held in Queen's Road Chapel on 7th September.

Elizabeth Bultitude was the last of the female itinerants of Primitive Methodism and she served the longest - 28 years. As she was the only female itinerant to 'die in the work' she was the only one to have an obituary in the *Primitive Methodist Minutes of Conference*.¹⁷¹

The Bible Christians

The Bible Christian experience is very similar to that of the Primitive Methodists. Both connexions were prepared to make use of all means available to spread their message and to recognize women as equal workers with men. The 1819 *Minutes of the Bible Christian Connexion* posed the question: "What are our thoughts on women preachers?" to which the reply was given: 'We believe God can enable a woman as well as a man to speak to edification and comfort.'¹⁷²

The earliest woman preacher of the connexion, though not stationed, was **Johanna Brooks**, a Bible Christian for 43 years. In 1816, when Johanna was ejected from Morwenstow parish church for giving a public testimony, she found many of the congregation waiting outside so she spoke to them very effectively for about half an hour. William O'Bryan, founder of the Bible Christians, visited her and a society was formed. Johanna continued to preach and, in 1823, she joined O'Bryan to conduct a

¹⁷¹. *PMMins* (1891) p.10-2

¹⁷². *Minutes of the Bible Christian Connexion* (hereafter *BCMins*) (1819) pp.4-6

revival.

We shall look at some Bible Christian women itinerants to give a bird's eye view of their work - Elizabeth Dart, Mary Hewitt, Mary O'Bryan, Catherine Reed, Mary Toms and Mary Ann Werrey.

Elizabeth Dart 1792-1857): the first Bible Christian female itinerant

Elizabeth Dart was born in the parish of Marhamchurch, Cornwall on 8th April 1792. The family were farmers and, although members of the Church of England, not very religious. Elizabeth loved reading and, around 1812, deeply impressed by the writings of Hester Ann Rogers [see p.?] she became attracted to and joined the Wesleyan Methodists. In 1814, Elizabeth started speaking in public, in spite of the 1803 Wesleyan ban on female preachers we noted earlier. At first, she led in prayer and gave exhortations, but she soon began to speak publicly and met with some 'male opposition'. On 9th October 1815 Elizabeth was among the group of 22 men and women who formed the first Bible Christian Society at Shebbear. In common with other female preachers Elizabeth was, at first, hesitant to speak, but overcoming her reluctance she became, in 1816, the first Bible Christian female itinerant. Invitations came from many places for her to preach and her diary tells both of the effectiveness of her ministry and its strain - physical, mental and spiritual.

Elizabeth Dart

Sunday evening after I had been speaking, and while engaged in prayer the Lord sent his convincing spirit amongst the people...This was a day of labour to my body as well as my soul, having spoken three times before this, - walked seven and rode four miles without taking any refreshment from dinner, till one o'clock the next morning. Nothing but the love of souls could have induced me to labour and endure this.

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical Sketches of Holy Women vol.2 (Leeds, 1828) p.204

When the Bible Christians' fifth quarterly meeting on 1st January 1817, held at Alsworthy, became a love feast and a revival Elizabeth took a leading part, talking and praying with 'the penitents' throughout the night. At seven next morning they all joined in breakfast and then continued praying until two in the afternoon. About 50 people 'found peace with God...' ¹⁷³ Her travels, usually on foot, in all sorts of weather, preaching constantly, often outdoors, took its toll of her health and, by 1819, she was listed as 'to travel as her health will permit.' Despite this, Elizabeth continued and was stationed in Bristol, Monmouth, Jersey, London, as well as locally in Devon and Cornwall. Her husband to be, John Hicks Eynon, was converted through her preaching and in 1826 he became a probationary itinerant. In 1832 Eynon volunteered to go to Canada as a missionary and set off from Liverpool in October, but the ship foundered in a violent storm off the coast of Ireland, and all his possessions were stolen, so he returned to England. Elizabeth Dart and he married in March 1833 and they set off from Padstow on 1st May for Canada and, although storms again forced the ship into port, they finally set sail five days later. ¹⁷⁴ After an awful voyage the Eynons reached Quebec on 19th June 1833 and for the rest of her life as her health and circumstances permitted Elizabeth continued as an itinerant and class leader. The couple visited England in 1848, when they preached throughout Devon and Cornwall before returning to Canada where Elizabeth died in 13th January 1857 and John in 1888. ¹⁷⁵ Elizabeth Dart is an example, one of many, of women travelling preachers in both the Bible Christian and Primitive Methodist denominations who

¹⁷³. Bourne, F. W. ,op.cit. p.41

¹⁷⁴. *Bible Christian Magazine* (hereafter BCMag.) (1833) p.218

¹⁷⁵. For details of the work of Elizabeth Dart (Eynon) in Canada see Muir, Elizabeth G., *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early Nineteenth Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada* (United Church Publishing House, 1991) passim

married their male counterparts and thus continued their ministry, albeit in most cases unheralded!

It is worth noting that the first Bible Christian Conference held at Baddash, Launceston in 1819 discussed the use of female travelling preachers and their ministry was unanimously approved. By 1819 the original society, formed in 1815, had grown into a large circuit of 12 stations with 29 preachers. An analysis shows that women were serving in all but two of these stations and that out of the 29 preachers 14 were women. From these statistics it can easily be seen how great a part was played by the female travelling preachers in the early years of the movement. With young preachers, of both sexes, often working in close co-operation it was perhaps inevitable that a number would be attracted to each other. The authorities were also concerned about propriety and anxious that any preachers who wished to marry should choose 'suitable' partners, so it is not too surprising to find the *Bible Christian Minutes* of 1820 recommending marriage between male and female itinerants.

Marriage of itinerants

A.10. - We recommend that itinerant brethren, who intend to marry, to choose their partners from among our sisters, who have dedicated themselves to the service of God, by coming forward as travelling preachers and we do agree that those preachers who so marry shall be entitled to the first support from the connexion.

Source: Bible Christian Minutes (1820) pp.6-7

The Reed and Thorne families were important figures in the history of the Bible Christian denomination, with at least seven members of the Reeds, and five of the Thornes being very involved over several generations. Four of the early Reeds, including two women, Betsy and Catherine, became itinerant preachers,. Betsy

(c.1794-1877) travelled for two years (1819, 1820) before marrying John Nancekivell, a farmer, after which she continued to preach as a local preacher. Her younger sister, Catherine, played a higher-profile role in the denomination.

Catherine Reed (Mrs James Thorne) (c.1798-1875)

Catherine Reed (c.1798-1875), daughter of William and Catherine was born at Holwell Farm, near Shebbear, around 1798. In 1819, Catherine became a travelling preacher in the Shebbear Circuit and then, in 1820, she and Ann Cory, another female itinerant from a well-known Bible Christian family, joined the Kent Mission. Bible Christian work had started in Chatham when stone mason, John Hocking, from Plymouth Dock (later called Devonport) was employed in the dockyard there and showed a copy of the 1818 Bible Christian *Rules* with William O'Bryan's *Preface* to a William Clark. Clark wrote to O'Bryan asking for preachers to be sent and in February 1820 James Thorne and William Lyle were appointed to the Kent Mission. In due course the work there grew, so that when, in the summer of 1820, more preachers were needed Catherine Reed and Ann Cory were sent. Catherine's first sermon in 18th June was said by one hearer, a doctor, to be 'inspired by God', while Ann's ministry was equally successful. In 1821 Catherine was invited by a Mr Gunn to visit London. Although apprehensive Catherine felt it was her duty to go and so Sunday, 29th April found her preaching in Webb Square at 11.00 a.m.; at 3.30 p.m. in the open air in Harefields and at 6.00 p.m. in Harefields Chapel. Great crowds attended all three services and many were 'deeply affected'.¹⁷⁶ Subsequent visits drew large congregations to both women's services, initially, to a large extent, because of the novelty of hearing a female preacher. Other women travelling preachers, Susan Furze, Mary Ann Soper and Mary O'Bryan, who visited London, and women local preachers also evoked the same reaction.

¹⁷⁶. Bourne, pp.109-115

As noted earlier, the Bible Christian Conference had recommended that itinerants wishing to marry would do well to choose fellow itinerants as their wives or husbands and this is what happened to Catherine Reed and James Thorne who were married at Shoreditch on 15th September 1823.¹⁷⁷ After their marriage the Reeds worked together in London and Sheerness before returning to Devon in 1826, when Catherine gave up her itinerancy.¹⁷⁸

Some concerned Bible Christians had started a boys' school at Shebbear, which had mixed fortunes for a number of years, but in 1844 the Conference appointed James Thorne as Resident Governor and he and Catherine, who acted as Matron, moved into the school and established it on a firm basis.¹⁷⁹

**Sir Samuel Way's Tribute to James & Catherine Thorne
1891**

The dominant influence in the school at that time (1841-50) was undoubtedly the gracious and benignant personality of James Thorne. No one who had the privilege of knowing him can forget his devotion, his piety, and his zeal....Scarcely second to Mr. Thorne's influence do I place that of Mrs. Thorne. I have heard of her spoken of as severe, but her severity arose from her scorn of anything that was mean and unmanly....No one who could appreciate purity, and sincerity, and lucidity of mind could withhold from Mrs. Thorne at least esteem, and I am sure that with many old boys she still has a warm place in their hearts.

Source: F. W. Bourne, The Bible Christians: Their Origin and History (1905) p.265

Catherine died on 14th May 1875 in her late 70s.

**Rev W. B. Reed (nephew of Catherine) at the James Thorne
Centenary Conference 1895**

I do not think she was second to her husband. For strength of character, for patient but indomitable courage, for true womanly

¹⁷⁷. Bourne p.87; Shaw p.27

¹⁷⁸. Beckerlegge, Oliver A., *United Methodist Ministers and their Circuits* [1968] pp. 192, 234

¹⁷⁹. Graham, E. D., 'Non Wesleyan Methodist Secondary Educational Ventures' (lecture given at WHS Conference, Easter, 2002) p19

insight and tact, there are few who are her equals. How much the Denomination in the former part of its history was indebted to her quiet heroism will, perhaps never be known.

Source: R. Pyke, The Golden Chain (1914) p.46

Mary O'Bryan (Mrs Samuel Thorne) (1807-1883)

Mary O'Bryan, daughter of William and Catherine O'Bryan, was born at Gunwen, Luxulyan, Cornwall on 3rd April 1807. Her father was the founder of the Bible Christian Connexion and both her parents were preachers. Mary was educated first at home, then locally, before being sent to boarding school in Penzance. She was well-read and later studied French and drawing. These accomplishments helped her in her ministry, especially in the Channel Islands where she was able to preach in French. After her marriage they proved useful in her husband's printing ventures and in teaching at the school they started in Shebbear.

At Christmas 1818, aged 11, Mary first spoke to a group of people about her faith. In the following year she spent much time in prayer, but was not certain of a call to preach. However, in 1823, when she was a mere 15, circumstances forced a decision upon her.

Mary O'Bryan starts to preach, 1823

Mr O'Bryan's account of her beginning to preach was, that he had been preaching at Launceston, and weary, at the end of the sermon he asked her, as she had prayed in public, to give out a hymn and pray. She took the book, and before going on with the hymn, she began to speak. At first he felt inclined to stop her; he was soon, however, content to let her proceed, as she spoke so fluently and with such influence. Looking around on the congregation he perceived most of them in tears. Whatever others may have thought, he was deeply persuaded preaching was her duty, and he urged her to continue in the blessed work to the end of her days.

Source: S.L. Thorne, The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother. (1889) p.14

In April that year Mary went with her father to London and her diary recounts her work there - praying and preaching. There are several references to feeling 'not well' or 'so tired', so it is obvious that, especially bearing in mind her tender age, the strain was considerable. William and Mary visited Kent during May and on the 13th they walked for 30 miles from Hartlip to New Brompton, whereupon Mary wrote, (not surprisingly!), 'I was much fatigued'. Having returned to London William went back to Cornwall, leaving Mary feeling rather bereft, but she continued with a heavy preaching schedule, until she moved to Kent on 11th June. Then on the 15th she received a letter from her father telling her she was to go to Guernsey. However, five days later, another arrived to tell her that in a month's time she was to go home first for the Conference in July at Devonport. On Monday, 11th August she set sail for Guernsey, arriving on 12th. The very next day Mary was plunged into her evangelistic work and made good use of her French, though she did comment that 'the language here is very different from good French.' She was sustained in her busy life and far from home, by letters from family and friends (remember she was still only 16!). Letter writing, as well as receiving them seems to have been an important aspect of her ministry.¹⁸⁰ By October Mary was on the move again when her father ordered her to Jersey because Mary Ann Werry was determined to go to Scotland (see p. ?). So on 21st she arrived at Elizabeth Castle, St Helier, feeling very ill [the crossing between the islands is often very rough!] Again, she was quickly immersed in her work, preaching to large crowds in different parts of the island.

Mary O'Bryan at St. Peter's, 28th October 1823

We rode in a cart on chairs. The people, though entire strangers

¹⁸⁰. Thorne, S.L., *The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother* (1889) p.40

to me, are very kind. Spoke in the evening to a crowd. The room, the passage, and the room on the other side, were thronged, and two or three hundred were said to be outside. There was motion and talking; I asked for attention; after the second hymn I sat quiet for some minutes; then they said 'if we are not quiet she not preach.' I then spoke a short time. I had begun three quarters of an hour before time; and when I concluded I could not get out for the crowd. However, I got out by a side door, and unperceived by them, left.

Source: S.L. Thorne The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother (1889) p.43

She noted, on 4th December, that 'It seems they (unidentified) are going to petition the Governor to send me out of the island, because I make the people mad. If their master is stronger than mine they may'.¹⁸¹ An unexpected delight was when her father, William, suddenly arrived on 28th January 1824 and the following Tuesday, 3rd February, the Bible Christians in Jersey held their Quarterly Meeting, followed by a lovefeast, which started at 6.00 p.m. and did not finish until 10.45 p.m. - 'a good time', she commented. William O'Bryan left on 9th February and Mary returned to Guernsey on 28th March. She was back in Jersey from the 2nd May until the 12th July when she left to go to Plymouth for 1824 Conference.¹⁸²

Then, after a short break at home Mary was appointed to the Isle of Wight with William Bailey and Mary Billing, arriving at Wootton Bridge on 6th August 1824. The Isle of Wight Mission consisted of the work on the Island itself and also in Portsmouth and its environs, so, just as there had been was much travelling between the Channel Islands, this appointment was the same. Most of Mary's travels throughout the Island were on foot, though sometimes she was given a ride in a gig. It is interesting to note her occasional comments about money, especially when we

¹⁸¹. Thorne, S.L. op.cit. p.46

¹⁸². Thorne, S.L., op.cit. p.50-58

remember that the Bible Christian female itinerants were only paid £1.10s (£1.50p) per quarter.¹⁸³ So she writes that ‘a letter here for me cost 2s. 6d. (about 12½p) and ‘to go to Portsmouth it cost 1s. (5p) and so to return.’ This latter reference was to a preaching visit she and Mary Billings made to Portsmouth, where they received a warm welcome and felt encouraged enough to predict that an independent circuit would soon be formed there.

On 5th October 1824 the Quarterly Meeting was held at Rookley and Mary’s trenchant comments on it might well strike a chord with present day Methodists.

Quarterly Meeting, Rookley, I.O.W. 5th October 1824

More prosperity than expected. All demands, too, were met. Several attended from a distance. A young man called Medley spoke first in the evening, he took ‘For our Gospel came not unto you in word only,’ etc. I thought it was a pretty large undertaking for him, but he did not misconstrue the meaning of it, for he said nothing about it! He spoke half-an-hour, then Friend Salter sang a verse: a sign he was to stop. Friend Haydon gave an exhortation for about a quarter-an-hour, from, ‘What shall I render unto my God,’ etc., and, in that time, said about five times as much as the other had said. Lovefeast after, and such an (sic)one as I never saw!

Source: S.L. Thorne, The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother (1889) p.66

The weather in November and December 1824 was obviously very wet as Mary often wrote of the rains and storms faced as she walked from one appointment to another - ‘was obliged to stop (nothing new) and wash my boots and pattens (a shoe with its sole set on an iron ring to raise the wearer’s foot out of the wet) in a rivulet’, ‘storm, shattered my umbrella - broke both pattens - got wet and dirty’, ‘I got to Rookley soon enough to change my wet things ... My walk would have been about 10

¹⁸³. *BCMins* (1820) Question 9

miles at least, and by the time I had travelled a much longer worse road, through continued wetting rain, I was not a little wet or dirty.’¹⁸⁴ On 21st March 1825 Mary went home for a short visit, returning to Portsmouth to work in the Southsea area before going back to the Isle of Wight in July. On the whole Mary had recorded little opposition to her ministry, but on 10th July she described that which she faced at Whitwell when she was preaching in the open-air.

Open-air Service, Whitwell, I.O.W., 10th July 1825

Srs. Bennett, Herridge, and Attrill, accompanied me to Whitwell, also Chas. Morris and J. Salter; when we were about half-way through the place, Friend Salter stopped, and said we need go no further; he knocked at a door and borrowed a chair, the only house, they told us after, where we could have got one. I began with a degree of courage, for, as soon as I entered the place, those fears which I had felt on the road were quite gone; while I was praying, I received two eggs, without being in the least moved, only a momentary suggestion, if they break my arms I shall not be able to speak at Winstone in the evening. Then, it was suggested, if they were rotten eggs, and the sun shines fervently, you will soon faint with the smell; the thoughts did not occupy my mind a moment; I felt that He who had sent me would protect me. The eggs were not rotten. We came so unexpectedly they were not prepared. S.B. stood like a champion; M.A.’s white gown was almost covered... After I had spoken, a poor drunk man came up, and, with a stone in his hand, offered to fight J. Salter;....

Source: S.L. Thorne, The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother
(1889) pp.81-82

The 1820 Conference had laid down ‘advice’ about appearance and dress. ‘Curling the hair’; also the wearing ‘frills, chitterlings (goffered frills), lace and bunches; or the wearing gold and pearls’ were forbidden. In the Isle of Wight Mission, in 1825, it seems that some of the male preachers began to criticize their female colleagues for Mary wrote that at the recent District Meetings much time had

¹⁸⁴ .. Thorne, S.L, op. cit. pp.70-71, 72

been spent on what she considered to be trivial matters. Apparently Mary had rebuked William Gibbs, her fellow itinerant for 'his smoking so much tobacco', so were the men taking their revenge by invoking the rules of the 1820 Conference? Or more likely did they use them as an excuse for mask their jealousy about the impact the women were having?

Criticisms of the Female Itinerants**August 1825**

Our men preachers, it seems, are not above employing hours in disputing about women's bonnets, cloaks, and even the colour of their gowns, kerchiefs, etc. One stated, that with regret, he has observed a declension in humility and simplicity among the female preachers; ... One pretends that he cannot preach the gospel without declaiming against females' long hair. O that they were as much bemaddened against over-heated, unreasonable zeal, sin, and self-confidence at large! Had I been there, I must have reasoned thus, 'My mother and others have taught me, that single females have only to please the Lord., but those who are married, their husbands; now it seems the case is altered; those bachelors are endeavouring to lord it over us, tyrannically dictating even the colour of our garments; what husband could do more? And having public discussions about our very petticoats!

Source: S.L. Thorne, The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother (1889) pp.84-85

At various times Mary had received proposals of marriage from fellow preachers and others, but to no avail. Then, on 24th September 1825, William O' Bryan and Samuel Thorne arrived unexpectedly in Portsmouth, and paid a visit to the Isle of Wight, en route to London. When they returned it was quite clear that Samuel had made up his mind to marry Mary because, without so much as a 'by your leave' he booked tickets for them both on the packet steamer from Portsmouth to Plymouth. Although Mary went with them a note, written years later, in her diary that 'his passionate fondness for me induced him to push his suit at every opportunity' which 'set me in a trying situation' shows that Samuel's addresses evidently caused her some

misgivings. Her father gave his consent and they were married on 28th November 1825 at 8.00 a.m. in Stoke Church.¹⁸⁵

Mary, at 18, was now a married woman and both she and Samuel, having given up itinerating, continued to preach occasionally as local preachers in the Devonport and other circuits. Samuel, aided by Mary, became the denomination's printer, first in Devonport and then at Shebbear. In 1831 the Conference sanctioned Samuel's wish to start a school. Many scholars entered the school, which opened on Lady Day the following year, but much of the work devolved onto Mary's shoulders as not only did the pair have other interests, but Samuel was often away on business.

Mary's Life**13th January 1833**

our school began again last Monday, after a fortnight's holiday. The number of our scholars is not diminished; I am in the school continually. My husband talks of taking boarding scholars; I do not much desire it at present....Samuel is very kind, but, while he has the trouble of riding about the country, I shall have the trouble of keeping the school and attending to a plenty of other business; for, besides the printing office and binding business, we keep a stationer's and druggist's shop, and S. has just begun a circulating library; so that I have business enough to dread being left at home alone.

Source: S.L. Thorne, *The Maiden Preacher, Wife and Mother* (1889) pp.100

For the rest of her life Mary, in addition to her everyday work as wife and mother, was a class leader and a local preacher in great demand. Family trials - illness, death and fires - beset her. Mary died at Stonehouse, Plymouth on 12th November 1883 in her 77th year and she was buried at Lake, Shebbear.

Mary Toms (1795-1871)

¹⁸⁵. Thorne, S.L., op. cit. pp.93-94

Of the many other Bible Christian female itinerants brief mention again (see p. 41-42) should be made of Mary Toms, a native of Tintagel, who travelled for about five years before marrying William Warder of Brading and settling down in the Isle of Wight. As the first Bible Christian missionary there Mary Toms played leading role in establishing the Isle of Wight Mission. Fond of pretty clothes in her youth she was converted to Wesleyan Methodism after hearing one of their preachers in Plymouth. At first her family were horrified, but finally accepted the change in her. Then around 1817 she heard a Bible Christian preacher, probably William O'Bryan and became a Bible Christian. Mary started her public testimony while still working as a dressmaker and then at the 1820 Conference she was accepted as an itinerant. Having heard about the Isle of Wight Mary became convinced she should go to it, but the denomination was not at that time able to support her there, so she served in the Luxillian (1820, 1822) and Morvah (1821) circuits, but, chiefly funded by the local people, she finally sailed on Tuesday, 29th July 1823 to establish the Isle of Wight Mission.¹⁸⁶ As it was Regatta Week it was a bad time for her to arrive in West Cowes, but eventually she was taken in by a Mrs Pooke, a Wesleyan. Then on the Sunday, a wet and windy day, she went alone to East Cowes to preach in the open-air. The novelty of a young woman, standing on a borrowed chair, singing, and preaching brought people to hear her - some listened attentively, others scoffed and laughed.

At the close Mary announced that she would preach again the following week. A room was offered, but so many people wanted to hear 'the woman preacher' that once again she held an open-air service. Many were convinced, including a man who had turned up with a rope with the intention of dragging her down into the sea and

¹⁸⁶.Woolcock J., *A History of the Bible Christian Churches on the Isle of Wight* (1897) pp.17-18

a well-to-do couple who would normally never have been seen dead at a dissenting assembly, but who came out of curiosity, befriended her.

Effect of Mary Toms' preaching, East Cowes, August 1823

It was quite striking in those days to see a lady, with fine ribbons and long waving feathers, attending the preaching of, and standing by the person of a "Bryanite" evangelist, holding the books, and rendering what other help she was able.

Source: J. Woolcock, A History of the Bible Christian Churches on the Isle of Wight (1897) p.23

Soon Mary received more invitations than she could accept and so about six weeks later, two other female preachers, Catherine O'Bryan, (William O'Bryan's wife) and Eliza Jew, were sent to the Mission. To be followed in 1824 by Mary Billing and Mary O'Bryan, (William O'Bryan's daughter). Mary Toms married William Warner of Brading in the Isle of Wight. After her marriage Mary continued preaching as a local preacher. Apparently the first preaching place, before a purpose built chapel was erected, was called Warner Chapel, perhaps celebrating the work of Mary and William.¹⁸⁷

In conclusion, we note that a hearer at one of Mary's services remarked that 'the pa'son couldn't praich a bit like her.'¹⁸⁸ Mary died on 1st February 1871.

Mary Ann Werrey (fl.1820-25)

The final Bible Christian female itinerant to whom we return (see pages 42-43) is Mary Ann Werrey, who is rather a mystery. The first details of her work as a travelling preacher came when she was appointed to the Isles of Scilly, probably in 1822. Previous to that she had been stationed at St. Keverne (1820) and Truro (1821).

¹⁸⁷. Woolcock, Ibid. p.50

¹⁸⁸. Woolcock, Ibid. p.45

However, she had a strong conviction that she should go to the Scilly Isles and she must have been very forceful as the Conference agreed with her! Smuggling, with its attendant problems of a general disregard for law and order and drunkenness, was rife. Another example of her powerful personality is that apparently her work made such an impact that William Mason, a former champion wrestler, was sent to help her in the autumn of 1821 and 'the moral change in the condition of the Scillonians was soon very great, and, in less than a year, one hundred and forty person met in class, and a chapel was built on the island of St. Martin's.'¹⁸⁹

On 9th March 1823 Mary Ann Werrey sailed for Guernsey in a violent storm. She lodged with a Wesleyan Methodist local preacher and soon after her arrival crowds came to hear her preach at the 'New Ground' (Cambridge Park)¹⁹⁰. Mary Ann Werrey went to Jersey, on 20th August, where, within a few days, a dance room was offered to her. Here great crowds attended her services just as they did the open air ones. Despite occasional disturbances Mary Ann continued her work and soon a larger room was obtained and furnished.

Mary Ann Werry in Jersey

A larger room, 60 feet long by nearly 20 wide, was secured a little later; a young man who had been convinced under the word offered as much timber as would be wanted for seats, and was willing to wait for payment until the money came in; three carpenters engaged, after their days work was done, to make, free of cost, a plain pulpit, sixteen pews, and as many forms as were needed.

Source: F. W. Bourne, The Bible Christians: Their Origin and

¹⁸⁹. Bourne, p.104 cf. Deacon, Lois, *So I went my Way: William Mason and his Wife Mary 1790-1873* (1951) p.54. Mary Mason (nee) Hewett, from a Quaker family, became a Bible Christian itinerant and worked in Exeter (1825), Shebbear (1826) and Luxillian (1827) before marrying William on 22nd August 1827.

¹⁹⁰. Moore, R. D., *Methodism in the Channel Islands* (1952) p.87

Even so after such a promising start, within a few months, Mary Ann felt that she was called to leave the Channel Islands and her place was taken by the 17 year old Mary O'Bryan [see p.152-160]. A three times repeated dream, in which she had seen herself preaching in a large town to crowds of people, convinced Mary Ann that she should go to Scotland. She described her experience to a friend, a sea captain, and, as he was shortly to sail for Scotland he offered her a passage. Mary Ann, however, needed to return to Guernsey to settle her affairs there first. She eventually set sail for Northumberland on 19th November, arriving in Blyth six days later. Some members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church looked after her and encouraged her in her desire to go to Scotland. However, in order to do this Mary Ann had to obtain approval (to preach?) from the Custom House in Newcastle.¹⁹¹ Obviously, Mary Ann hoped that this would be a mere formality as Bourne says that she had already sent her 'box' on to Edinburgh.¹⁹² It seems that things did not go according to plan and Mary Ann had such a torrid time in Newcastle - lonely, hungry, nowhere to stay - that she decided to return to her friends in Blyth. Unfortunately, her health had suffered and she was taken ill. Having somewhat recovered, she went to preach at Morpeth, where she became seriously ill, but on hearing that crowds had gathered at the Town Hall she insisted on going to speak to them. She also preached in the Methodist Chapel there. It seems that once again the novelty of a female preacher was proving a draw and a number of people were converted. However, convinced yet again that the Spirit was

¹⁹¹. When, in 1830, Primitive Methodist itinerant, Mary Porteous, was stationed in the Carlisle Circuit she was worried because she had been told that it extended into Scotland, that the Scots would never accept a female preacher and also that they were very intelligent so she would find it difficult to preach to them. Cf. 'Chosen by God: the female itinerants of Early Primitive Methodism' [Graham, E. D. Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1986] p.214

¹⁹². Bourne, op. cit. p.142

calling her to move on Mary Ann travelled to Alnwick, where she was refused permission to preach in the local Methodist chapel, so she went on to Belford. Apparently Mary Ann's health was considerably impaired as she was unable to preach as often as she would have liked during the ensuing months.

Mary Ann Werry in Northumberland

She strove as she best could against increasing pain and weakness, but became satisfied at length that "she should find the North of England was the nearest way to heaven." "I rejoice, that the door has been widely opened for others... My hope is to see a church planted in this place ere I die."

Source: F. W. Bourne, The Bible Christians: Their Origin and History (1905) p144

She wrote on 8th January 1824¹⁹³ giving details of the work there and asking that she might be allowed to 'remain with the little flock'. After this Mary Ann continued to struggle with illness and William Mason, with whom she had worked in the Isles of Scilly was appointed to the Northumberland Mission in 1824 to support her, 'but he was sent too late to effect her rescue' and Bourne assumed that she died in Northumberland and never did achieve her desire to go to Scotland.¹⁹⁴ Certainly her name disappeared from the Stations in 1825, but was this really the end of her story? There are several rather tantalising hints which may add to our knowledge of her. First, R. D. Moore in *Methodism in the Channel Islands* quotes from *The Times* newspaper of 4th May 1925:

'Reprint from 4th May 1825 - 100 years ago.

¹⁹³. Court, A.W.G., 'Mary Ann Werry in the North'; Champley A.P., 'The Bible Christian Mission to Northumberland 1823-30' [NE Branch WHS Branch *Bulletin* No 5 (July 1964) pp. 60-62; No.25 (March 1976) pp.21-22; cf. Short, C.C., *Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists: The Story of the Bible Christian Mission in County Durham* (1995) pp.12-13

¹⁹⁴. Bourne p.145

‘A young lady is to preach a sermon in the Caledonian Theatre on Sabbath evening next. This is altogether a rare circumstance in Scotland and there is no cause to apprehend that she will hold forth to empty boxes. She is a Miss Werrey, 22 years of age and a native of Guernsey.

‘*Edinburgh Observer*.’¹⁹⁵

Then, according to Dr. A. W. G. Court, Mary Ann was nursed back to health by the Barwicks, with whom she stayed in Belford and when they moved to Edinburgh she went with them. He continues by quoting an account from the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* of 2nd May 1825 about ‘a young lady from Guernsey’ who preached in the Caledonian Theatre the previous evening:

Mary Ann Werry in Edinburgh, 1825

‘a young lady from Guernsey’ preached in the Caledonian Theatre the previous evening, when the crowd was so great that some of the seats in the gallery collapsed causing great panic. Many rushed for the exits, but once calm had been restored the theatre was again filled though by now it was too late for the service to take place, so the police cleared the house and ‘the lady herself took her departure...in a hackney coach.’ The writer, obviously no a friend of female preaching commented ‘We trust the public authorities will take care that no such disgraceful proceedings are again permitted to disturb the peace and sanctity of the Sabbath.’

Source: Court, A.W.G. ‘Mary Ann Werry in the North’ [NE WHS Branch *Bulletin* No.5 (July 1964) pp.6--62; Champley A. P. ‘The Bible Christian Mission to Northumberland 1823-30 [NE WHS Branch *Bulletin* No.25 (March 1976) pp.21-22- cf. Short, C.C., *Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists: The Story of the Bible Christian Mission in County Durham* (1995) pp.12-13

On 12th May the newspaper reported that the same ‘young lady from Guernsey’ had publicized her intention to preach ‘in the Free Masons’ Hall, Niddry Street, on Monday 16, Wednesday 18, Thursday 19 and Friday 20.’ Admission to this

¹⁹⁵. Moore, R. D., op. cit. p.88

service was to be by ticket only in order avoid 'a recurrence of the painful disturbance which took place' previously. There seems to be no record of these events taking place and similarly none of her death and burial.¹⁹⁶ So to the end Mary Ann Werry remains an enigma.

**Verse on Mary Ann Werry from A Song of a Century by
Rev. Lewis Court, 1915**

Her birth, her lineage - these are all unknown
And how she passed into the land of light.
She came, they say not whence; her spirit's flight
We know not: but we know the great white throne
Was in her vision, - that within the zone
Of those brief years which marked her glorious fight
She loved and served her Lord with all her might,
And bore her bitter cross without a moan.
Her life was like a golden summer glow
Between two glooms, - that all too swiftly flies;
Yet leaves a deathless glory for the race.
She was enraptured with her theme of Grace.
Men heard entranced, and turned them from their woe,
God keeps a record though his servant died.

Source: Lewis Court Bible Christian Collection [Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, University of Manchester Ref. MAW Ms 93.4] cf. Short, C.C., *Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists: The Story of the Bible Christian Mission in County Durham* (1995) pp.18-19; Mills, Joan, 'What are our thoughts on women preachers?': The female Itinerant Preachers of the Bible Christian Church. [Ms n.d.] p.66

¹⁹⁶. Court A.W.G., 'Mary Ann Werry in the North'; Champley A.P., 'The Bible Christian Mission to Northumberland 1823-30' [NE Branch WHS Branch *Bulletin* No 5 (July 1964) pp. 60-62; No.25 (March 1976) pp.21-22; cf. Short, C.C., *Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists: The Story of the Bible Christian Mission in County Durham* (1995) pp.12-13

Chapter 11: -Wives of Itinerants

Some of John Wesley's itinerants were fortunate in having very supportive wives who not only provided what home comforts they could, often managing the family budget well, given their low stipends, but were also able to help them in their ministry, by visiting, engaging in and often leading class meetings. So, here we need to note that a number of wives of travelling preachers became actively involved, with many of them exhorting and praying, yet more 'prophesying' and some actually engaging in 'preaching'. There are many memoirs of ministers' wives in the connexional magazines which bear out this role model of a loving, dedicated supportive partner. John Wesley, perhaps with his mother's example in mind, was convinced of their role and expected them to take a full part in 'spreading scriptural holiness' throughout their sphere of influence in support of their husbands. So in a number of cases ministers wives carved out a position for themselves as colleagues and partners in ministry. Some women had already played a considerable part in the spiritual life of the societies before they married itinerants and not unreasonably they continued so to do. We have already seen this in respect of **Mary Bosanquet**, who, when she married the Rev. John Fletcher, brought her previous experience of running her school community, as class leader, counsellor, visitor and 'preacher' to the marriage partnership. Equally, **Hester Ann Roe**, when she became the second wife of the Rev. James Rogers, continued her work as class leader and visitor, and indeed extended it with private counselling and her devotional writings, in conjunction with her husband's own ministry. James appreciated his wife as a wonderful helpmeet and commented that she supported him in many ways with advice and wise observations: 'I do not remember that I ever relied upon her judgment, or acted by her

advice, but I found it good.¹⁹⁷

Hester Ann Rogers

Our hearts being thus strengthened by the Lord, **we** agreed solemnly to devote **ourselves** and **our** all to him and his work.

Source: H. A. Rogers, Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers.... (1833) p.66 [emphasis is mine]

Frances Mortimer (1736-1808) had also been a class leader and visitor before she married the Rev. John Pawson in 1785. In the first station, Edinburgh, after their marriage Frances led a class and also held regular conversation meetings with women members of the society, including a band meeting with Lady Maxwell. Although Frances was rather irked by the constant moving from circuit to circuit - losing old friends, the variable quality of housing and sometimes in towns and at others in the country, - she made the best of it by throwing herself into visiting and counselling people in need. Life became rather difficult in the years immediately after Wesley's death for the Pawsons as not only did they have a large, important appointment at Liverpool, but in 1793-4 John was President of Conference (and again in 1801). During that time there were many problems for the future of Methodism, which it is not within the compass of this present survey, but which caused John Pawson much heart-searching, so that Frances wrote that 'this honour is so far from lifting me up, that I feel it humbles me at the Lord's feet.'¹⁹⁸ While her husband was so involved with connexional matters Frances did her best to give him support at home and also to continue with her own classes and counselling.

Sarah Willis (1770-after 1813) was another itinerant's wife who had been a visitor and the leader of a group of women who visited women in hospitals and prisons

¹⁹⁷.Rogers, H.A, *Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers...* (1833) pp. 210-11

¹⁹⁸ .Sutcliffe J., *The Experience of Mrs Frances Pawson*, (1813) p.90 (*Journal* July 1793)

before she met and married William Stevens (1788 or 1789). After their marriage she continued to do this in the circuits in which they travelled and also supported him by 'leading classes, exercising in public prayer, and in exhortation', when, as her husband wrote to Dr, Coke, the fact that they were being 'headed by a woman excites the attention and curiosity of the people'.¹⁹⁹ Taft says that her husband, William Stevens, suffered from asthma and she 'laboured with him in the gospel, and sometimes laboured *for* him,' when his asthma prevented him from carrying out his ministerial duties. Sarah accompanied William to his services, no doubt to keep an eye on his health, and she often gave an exhortation after he had preached the sermon. In 1800 the Stevens were at Kingswood School where Mr Stevens had been appointed the writing master. Sarah was now in her element forming classes for the children and teaching them herself, so that a number were converted. While at Kingswood Sarah was the prime mover in the establishing of a Benevolent Society, which assisted the poor people of the area.

Letter to her husband at Conference, 1803

Last Wednesday and Monday evenings, much of the power of God was felt in our meetings. C.K. was on the point of stepping into the liberty of God's people, and the other dear lads, were all athirst for the Lord. After they retired to their bed-room, they prayed and wrestled together for his blessing, and he graciously appeared a present Saviour. Six or eight professed to have found a sense of the Divine favour. As far as I can judge, the whole school has felt a Divine influence. This I know will gladden your heart; this is worth living for indeed.

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical Sketches of Holy Women vol. 1 (1825) pp.165-66

Brief mention of three other ministers' wives: **Mrs. Hainsworth (fl. late**

¹⁹⁹. Taft, vol.1 p.161

1700s/early 1800s) after her marriage 'continued to preach and exhort, as opportunities occurred' and often accompanied her husband to his appointments, speaking after he had preached. After his death she took occasional services.²⁰⁰

Mary Wiltshaw (1763-1819) sometimes took the place of her husband, assisting him with his work, particularly visiting villages in the circuit. ²⁰¹

Mrs Adam (Mary) Clarke (née Cooke) (1760-1836)

The wife of the Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke was born in Trowbridge and brought up in a strict Church of England family. Her father died when she was 14. Methodists had visited the town in 1754 and Adam Clarke, aged about 20, was sent there in 1882. Mrs Cooke offered hospitality to John Wesley and other preachers. Two of her daughters, Elizabeth and Frances, became Methodists and urged their sister Mary to go with them to the preaching house, but she declined. However, eventually she was persuaded to go to hear Adam Clarke and, despite her mother's objections, she too became a Methodist. Wesley wrote to her on 30th October 1785 urging her to 'hold fast' and 'let Him (God) take His own way' in moulding her faith.²⁰² After Elizabeth was made a class leader Mary became more actively involved and when Adam Clarke returned from the Channel Islands he and Mary became engaged. Mrs Cooke disapproved of the match, not because she disliked Adam, but out of a motherly concern for her daughter's well-being. Nevertheless, Mary and Adam were married in Trowbridge on 17th April 1788 and soon set off for the Channel Islands. In due course Mary and her mother were reconciled.

Mary was invariably appointed as a class leader in all the circuits in which

²⁰⁰. Taft, vol. 2 pp.224-7

²⁰¹. Taft, vol. 2 pp.184-193

²⁰². JWL vol. 5 p.298

Adam served. She took her duties very seriously, diligently visiting the sick or distressed. Adam Clarke was the scholar of early Methodism, with wide interests and great learning, but much credit should be given to his wife who became extremely good at fielding general calls so that his studies would not be interrupted. She also provided the necessary calm, stable, happy home environment in which he could work, as a scholar and also fulfil his duties as a busy itinerant minister. Adam died in August 1832 and Mary on 20th December 1836, aged 76.²⁰³

Wives of Non-Wesleyan Itinerants

As a number of the female travelling preachers in both Primitive Methodist and the Bible Christian Connexion married their male colleagues only very brief reference will be made to them here as many will have been covered elsewhere in this survey. The *Minutes* of both connexions, but, especially, the Bible Christian ones recommended that itinerants should marry their colleagues. Question 10 in the 1820 *Minutes of the Bible Christian Connexion* tackled the issue of itinerant marriage.

Travelling Preachers Marrying

Q.10. What about travelling preachers marrying?

A. [Allowed, but] both male and female travelling preachers to be careful in choosing partners. It is recommended that itinerant brethren who intend to marry choose their partners from among our sisters, who have dedicated themselves to the service of God, by coming forward as travelling preachers; and we do agreed that those preachers who so marry shall be entitled to the first support from the connexion.

Source: Minutes of the Bible Christian Connexion 1820 pp.6-7

The best known of the Bible Christian female itinerants who married her fellow male colleague was **Mary O'Bryan** who became Mrs Samuel Thorne on 28th November

²⁰³ Clarke, Mrs Adam (Mary), *Mrs Adam Clarke: Her Character and Correspondence* (1851) passim; *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (ed. John A. Vickers, 2000) p.69

1825 (see p.?). Others were **Mary Billing** (1. Mrs Harry Major, 2. Mrs Richard Kinsman), **Jan Bray** (Mrs William Hill), Mary Cottle (Mrs William Reed), Elizabeth Coutrice (Mrs Andrew Cory), Elizabeth Dart (Mrs John Eynon Hicks) and so one could go on.

In Primitive Methodism we also find that some of the female travelling preachers married their male colleagues. Two of the best known were **Sarah Kirkland** who married itinerant John Harrison on 17 August 1818 and then, after his death, William Bembridge, a local preacher, in February 1825, and **Elizabeth Smith** who married Thomas Russell on 8th April 1833. Others include **Jane Ansdale** (Mrs William Suddards), Martha Doncaster (Mrs John Ride), **Mary Edwards** (Mrs Sampson Turner), **Ann Goodwin** (Mrs Henry Green) and so one could go on.

A particularly interesting example is that of **Elizabeth Pope (nee Stevens)** as it shows the close relationship within the branches of Methodism. Elizabeth was born at St Ives, Cornwall on 2nd July 1786 and became a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1799 when she was 13. Then, in 1835, when she married Henry Pope, a Primitive Methodist itinerant who was stationed at Redruth in 1830 and St Ives in 1833, she joined the Primitive Methodists. Elizabeth supported her husband as class leader, visiting families and especially by Missionary collecting in all his circuits. While stationed in Banbury 1851 she had a serious fall, became lame and suffered from rheumatism. Then one²⁰⁴ evening in August she caught a chill while out visiting followed by paralysis in September and Elizabeth died on 1st November 1852, aged 66.

A trawl through the obituaries in the connexional magazines of both churches

²⁰⁴ *PMM* 1853 p,13ff.

would provide many examples of the wives of itinerants who, although often not acknowledged as preachers in the official sense, gave great support in countless ways to their husbands throughout their ministry, so that, in reality, it often became a shared ministry. Obviously, many of these obituaries and memoirs of the wives show that the women who were not or had not been travelling preachers in their own right, were, class leaders, sick visitors or local preachers thus supplementing the husbands' ministry.

Chapter 12 - Women Local Preachers

Previous mention having been made to John Lenton's research on women preachers in Wesleyan Methodism²⁰⁵ as well references earlier to women such as Sarah Mallett, Sarah Crosby, May Bosanquet, Mary Barritt, Mary Sewell, Dinah Thomas and Elizabeth Evans, plus Alice Cambridge and Ann Lutton in Ireland²⁰⁶ only a few other examples will be included here.

Ministers wives who were local preachers

It is worth noting that, apart from the women itinerants who married their male colleagues and then reverted to local preacher status there were a number of travelling preachers' wives who were also local preachers. For many of these their work was really an extension of their husbands' ministry.

Mary Hallam, (nee Hadfield), wife of Christopher Hallam, for example, 'was known throughout the northern circuits as a woman of exceptional gifts and usefulness. She frequently preached in all the circuits in which her lot was cast and with much acceptance'

Ann Hirst, (nee Howson), wife of John Hirst, when a snow storm prevented her husband from returning home to take a service, took his place. First reading a sermon and then expounding 'and revealed such surprising gifts that her name was soon placed upon the plan as a preacher ..., [she] became very popular as a "special" preacherMany in later years testified that she was the ablest woman preacher they had ever heard.... For sixty years she preached the Gospel as the Spirit gave her

²⁰⁵ . Lenton, John H. 'Labouring for the Lord' op. cit. pp. 64ff.

²⁰⁶ . see chapter 9.

utterance.²⁰⁷

Harriet Wallis, wife of itinerant George Wallis, became a Primitive Methodist at the age of 11 and ‘having a fine voice and good natural abilities, she was soon made useful...and at an early age delivered a public exhortation...’. She spoke at many meetings and, in 1834, became a local preacher on the Shefford plan.

Harriet Wallis (nee Maslin) - local preacher

She regarded her appointments as providential, and attended them punctually; and her public addresses being earnest, short, pithy, pointed, and affectionate, full of life and fervour, she was well received and extensively useful.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1853) p.265

After her marriage to George Wallis in 1837 Harriet continued to preach, and took part in prayer meetings, sick visiting, tract distribution. Also, when ‘not engaged in preaching, she was found, Sabbath after Sabbath, teaching’ in the Sunday School. It was noted that her pre-marriage experience of ‘preaching on mission ground’ meant she could identify with the experiences faced by younger preachers, encouraging and helping them. Harriet died on 9th November 1852, aged 35.²⁰⁸

Elizabeth Jackson, wife of Charles Jackson was born at Kirk Michael in the Isle of Man in 1819. Converted at 17 she became a Sunday School teacher and when there was a revival in the island she took part in prayer meetings and helping with new converts. After marrying Charles in 1844 she was a Sunday School teacher, sick visitor and class leader in all the circuits in which they served. In 1851 in the hope that ‘her native air’ might aid her failing health the District Meeting sent the Jacksons

²⁰⁷. Ritson, Joseph, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (1909) pp.154-57

²⁰⁸. *PMM* (1853) pp. 264-68

to Ramsey, but Elizabeth died on 11th December 1851.²⁰⁹

Women local preachers of Primitive Methodism

Apart from the female itinerants, Primitive Methodism made good use of any women who showed a talent for public speaking as local preachers, missionaries, evangelists, class leaders and prayer leaders. Two stories from *The Primitive Methodist Magazine* paint a picture of the devoted work of these women.

Elizabeth Elliott (1810-1825)

The story of Elizabeth Elliott is a tragically short one. Born in Bristol in 1810, Elizabeth was converted in 1824 and soon ‘made good use of the talents the Lord had given her.’ Many were converted through her efforts as she was an excellent speaker, giving short, but powerful sermons. Like many others Elizabeth faced persecution for her faith, but pressed undaunted as the writer of her obituary notes.

Elizabeth Elliott

At the beginning of her pious course she had to endure much persecution; but as her day was, so was her strength. Her will was swallowed up in doing and suffering the will of God. She was a most willing labourer for the Lord. I believe she never wilfully nor carelessly neglected an appointment. And if any other person's appointment wanted supplying, she would give all possible diligence to supply it, if in her power. In labours for souls she was abundant.

Source: *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1825) pp.409-13

When Elizabeth preached at Poathawine (Shropshire) at 2.00 p.m. on 17th April 1825 one of the local preachers present reported that she said, three times, - 'This may be the

²⁰⁹. *PMM* (1852) pp.195-98

last time I shall speak to you in this place'. On Saturday, 23rd April, just before 2.00 p.m. Elizabeth set off to walk to her Sunday appointment. She had to cross the river beyond Pant, where there was a chain fence across the river to prevent cattle from straying. The ferry-man, who should have crossed below the chain, set off above it and the force of the current drove the boat into the fence, upsetting it. Elizabeth and the ferry-man's wife were drowned. In spite of an extensive search being made throughout Saturday night and all day Sunday her body was not found until Monday evening. Elizabeth was just fifteen and three months when she died.

Elizabeth Swinton (1776-1853)

At the other side of the country in Lincolnshire, much about the same time as Elizabeth Elliott was born, another Elizabeth in her late thirties joined the Primitive Methodists. Elizabeth Swinton, born at Thurlby on 22nd April 1776, was brought up in a church-going family. When the Primitive Methodists visited Swinderby Elizabeth joined them and soon started to speak in public, both in chapels and out-of-doors. In particular she visited village fairs, often scenes of riotous and drunken behaviour.

Elizabeth Swinton and Village Fairs

She was in the habit of visiting the villages during the annual feasts, at which times not a few of the "baser sort" are gathered together for all kinds of mischief and wickedness. In the centre of a village, surrounded with scores of such characters, in different degrees of intoxication, making all sorts of noises, and missiles flying in all directions, she had stood firm and undaunted, and faced the rabble, and poured upon them, in no very measured terms, the awful truths of the Divine word. And it is a fact, that many of those characters felt the force of the truth as delivered by her, and became the fruits of her zealous labours.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1853) pp.454-6

As with the female itinerants, the appearance of a woman preacher had novelty

value and many came from curiosity to hear her, some of whom were converted. When Elizabeth died, on 17th March 1853, five months after her local preacher husband, Isaac, she was buried at St. Botolph's, Lincoln and it is a remarkable tribute to Primitive Methodism and to the work of a woman local preacher that the *Stamford Mercury* reported her funeral. A memorial stone, erected in Portland Place Primitive Methodist Chapel, Lincoln paid tribute to her work: 'She was thirty-seven years a Primitive Methodist local preacher. "She hath done what she could."

Tribute to Elizabeth Swinton from the *Stamford Mercury*

Mrs. Swinton, the Primitive Methodist preacher, who for thirty-seven years devoted a large portion of her time to the teaching of the gospel, was interred in St. Botolph's, on Sunday last. How this humble woman was beloved, is shown by the fact that 1,500 people assembled to witness the funeral.

Source: Primitive Methodist Magazine (1853) pp.456

Several points of interest, which are borne out by other Primitive Methodist obituaries, arise from these stories. First, the very young age at which many of the early women preachers started their ministry, for example Sarah Mason (16); Hannah Hardy (18); and Ellen Cooper (19). Secondly, the rapidity with which the early itinerants (true of both female and male) moved from member to local preacher to itinerant. Thirdly, it was often remarked how the novelty value of a woman preacher drew crowds to hear her. The Primitive Methodists were only too willing to exploit this novelty value if it brought people to hear the saving Gospel, so when Primitive Methodism, in its wisdom, decided to 'side-line' its women travelling preachers, women local preachers, exhorters and evangelists were still readily accepted and widely used. Many women preachers suffered persecution in a variety of forms, but as this is equally true of the men it is probable that it was Primitive Methodism itself which was under attack rather than women because of their sex.

The women local preachers whose obituaries (as noted earlier) were printed in *The Primitive Methodist Magazine* were surely just the tip of the ice-berg and there must have been many more women up and down the country working without formal recognition. Several obituaries mention that both husband and wife were local preachers, for example, **Mr and Mrs Dunn** of Tidington in the Banbury Circuit, and **Mr and Mrs Gardner** of the Brinkworth Circuit, or other members of the family such as **Mrs Eliza Beavan and her sister** in the Monmouth area; **Mary Russell and her son** in Ludlow. Quite a number, like **Sarah and William Bembridge** and **Elizabeth and Isaac Swinton** were local preachers for many years. Then there was **Hannah Hardy** of Ripley, who became a local preacher at eighteen and was 'on the plan' for forty years' till her death at the age of fifty-eight; **Jane Gardner** (Brinkworth Circuit) and **Sarah Lawley** (Prees Green Circuit) both of whom `served for twenty years.

Hired Local Preachers

Primitive Methodism had a number of local preachers who were regarded as travelling preachers by their own circuits, if not by the Conference. More properly these should be designated as hired local preachers. The difference between the two was;

'one part are removable only by agreement of the circuits one with another or by agreement of one district with another, and these are called hired local preachers; the other part are removable by the Annual Meeting and are called travelling preachers. This is all the difference between them, in all other respects they are alike.'²¹⁰

Study of local circuit records show that when a circuit identified a missionary opportunity and had the necessary money to pay for an extra preacher it would 'take out' a hired local preacher (often one available locally) for a quarter or so. This means that such preachers appear along with the salaried, regularly stationed

²¹⁰. *PMMins.* (1821) p.4 (Question 9)

preachers, but then disappear from the accounts. Female examples are **Hannah Petty** (Cheshire); **Ann Pugh** (Shropshire); **Hannah Summerlands** (Burton-on-Trent) and **Mary Thatcher** (Hampshire). One of the later well-known Primitive Methodist women local preachers was **Mary Bulmer**. Born at Wylam-on-Tyne, she commenced work as a young girl in the North of England in 1888 and conducted many missions, such as one at Tanfield, which resulted in the conversion of five young people.²¹¹ She was accredited as a local preacher in 1891. Obviously highly regarded, she acted at times as a hired local preacher, and practically as a travelling preacher. For example, in 1899, she was called upon to step into the breach in the Stanley Circuit when both the superintendent minister and the second minister died. Employed in the Chester-le-Street Circuit for three years from 1903 she was invited to stay a fourth, but on 8th August 1906 she married a Primitive Methodist itinerant, the Rev. J.E. Leuty, and they went to the Newcastle-under-Lyme Circuit. 'Before that event her name had become connexional - indeed, had gone beyond the bounds of Primitive Methodism, for in 1904 she was elected to the National Executive of the Christian Endeavour Council, and visited the great centres of the country. Her success in the circuit (Newcastle-under-Lyme)... will never be forgotten.'²¹²

Briefly, others to be noted are: **Miss Bennett** (Chester), a popular evangelist described as one of foremost woman preacher of her time. From Huxley, Cheshire she was greatly in demand in the north-west where she conducted revivals with great effect in the 1850s and 1860s. **Mary Ridley** (West Cumberland), born in Harras Moor, near Whitehaven on 18th December 1814 she was converted in 1829 becoming a local preacher two years later. She acted virtually as a travelling preacher for 15 years in the Alston area before doing evangelistic work throughout the Border counties. As she is not listed on the Primitive Methodist Stations presumably Mary

²¹¹. Patterson, W.M., *Northern Primitive Methodism* (1909) pp.221,224,275-76; *The Methodist Local Preachers' Who's Who* (1934) p.328

²¹² Ibid. pp.275-76

was regarded as a hired local preacher or evangelist.²¹³ **Selina Jackson** born at Denby, Derbyshire on 5th September 1827 (later to become Mrs Shimwell; then Mrs. Llewellyn) became a local preacher in 1846 and acted as a hired local preacher from 1847-9. Her obituary describes her as

'a woman of vigorous thought, eloquent utterance, and godly life, and in great request for special services in many of the most important circuits in the Midland counties. She laboured with great acceptability and usefulness as hired local preacher...'²¹⁴

Patricia Powell (Mrs. Mason), born at Haven, Dilwyn, Herefordshire on 25th September 1828, became a local preacher in June 1847 and preached for five months in 1850, when the travelling preacher became ill, before her own health gave way. Then she acted as a hired local preacher in 1856-7, until she had to retire through ill-health.²¹⁵ Finally mention must be made of **Jane Spoor** (Mrs Ralph Cook) born at Wickham, near Gateshead on 2nd May 1815, was converted around 1827, she became a Primitive Methodist member, an exhorter, then a hired local preacher, working with her itinerant brother Joseph, until the strain became too great. However, she continued as a local preacher and class leader, dying on 25th May 1878.²¹⁶

These examples indicate the geographical spread of women who were active in the ministry in local situations, showing that many were working energetically to spread the Gospel wherever they were.

Bible Christian Local Preachers

It is not possible to discover the numbers of female local preachers who served in the formative years of the Bible Christian denomination, but considering the

²¹³. Patterson, W.M., Ibid. pp.175,143; Graham, E. D. *Chosen by God: A list of the Female travelling Preachers of Early Primitive Methodism* (2010, 2nd edition, publ. Wesley Historical Society) pp. 73-74

²¹⁴. *PMMag.* (1888) p.242; Graham, E. D. op.cit. p.73

²¹⁵. *PMMag.* (1887) pp.177-78; Graham, E. D. op.cit. p.84

²¹⁶. *PMMag.* (1880) p.118; Graham, E. D. op.cit. pp.86-87

number of female itinerants and the value placed on their work, it is certain that any women showing a aptitude for public speaking would have been encouraged to become a local preacher, especially if circumstances and inclination precluded their becoming itinerants. So, I think, we can safely say that women filled many 'pulpits' most Sundays, as well as taking service, prayer and class meetings during the week. The first Local Preachers Meeting was held at Week Orchard in the spring of 1816 and the main criterion in those days was a strong faith and a desire and willingness to pass it on to others.

One of the people affected by Johanna Brooks' address when she was expelled from Morwenstow parish church (see p 147) was Emily Cottle. All the Cottle family were very supportive and became staunch members of the Bible Christian Connexion.

Emily Cottle (1792-1819)

Emily Cottle was born at Brexworthy, Devon on 10th June 1792. In 1803 the family moved to Youlston, near Morwenstow, Cornwall. When William O'Bryan visited the area, on 13th February 1816, he came to know the Cottle family. On 23rd March Emily became a Bible Christian - one of the first to do so, but soon the rest of the family joined her. Before very long she started to pray in public, to exhort, then finally to preach. For a little while Emily accompanied another female speaker as a volunteer in Devonshire, but in May 1818 she had 'an appointment to take a Circuit', for the first time. This was in the Michaelstow Circuit and so on 23rd she set off, with the young (probably about 11 years old) Mary O'Bryan, who was already a preacher. Her diary for that period shows that, although Emily was not regarded as an itinerant,

she travelled considerable distances taking many meetings in Cornwall and Devon. At the end of January 1819 she went to Devon to help look after her aunt and family who were suffering from a fever. Unfortunately she herself soon succumbed to the disease and was taken home where she died on 21st February 1819, aged twenty-seven.

Emily Cottle

She also filled up a useful place in the church, as a local preacher, holding meeting on Sundays and week-day evenings, always embracing every opportunity of working for God.- She has walked many miles, (when she might have rode,) to publish the glad tidings of salvation.'

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical Sketches of Holy Women vol. 1 (1825) pp.271-90

Grace Reed (1802-21)

As already noted (p. p.150) the Reed family played a prominent part in the early Bible Christian movement. Grace Reed was born at Holwell, Devon on 30th September 1802 and became a Bible Christian at the age of 13 or 14. Feeling a compelling need to tell others of salvation, she was well aware she would be severely censured for preaching, but this did not deter her from taking services and prayer meetings. A letter from Agnes Bear to Grace's sister, Catherine Reed, dated 26th February 1822, gives some indication of her talents and usefulness.

Agnes Bear to Catherine Reed about Grace Reed

Her words were *few, and seasoned with grace*; and such as ministered grace unto the hearers.....

'Her *public discourses* were generally such as suited the *congregations* which she had to address; and I believe they were delivered *in demonstration of the spirit ,and with power*. I believe she always felt the *importance* of the subject on which she spoke; and it hath been made a blessing to many souls.

From June 1820 Grace's health deteriorated and she died on 1st October 1821. After the funeral at Holwell her coffin was carried by six preachers to Lake where she was buried in Ebenezer Chapel burying ground. Her grave-stone recorded that she

'was about *five years* a Member of the Society of Arminian Bible Christians; and some time a *Local Preacher*: In which capacities she adorned her Profession, and sweetly fell asleep in Jesus, Oct. 1, 1821. Aged 19 years.'²¹⁷

Sophia Willis (fl.1820s)

In *The Arminian Magazine* (later *The Bible Christian Magazine*), of 1823 there is an interesting account of the impact made by Sophia Willis, a female local preacher, working in the London Mission with William Strongman. Entitled 'The Female Preacher' apparently it appeared in *The Pulpit*, a weekly publication, and indicates the interest shown in female preachers:

'Passing through the fields, between the City-Road and Islington, on Friday-evening, May 16th, my attention was drawn towards a number of persons collected together against the wall of the Britannia skittle-ground. I approached them, and found they were assembled around a young female, apparently about twenty two or three years of age, who was standing behind a chair, and praying very earnestly. There was another young person standing on the left side of her, most probably her sister, as they dressed nearly alike, and in the neat and simple habits of *Friends*.....

'Here I was compelled to leave the spot, to which I was, as it were, chained..... The auditory was not numerous, but it was attentive; and amongst others, I particularly noticed three countrymen with scythes on their shoulders, who seemed particularly so, I trust not without benefit. The preacher appeared very earnest; she delivered her observations without hesitation,-indeed with great fluency; with distinct enunciation, and generally, in very correct

²¹⁷. Taft, vol. 1 pp.271-90

language. I know not who she is; but it was said, she lived somewhere near the place I heard her. The dress she wore was doubtlessly assumed merely on account of its simplicity; as I conceive she could not belong to the society of Friends.

'She needs great encouragement, to undertake, and persevere in such a task; and no doubt she will have it, from Him who alone can give it her in this world of nothingness and vanity.'²¹⁸

Female local preachers in the Chatham and Weare Circuits

The second recorded meeting of the Chatham Bible Christian Circuit contains the names of Mary Malyon and Sarah Clarke as local preachers on full plan. Mary continued till 10th August 1830. Sarah married in 1826 and appears to have taken an appointment on a Primitive Methodist plan. This was obviously frowned upon as the minutes go on to say that it was agreed that if she continued so to do her name should be removed from the plan. As her name appeared until her death in 1828 she must have heeded the warning. About the same time there were three other women 'on trial', but they only served briefly.²¹⁹ Evidence from other Bible Christian circuits reveals more women working as local preachers - e.g. Weare in Somerset, where the Bible Christian Circuit Book (1822-1853) shows that in 1849/50 there were 18 local preachers (14 men, 4 women) with 15 (13 men, 2 women being recorded in the following year.²²⁰

Methodist New Connexion

There is no evidence to show that the Methodist New Connexion ever had any female itinerants so it seems unlikely that there were many *official* women local preachers and indeed the Stalybridge Methodist New Connexion Local Preachers' Meeting, 25th December 1837, resolved that 'it is the opinion of this meeting that

²¹⁸. *The Arminian (Bible Christian) Magazine* (1823) pp.281-86

²¹⁹. Minutes of the Chatham Bible Christian Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting 1822-62

²²⁰. Weare Bible Christian Circuit Book, 1822-53

female preaching is unscriptural.²²¹ Nevertheless, Taft writes of Miss Hannah Hunt, from Breaston, Derbyshire, a blind lady and a member of the Methodist New Connexion who apparently preached, - whether officially or unofficially is not certain.

Hannah Hunt

'a native of , where she chiefly resides, except when for religious purposes she visits the different churches belonging to the people with whom she is united in Christian fellowship. She is a member of the New Methodist Connexion, and has been preaching the gospel in many large towns and country villages in this kingdom, for the last twenty years. The Lord has taken away her natural sight, but he has continued her spiritual vision, so that she clearly sees the things that belong for her peace, and is likewise endued with gifts and talents to preach, to edification, exhortation, and to comfort, before any community of Christians.....

'She has been in Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, and Nottingham, preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, - endeavouring to persuade the children of men to be reconciled to God. She has preached in various respectable chapels, to the astonishment of hundreds, and it is said she has been made the honoured instrument in the conversion of the many.

Source: Z. Taft, Biographical Sketches of Holy Women vol. 2 (Leeds, 1828) pp.250-52

The Christian Ambassador, (1885), reported that Thomas Parsons in a symposium on 'The position of women in the church', commented, that 'The New Connexion and the United Methodist Free Churches permit women preaching, but to what extent we cannot say.'²²² It is not known if or how many women local preachers there may have been in the United Methodist Free Churches, but Oliver Beckerlegge says that in common with the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians the Arminian Methodists used women preachers and cites the work of Elizabeth Evans, to whom reference has

²²¹. Stalybridge Methodist New Connexion Local Preachers' Minute Book 1837

²²². Parsons, Thomas, 'The Position of Women in the Church' in *The Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador*, (3rd series) 1885 p.682

already been made. [page?] As he remarks that the Arminian Methodists 'altogether brought into the Union (1932) some 1,200 members and seventy local preachers', one wonders if some of these may have been women and also if there were women itinerants in the earlier years.²²³

In his research on the *Arminian Methodists: The Derby Faith*, Dr William Parkes refers to Hannah Fisher who had preached from the age of 16 writing that 'She preached to large and mixed congregations, often with male preachers present, and belonged to the Faith folk.' The Wesleyan Methodist Derby society welcomed women, including for a short time Elizabeth Evans, as noted earlier (p?), but the Superintendent Minister, John Davis, was very strict in enforcing the 1803 Conference ruling against women preachers. One wonders how much effect Hannah's preaching would have had if she had not succumbed to typhoid fever in November 1831 at the early age of 24.²²⁴

The non-Wesleyan denominations often benefited from the more rigid stance of Wesleyan Methodism as some women who felt called to preach, but could not exercise their ministry within it, turned to Primitive Methodism and the Bible Christians. One of these was Mary Porteous, whose biographer, John Lightfoot, states that 'in all probability, she never would have left them (the Wesleyans) had the way been opened for her to preach among themBut God's ways are not as our ways. He opened a door for her to preach among the Primitives in a sphere of labour for which she was eminently qualified.'²²⁵

Women Preachers in later years

²²³ Beckerlegge, Oliver A., *The United Methodist Free Churches: A Study in Freedom* (1957) p.27

²²⁴ . Parkes, William, *The Arminian Methodists: The Derby Faith: A Wesleyan Abberation in Pursuit of Revivalism and Holiness* (Merlin Methodist Monograph, No 3, 1995) pp. 15-17, endnotes 1 (pp.23-24) 18-22 (pp.25-26)

²²⁵ . Lightfoot John, *The Power of Faith and Prayer exemplified in the Life and Labours of Mrs Mary Porteous...* (1862) p.79

Wesleyan Methodism

There were certainly no female itinerants, as such in Wesleyan Methodism in this period, but there were women preachers, even though they are difficult to track down. Circuit plans and the 1910-1933 Wesleyan Methodist *Who's Who* provide a few clues and the *Local Preachers' Who's Who 1934* some more, though it is not always easy to determine from which of the branches the preacher originally came. John Lenton, as noted earlier, (page ?) has analysed the Wesleyan women he identified and from this asserts 'that there were, in all probability, many more women preachers in this period who are unknown or whose activities as preachers remain at the moment unproven.'²²⁶ This comment is borne out by an article in the 1897 *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, by J. W. Walker, entitled 'The place and power of woman in Methodism' which stated:

'As preachers they have not been numerous, (but)...The fact remains that women have been and are being put on our plans, and that with the happiest results.'²²⁷

He goes on to remind the women that as local preachers they had a seat on the circuit quarterly meeting, and as this gave them the right to vote on all important matters, they must accept this heavy responsibility. So Walker's comments appear to confirm that women had been, and were being, used by the Wesleyans up to the time at which he was writing, (1897) even if examples were rare.

There is little information available of the work of women local preachers in the later period to fill out the picture, but from references in the Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian magazines it is apparent that they were used in the circuits, particularly as evangelists and special preachers for anniversaries and chapel openings, throughout the nineteenth century. Again perhaps the novelty factor was

²²⁶. Lenton, op.cit. pp 68-9

²²⁷. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (hereafter *WMMag* (1897) pp.174-6

evident here - it would be important to have a large congregation on such occasions and who knows what good might be done to those who came chiefly through curiosity.

The whole question of women preaching was never very far from the minds of church authorities, especially as the Methodist connexions became more settled and respectable and therefore felt that they should become more conformist, which usually meant toning down more extreme elements, such as fervent evangelism and female preaching. So *The Christian Ambassador*, had a number of articles on the subject, usually dealing with women in the itinerancy, but much of the comment is relevant to all types of female preaching. In particular in 1885 there was the report of a symposium consisting of six papers on 'The position of women in the church'. Most of the contributors, who were all ministers, are rather ambivalent - they do not wholeheartedly approve of women preaching, but, on the other hand, they are not prepared to go so far as to deny the right of some women to preach. The most positive attitude was that of Thomas Parsons, (already quoted above) who submitted the fifth paper in which he stated that, he agreed with the Wesleyans that women might be used 'but (they) make the conditions for admission into their pulpits so stringent that only women of unquestionable piety and talent can expect to occupy that position'. Parson's own view was that 'Female preaching will never be other than incidental, accessory, unreliable.' Then he went on to urge that female candidates for the plan should be examined as the men were and that they should be under 'circuit control' and not have a 'roving commission'. Parsons had alluded in his paper to the abuse of female preaching, so maybe this is a reference to the fact that when women ceased to be stationed as itinerants in Primitive Methodism many continued to act as evangelists, taking special services and missions, no doubt providing a novelty attraction, which was resented by some of the men whose congregations were lured away by the women preachers.²²⁸

²²⁸ Parsons, Thomas, 'The Position of Women in the Church' in *The Primitive Methodist Quarterly*

Very often only the surname or initials of local preachers are given on circuit plans and records so it cannot be determined who, if any, are women. Several women are listed as 'Auxiliaries' which may or may not be significant. An analysis of the plans of the Shefford Primitive Methodist Circuit (Andover Branch) for 18th January 1835 – 10th January 1836, which contain the name of 'Jane Farr' - presumably written in full to distinguish her from 'J. Farr, snr.' (her father?), is of interest: in the first quarter Jane had fifteen appointments on eight of the twelve Sundays and also was one of the speakers at a missionary meeting on 1st March at 2.00 pm; in the second quarter Jane took thirteen services on six out of the twelve Sundays; in the third quarter she had twenty on ten Sundays out of the thirteen and on the fourth fourteen on ten out of fourteen. In addition, she took a service at Faccombe on Wednesday, 9th December, so her work load was considerable and certainly equal to the appointments taken by the preachers listed on the plan above and below her.

Full names were given on the 1835 (July 20 - October 12) plan of the Bolton Primitive Methodist Circuit. Ann Noble was one of the four travelling preachers, and among the 33 local preachers 2 are women taking 16 appointments between them. In addition, 6 men and 1 woman who took 5 appointments were listed as being 'on trial'.

Statistics of women local preachers in the various branches of Methodism are not easy to find but it seems that in London in 1896 there were only 11 women out of 432 local preachers.²²⁹

Twentieth Century Developments

Significant recognition of women local preachers after the 1910 resolution, which had deleted the 1803 phrase 'address only her sex,' came in 1918 when the *Wesleyan Methodist Minutes* stated:

Review and Christian Ambassador (3rd series) 1885 p.682

²²⁹ Rawlings, E.C., *London Directory for the Primitive Methodists* (1896) pp. 23-37

'Women Local Preachers. - The Conference declares that women are eligible to become fully accredited Local Preachers on the same conditions and shall hereafter enjoy the same rights and privileges as men who are Local Preachers.²³⁰

The following year there was a further development:

'Wesley Deaconesses and Women Preachers: - The Conference authorises Local Preachers' Meetings, in the case of Wesley Deaconesses and other women who have already been preaching under the sanction of the Regulations of Conference of 1910, to receive them upon full plan without further examination.²³¹

The non-Wesleyan connexions did not break down their local preachers' statistics by sex, and neither did Wesleyan Methodism until 1927 when the numbers of women are given as 'Women Fully Accredited 442; Women on Trial 68; Women Received on Full Plan 43'. The fully accredited numbers for the following years were: 1928 - 475; 1929 - 523; 1930 - 561; 1931- 598 and 1932 - 642.²³² In the first returns after Union, those of 1933, there were 1,422 women in the Methodist Church who were fully accredited; (110 placed on full plan that year) with 208 on trial.²³³ These figures seem to imply that at Union 780 women came into the Methodist Church from the non-Wesleyan traditions, although it is necessary to take into account those who would have become Wesleyan local preachers anyway (an average of 40 over the previous 5 years) and those who died or left.

Returning to the Wesleyan Methodist statistics the schedule for 1928 not only gives the total for the whole connexion, but also for each district. Sample percentages of women preachers by district are South Wales (7.36%); London First (4.2%); Devonport and Plymouth (3.59%); Halifax and Bradford (3.43%). Then at

²³⁰. *WM.Mins.* (1918) p.85

²³¹ Ibid. (1919) p.271

²³². Ibid. (1928) (gives 1927 numbers) pp.388-89; (1929) pp.404-05; (1930) pp.390-92; (1931) pp.386-87; (1932) pp.250-51

²³³ *Minutes* (1933) pp.450-51

the bottom of the list come Manchester (1.55%); Portsmouth (1.53%); First North Wales (1.32%); Second North Wales (1.08%) and Isle of Man (0.60%).²³⁴ Looking at the 1932 totals for Wesleyan Methodism there were 18,785 local preachers, 642 (3.42%) of these being women, while for Methodism as a whole in 1933 the figures were 34,948 with 1,422 (4.1%) women.²³⁵ Studying these district statistics and selecting Districts which most nearly equate with each other, especially for those areas where non-Wesleyan traditions were strongest, it is found that there were increases in Scotland of 3.61%; Carlisle 2.92%; Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1.2%; East Anglia 1.1%; Lincoln and Grimsby 0.77%, and Stoke-on-Trent 0.69%; (Hull had a decrease of 0.57%). These increases must indicate the greater relative numbers of women local preachers in the non-Wesleyan branches.

According to *The Methodist Local Preachers' Who's Who, 1934* there were 106 women who were 'Fully Accredited' before 1910. Unfortunately it is not possible, in most cases, to tell from which branch of Methodism they came. Altogether there are 739 women listed in the survey, but few indicate their former connexion and so it is impossible to state categorically that at Union there were more women in one branch than another. However, of the 44 preachers' who were ministers' wives or widows 19 or 43.2% were Wesleyan and 25 or 56.8% were Primitive Methodists, but there were none from the United Methodist Church. No firm conclusion can be drawn from this small sample. 67 women were or had been deaconesses or missionaries.²³⁶ Statistics of Local Preachers continued to be published in full until the late 1960s.

²³⁴ *Minutes* (1928) pp. 388-89

²³⁵ . *Ibid.* (1932) pp.250-1; *Minutes* (1933) pp.450-1

²³⁶ *The Methodist Local Preachers' Who's Who 1934* passim

It is interesting to note that the Local Preachers' Meeting of the Jersey French Circuit reported on 10th May 1923:

we have the happy satisfaction of welcoming Miss Susan Renouf after oral examination and trial sermon as the first lady local preacher in the Channel Islands.²³⁷

and the Circuit plan of the same circuit in 1938 has the name of Miss Enid Le Feuvre, who was accredited in 1931 and another women is listed under 'D'Autres Aides'.

Out of a dozen randomly selected 1994 plans, representing different parts of the British Isles four have 50% or more women local preachers; six have 25% or over and the other two around 20%. Looking at the number of women 'Fully Accredited' since 1970 all but two of the circuits show that 50% or more women became local preachers after that date. Does this indicate a wider acceptance of women? Is there perhaps a link between women becoming local preachers and going on to enter the full-time presbyteral or diaconal ministry? There is room for further research here.

Women feature on the Bristol Road, (Birmingham), Wesleyan Methodist Circuit Plan from 1937 and continued to play an increasing part, especially during the war years. In the 1990s women comprised around half of the numbers. Mrs. Mary Worrall. 'Fully Accredited' in 1930 was the oldest local preacher at that time and she commented that

I thought God was calling me to be a missionary ...The circuit was very dependent on local preachers ... I was put 'on note' and helped with services under the guidance of another local preacher. A close friend was accepted at the same time. I can only remember one other woman preacher... I don't remember any suggestion that we should not become local

²³⁷ Minutes of the Jersey (French) Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting, 10th May 1923

preachers because we were women, it never entered my head and we were welcomed wherever we went... I normally cycled, but sometimes borrowed my father's motor cycle.

I can't remember having any training apart from the services 'on note'. In those days there did not seem to be any organised training and no written examinations, but I did take one or two Methodist correspondence courses. And eventually after two years, I had to preach a trial sermon and answer questions at the L.P. meeting before being put onto 'full plan' in 1930.

Over the next thirty years Mrs. Worrall preached in many parts of the country and was readily welcomed by all the circuits and churches. Then in 1961 she and her husband moved to Northern Ireland where she found a very different situation:

Most churches in Belfast had their own minister and there was little call on Local Preachers. But each church had an annual Methodist Womens' Association service for which they wanted a woman preacher! As a result I preached in almost every Methodist Church in Northern Ireland, and also was invited twice to the Cork District, three times to Dublin, also to Donegal, Sligo and two or three churches in the centre of Ireland.²³⁸

On a final personal note I became a Fully Accredited Local Preacher in 1954, one of a family whose members can now count over 400 years local preaching between them and from 1955-1960 in Scotland I encountered much the same situation as Mrs. Worrall did where a woman preacher was rather a novelty and so not only did I preach throughout the Wishaw and Motherwell Circuit but also in most of the Church of Scotland and Baptist churches in the Burgh! Finally, I officially 'retired' in 2017!

Conclusion

It seems that from the early struggles to gain acceptance women local

²³⁸. Memories of Mrs Mary Worrall, February 1994

preachers are now equally used alongside their male colleagues and in many circuits equal numerically too. So we can all honour the endeavours of the early women preachers and pay tribute to the countless faithful women who have sought through the years to proclaim the Gospel.

Chapter 13: Specialist Organizations

There were, and are, a number of specialist organizations worthy of mention. Most of these have been covered by individual research and publication, so here brief reference is simply made to them and the reader directed further for fuller information.

Joyful News Mission

The Rev. Thomas Champness (1832-1905) Wesleyan Methodist minister and evangelist, who had served as a missionary in West Africa (1857-64), was appointed as Newcastle District Missionary in 1879 and moved to the Bolton District in 1882. Here, at the request of the President of Conference, the Rev. Charles Garrett, himself an evangelist, he started the *Joyful News* paper, 22nd February 1883.²³⁹ The *Joyful News* became a success and soon Champness and his wife decided to take two young men into their home to train them as lay evangelists. This experiment also succeeded and when Champness went to Rochdale in 1886 he continued his work. In 1889, as his household became larger, they all moved to Castleton Hall and he was released from the itinerancy in order to further the Joyful News Mission. As time went on he concentrated on the training of local preachers who would then go back to work in their circuits. In 1903 Champness retired, and as the lease on Castleton Hall was due to expire, the Church bought Cliff College, Calver, Derbyshire, so that his work might continue.²⁴⁰

The Rev Amos Cresswell recounts the history of Cliff College in his book, by outlining the beginnings of evangelistic training by Henry Gratton Guinness, first in London and later at Calver and the acquisition of Cliff by the Home Mission

²³⁹ After 80 years the last issue of the paper was in 1963.

²⁴⁰ Cresswell, Amos, S., *The Story of Cliff* (1983, Joyful News Book Room) pp.5-11

Department for missionary and lay-training. Creswell then surveys the incumbency of the Principals who served at Cliff College, Thomas Cook (1903-13), Samuel Chadwick (1913-32), John A. Broadbelt (1932-48), J. Edward Eagles (1948-57), Thomas D. Meadley (1957-65), Howard A. G. Belben (1965-1977) and A. Skevington Wood (1977-1983). During Belben's first year as Principal women were admitted to Cliff College and the first woman member of staff was appointed in 1968.

However, women had been trained as evangelists much earlier than this. George Clegg, a Wesleyan Methodist industrialist was a pioneer in this field. In 1887 he established a female evangelists' home in Halifax, his home town, as a branch of the Joyful News Mission. In 1890 the Connexional Evangelical Secretary of the United Methodist Free Churches, the Rev Alfred Jones, and the Rev Henry Thomas Chapman, minister of Lady Lane Mission, Leeds visited the Home for Female Evangelists and Chapman wrote to *The Free Methodist* newspaper. He described it as very much a 'home', with the house work done by the young ladies in training and presided over by a lady matron. The students rose early, and after 'putting the bedroom in order', engaged in reading and prayer before breakfasting at 7.45 a.m. From 10.00-12.30 they went out visiting. After dinner out they would go again for about two to two and a half hours, then back for tea. In the evening some would hold open air evangelist services, while others conducted meetings in the school chapel, which had been opened in 1889, or in a mission centre. New students were sent out in pairs. Their studies were supervised by the circuit ministers and the women went out into the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion at the request of Circuits and Superintendent ministers. Not only did the female evangelists take two out of three Sunday evening services, but also class and other weekday meetings. Apparently in response to

questions, Clegg replied that the women who offered themselves were ‘intelligent, well-brought up, capable and godly’, and, after some initial reservations, many superintendents were now enthusiastic about using them. Clegg reckoned that it cost around £250, mainly funded by Clegg himself, to train the evangelists.²⁴¹ It is obvious that the United Methodist Free Church ministers were very impressed and hoped to start something similar for their own church. This eventually happened, when the Rev T. J. Cope moved from Yorkshire to become superintendent minister of the London VII Circuit, with its main church in Pimlico. Pimlico was an area with many social problems which Cope was anxious to address. He realized that a programme of intensive visiting was required and, having been impressed by the work of the sisters of the West London Mission and the Wesley Deaconesses, he sought to set up a deaconess training institute for the United Methodist Free Churches.²⁴²

The Deaconess Orders [

The United Methodist Free Church/The United Methodist Church

The vision and enterprise of George Clegg resulted in the foundation of the United Methodist Free Church Deaconess Institute while the realization by the Rev Thomas Bowman Stephenson that the Wesleyan Methodist Church needed dedicated trained women, especially to work with women and children, led to his founding the Wesley Deaconess Order. As the stories of these institutions have been covered in detail in my 2002 book, *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1978* only a brief mention of them will be given in the present work.²⁴³

²⁴¹ *The Free Methodist* June 26, 1890 p.7

²⁴² . see *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1978* (Graham, E .D., 2002), chapter 9.

²⁴³ See also Graham, E. D. *Ministering Sisters: A Directory of the members of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1988 and their Appointments* (2014)

The United Methodist Free Church Deaconess Institute was set up in 1891. Its main emphases were evangelism, district visiting and sick nursing. Many of the women had special evangelistic gifts and used them effectively to engage in missions. These missions served two purposes – fostering the spiritual welfare of the local people and engendering income from the collections. The missions were backed up with permanent organizations in the churches, particularly ones for young people.

As neither the Methodist New Connexion or the Bible Christians had deaconess institutions when they and the United Methodist Free Church came together in 1907 to form the United Methodist Church it was felt that the Union would provide increased opportunities. District visiting was a very important side of the deaconesses' work as they went into factories, and markets as well as holding class meeting and special projects for girls and children. They strove to alleviate poverty both in towns and in the countryside; to act as character witnesses in court appearances; to oppose licensing applications in their stand against intemperance. In an article on 17th April 1924 the Warden commented that

The sisters are fulfilling a big place in the life of our churches. They visit the sick and poor, they befriend the young, they teach in the schools, they work among women, and by their sympathetic help brighten the lives of others and win many for the Saviour, while some of them are working bravely in down-town churches.²⁴⁴

Wesley Deaconess Order

The Rev. Thomas Bowman Stephenson, having started the Children's Home in 1869, followed this up with the formation of the Wesley Deaconess Order. The first Deaconess house was opened in July 1890 in London, moving in 1902 to Ilkley in Yorkshire where training continued until 1968 when it relocated to Birmingham. After several property moves and much restructuring in 1996 it became the Methodist

²⁴⁴ . MSS Cuttings Book (Gair) April 17, 1924

Diaconal Order open to both women and men. More recent changes have led to the Order's headquarters being based in Church House, Marylebone, London.

As details of the work of the Wesley Deaconesses is given with examples in *Saved to Serve* here reference is made merely to the types of work in which they engaged. The 1902-1903 report to the Wesleyan Methodist Conference highlighted the importance of making full use of women's talents rather than ignoring them.

Report to the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1902-3

'The Work of the Deaconess is very varied. She may be a *Church Deaconess*, aiding in the Pastoral work of a great congregation. She may be a *Mission Deaconess*, taking part in the manifold activities of a Central or other Mission. She may be a *Deaconess-Evangelist*, mainly devoted to Special Services. She may be a *Deaconess-Nurse*, bringing to her work, not only skill, but the character and influence of a devoted Christian woman. She may be a *Deaconess-Teacher*, carrying on School Work in neighbourhoods, where Schools cannot be established on the ordinary commercial principles, but where they are greatly needed to counteract Romish and "High Church" influence. She may be a *Slum Deaconess*, caring for the very lowest; or she may be the *trusted friend*, and, humanly speaking, the saviour of women who are lost in the midst of wealth and fashion. She may be engaged in *Rescue* work for women or for the prisoner, working at the prison-gate, or within the prison. And lastly she may be a *Foreign Missionary Deaconess*, carrying out all the above ideas, amid the special circumstances of Christian work in heathen lands. Several of these departments are already being wrought by the Order; others have yet to be undertaken.'

Source: Wesley Deaconess Institute Minute Book 1895-1910
(between pp.157 and 158)

This extract shows that the variety of work in which the deaconesses were already engaged or in which they could serve was extensive.

Church Deaconess

As with the United Methodist Free Church deaconesses district visiting; taking meetings and providing practical activities, such as cookery and nursing

courses as well as social games played a great part in the deaconess's life. Much work with families arose through intemperance and poverty so concern for the needy was paramount, not only to give financial support, but more particularly, to protect women and children. Often their care brought about in an improvement in the family's situation.

Mission Deaconess

Sisters in mission situations found that much time and effort was spent in district visiting, sick nursing, dispensing medical advice and basic remedies. Creches were established to help working mothers with child care and savings banks to assist with financial matters. Sometimes mission bands went out into the open air to meet people and conduct services while efforts to get women and girls off the streets, involved starting Girls' Guilds in evenings where practical cookery, and nursing demonstrations alternated with dressmaking and doll dressing competitions and social games. As with the church based deaconesses the mission sisters found that drunkenness had much impact on family life - unemployment, poverty, cruelty, destitution - and quite often the deaconesses themselves faced danger in order to protect the women and children from drunken fathers or to rescue children from women who had fallen prey to the bottle. Although the deaconesses' work was chiefly with the women and children in a number of cases the changes in them rubbed off on the men and so the whole family benefited. Elise Searle, sister in charge of the Norwich branch house, who was elected to the Board of Guardians carried out her Christian service in a new way. She described the Board Meetings as like 'miniature House of Commons' where she sat as an Independent. She visited the workhouse and was able to institute various changes for the inmates such as an adequate supply of

towels, brushes and combs and better meals.

The Deaconess Evangelists of Wesleyan Methodism

The role of the Deaconess Evangelist was a rather specialised one and particularly interesting as officially Wesleyan Methodism did not approve of women preaching, though undoubtedly women did preach. The 1803 Conference regulation to this effect was still in force and it was only in 1918 that equal official recognition with men given to women local preachers and the next year to Deaconesses.²⁴⁵

In 1891 the Rev. Samuel Wilkes, the minister of the Hackney Road Mission, reported that one of the two the Mission deaconesses was given 'opportunity for public addresses and exposition of God's work, by which many have been blessed.' The same year Sister Freer wrote that, in her eight months work at Hackney Road Wesleyan Chapel, she had spoken at 'our Band of Hope Meeting and religious gatherings. I have also occasionally conducted services in the chapel, and upon these efforts God's power and blessing have rested.' Later when she went to Norwich to do evangelistic work in the villages, the minister, the Rev. George Graves, wrote:

'Sister Freer... Her work is chiefly evangelistic; in this respect differing from that of the majority of the Sisters. We do not expect, or even desire, that every Sister shall be able to speak in public. This is a great gift; but there are many forms of useful work in which the Sisters may be happily engaged that have not that special power. None the less we are thankful when God gives us consecrated women who can speak with power and persuasiveness to the people.'²⁴⁶

It seems that from 1893 some Deaconesses were used in more organized evangelistic work, for that year *Highways and Hedges* notes that:

'It is hoped that during next year one or two of our Sisters, whom God has greatly blessed in addressing meetings of an evangelistic

²⁴⁵. chapter 12 and footnotes

²⁴⁶. *HH* ((Jan.1892) p.13, (Dec.1892) p.234

character, and for the enriching of the spiritual life, may be able to hold Missions here and there....Such Missions we have found from experiment to have been greatly blest; they seem likely to leave more permanent results than those in which a great disturbance is necessarily made in the ordinary work of the Church.²⁴⁷

The time Sister Alice Hull spent in Bristol, for example, included 'soul-probing addresses and quiet heart-searching utterances.' Her farewell sermon on, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." was described as 'most eloquent and impressive reasoning of righteousness, temperance and judgement to come.'²⁴⁸

Over the years many Sisters, gave addresses at Convocation about their work, but, in 1894, on the Sunday morning Sisters Freer and Florence Thornton gave sermons.²⁴⁹ Such instances of preaching services taken by Deaconess Evangelists are just the tip of the iceberg. So from the early days deaconesses did take services, but after 1901 some were especially designated 'Deaconess Evangelists' in the Appointments List. The Warden, editor of *Flying Leaves*, in January 1905 wrote:

'Many of the Wesley Deaconesses are good speakers: they say their say, and do not say anything merely for the sake of saying it. A few of them preach with power and success. But ours is not an order of women preachers. Yet when the Spirit of God touches with fire a woman's lips, we dare not bid her be silent. Two of our number are wholly devoted to mission preaching. They can command large audiences or small in large chapels and halls, or in little village sanctuaries. Their work is very wearying and exhausting, and we desire to commend them specially to the sympathetic prayers of our friends.'²⁵⁰

Here, surely, Stephenson was following in the footsteps of John Wesley and Hugh Bourne in believing that if God had chosen a woman as his instrument they dare

²⁴⁷ . *HH* (Aug.1893) p.158

²⁴⁸ *HH* (Oct.1893) pp.191,198, (Nov.1893) p.218

²⁴⁹ . *HH* (Sept.1894) p.168

²⁵⁰ . *FL* (Jan.1905) p.189

not deny her the right to preach whether they approved or not.

The first deaconess to be named as a Deaconess Evangelist was Sister Jeanie Banks. Eliza Jane Banks records that she was brought up on stories of her missionary parents' experiences in the West Indies, which influenced her and made her feel that

'To preach the Gospel and save souls was.... the chief thing worth living for; and my first sermon (a very short one) was made and given away when I was fourteen years of age.'²⁵¹

Certain that this was her mission in life Jeanie visited 'the sick and dying, the aged and lonely, the drunkard and forlorn' and regarded this, plus her experience in nursing her parents, as good training for her future work.

Jeanie Banks was a Sister in the East London Mission with the Rev. Peter Thompson for eight years, before transferring in 1896 to the Wesley Deaconess Institute.²⁵² This service meant she was excused the usual period of probation, being consecrated in April 1896. She was 'wholly devoted to evangelistic work' and was happy to accept any invitation to lead a Mission whether it came from a 'quiet country place' or 'the crowded parts of East London'.²⁵³ There are many reports of her missions and tributes which show people being converted or deeply affected by them. One of Jeanie's more unusual projects was that for several years during the summer she did evangelistic and medical work, in Scotland, among the fishing community of Fraserburgh and in the Hebrides and Shetland. *The Methodist Times* described her as:

'a powerful evangelist. Small in stature - a "shrimp" between two stalwart fishermen, as she described herself - but with every feature and action indicative of life and energy, she at once impresses her hearers with her personality.On Sundays she

²⁵¹. *FL* (Feb.1903) p.20

²⁵². MSS diary of Jeanie Banks (Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, Manchester

²⁵³. *HH* (April 1897) p.88, (May 1897) p.113

preached twice to crowded congregations, nearly all of whom were men, and on other days of the week tended to the injuries of the bodies of the much-exposed fishermen and girls. "The doctor woman's" popularity there is consequently great.²⁵⁴

In 1904 Jeanie summed up her work 'Summer in the Shetland Isles':

'August 26 - Closed the Medical Work. The fishing fleet is gradually diminishing; there is a general "going South," and the girls, by hundreds, are following the boats.

Every Sunday during the three months it has been my joy to preach the gospel in town or country to eager listeners; 299 visits have been paid to the homes of the people; and to-night I embark again for Aberdeen, and thence to the homeland, rejoicing in the privilege of service, and feeling that if I had a thousand lives, all should be devoted to my Lord and Master.²⁵⁵

Another of Jeanie's enterprises was when she conducted several missions in Ireland where her work was described as 'most helpful and encouraging'.²⁵⁶

When it is remembered that officially Wesleyan Methodism frowned upon women preaching the many tributes paid to the effectiveness of Sister Jeanie's ministry are telling. Announcing her wish to retire at the end of August 1912, the Warden, the Rev. William Bradfield, commented that she was the first deaconess to superannuate and the June Committee's tribute recorded:

RETIREMENT OF SISTER JEANIE BANKS 1912

"In giving permission to Sister Jeanie Banks to retire from the active work, the Committee desires to place on record its high appreciation of the invaluable service she has rendered to the Deaconess Order and to the Methodist Church during the sixteen years she has laboured as Deaconess Evangelist.Her evangelistic missions have been owned of God in multitudes of converts, some of whom are now in the Ministry, and many others doing great service for Christ in almost all parts of the

²⁵⁴. *HH* (Oct.1898) pp.234-5; (June 1899) p.138; *FL* (Oct.1904) pp.134-5; (Sept.1906) pp.124-5

²⁵⁵. *FL* (October 1904) pp.134-5

²⁵⁶. *FL* (March 1904) pp.42-44; (June 1905) pp.266-67; (March 1906) p.39, (March 1907) pp.43-45; (April 1907) pp.59-60;(May 1907) p.70; (June 1907) pp.91-2

world.

Source: *Flying Leaves* (July/August 1912) p.102

The Order regarded Jeanie Banks' retirement as a sign that the Institute was no longer a novelty.²⁵⁷ She died on 11th January 1932.

In 1902 Sister Helen Fieldson became a Deaconess Evangelist, brought up in the Church of England she entered the Deaconess Institute in 1901, being consecrated in April 1902. The first report of her work, in April 1903, while telling of its success and her improvement as a preacher, hints she had health problems and indeed from 1913 she had to restrict the number of missions she could take, being advised only to accept engagements in the South of England. Many reports, similar to those of Jeanie Banks, were received about her work and she is described as a cultured, able and winning speaker, with no sensationalism. From November 3rd-14th 1907 Helen conducted a mission in Northbrook Street Chapel, Newbury and the *Newbury Wesleyan Record* (December 1907) commented:

'It seemed strange at first to many of our people that a lady should undertake this particular sort of workBut we think that few, if any, of those who heard Sister Helen will venture to deny her call to preach the gospel. If anyone came expecting sensational or hysterical services they must have been strangely disappointed. There was in her such gentle modesty combined with quiet dignity; such an utter selflessness, such an evident surrender of herself to be (as she phrased it), simply the channel through which God's message came, that prejudices were forgotten: we felt ourselves lifted to a higher plane, and realised the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.'²⁵⁸

Once the 1910 Wesleyan Methodist Conference relaxed its stance, somewhat, on the preaching of women several more deaconesses joined the list of Deaconess Evangelists. These included Sister Florence Bucknell, Myra Lambert,

²⁵⁷. *FL* (July/Aug.1912) p.109; *WM Conf. Mins.* (1913) pp.80-81, 552-54

²⁵⁸. *FL* (Feb.1908) p.204

Esther Bee and Mary Coles, with others, for example, Gertrude Coombs, Annie Scott, Bessie Parsons, working for short periods in various parts of the country, or on special evangelistic missions. Myra Lambert, who completed 12 Missions during the winter of 1913-14 - five in towns and seven in villages, highlighted some of the experiences Deaconess Evangelists encountered.

Missions 1913/4

Sister Myra Lambert

'Visiting the homes of the people has brought blessing and salvation to many. In each Mission efforts have been made to reach all classes. Public-house visiting and open-air work has yielded good results. Midnight Meetings in Town Missions brought us the opportunity of preaching Christ.... The evangelist's life is full of changes,... for after each Mission there is the packing up and moving on. Not always in express train or motor-car, as I can say from experience. In journeyings often, in perils of bad weather, in all sorts of vehicles have I been conveyed to my appointments. Once was I taken in a carrier's wagon; twice did I ride in a farmer's pig-cart; twice was I put in a village grocer's cart among the packages of groceries; once was I dragged in a trailer behind a bicycle; once did I suffer extreme exhaustion of patience riding in a donkey-cart. To journey by train or motor is first-class travelling.'

Source: Flying Leaves (May 1914) p.76-77

After 1919, when Wesleyan Methodism finally gave official recognition to women preachers, more deaconesses became local preachers or regularly took services. Sister Ellen Gould, in 1924, remarked that she frequently visited the six village causes in the St. Albans Circuit, that she felt that often life in the village was lonely and that the churches 'need us desperately, and many of them do not even know of our existence'. So she commented that 'we should be going not only to those who need us, but to those who need us most.'²⁵⁹ After the 1932 Union the deaconesses

²⁵⁹. *The Agenda* (Jan.1924) pp.10-11

continued with their work much as before, but with the added resources and scope which the unified enlarged Order afforded.

The changed attitude of Methodism towards women preachers is shown in an article written in July 1948 by a retired deaconess, Sister Sadie Martin:

‘I had gone as a very young “grey” Sister to a new circuit, and on the first Sunday evening my very dignified Superintendent called me into his study. He looked very grave; I felt nervous. Handing me a Minutes of Conference, opened at a certain resolution relating to women’s work, he said, “I hope that you will never feel called upon to preach while in this circuit.” I assured him that I would not transgress. Forty years later I found myself with no option, for I was now in a different world. Another Superintendent sometimes expected as many as twenty-six appointments in one quarter!’²⁶⁰

Deaconess-Nurse

After he the first deaconess house in July 1890, Stephenson wrote to the *Methodist Times* in August asking for ‘a godly lady’ who, if not already a nurse, would be willing to obtain the midwifery certificate. Dr A.C. Tunstall gave medical instruction to the deaconesses with the course based on the St. John’s Ambulance Association guidelines. All deaconesses undertook basic first aid courses, including some midwifery, often obtaining a certificate from the Obstetrical Society. In 1897 Lucy Hawken was given permission to study for it, though at that time the Deaconess committee was not able to ‘offer to pay any part of the expenses incurred.’²⁶¹ Gertrude Nettleship, before going to Ceylon in 1897, also passed the Society’s examination. Many deaconesses took special courses in hospitals in order to equip themselves more fully for their work. For example, in 1904, Elizabeth Spence went

²⁶⁰. *The Agenda* (July 1948) p.2

²⁶¹. WDIMins I p.48

to the Royal Infirmary, Salford, but the same year Anita Hall had to return to College from the Royal Infirmary, Bradford ‘not being physically equal to the strain’, which indicates that nursing was very strenuous. In particular, deaconesses going overseas undertook some specialised training to enable them to deal with tropical climates and diseases. Gladys Stephenson, before she went to China in 1915, followed a three year hospital course, plus a year’s special training. Alice Burroughs went to Hull Royal Infirmary in order to qualify for special missionary work in West Africa.

It is important to remember that Nursing was not regarded very highly as a profession and indeed for many years was not even open to non-conformist women. Many so-called nurses were barely trained at all and had little knowledge, or interest in even basic first aid or hygiene. So, by any standards, the Deaconess-Nurses were of great value in raising the standards of health in the places in which they worked.

In their various appointments the deaconesses kept a medicine chest, stocked with essential first aid equipment from which they could dispense simple remedies and deal with minor ailments and emergencies. A Deaconess, working in a suburban area, who found her knowledge of nursing invaluable in her visiting, wrote that ‘One woman said when I called, “Oh, Sister, if I had known you were coming to-day I should not have taken my little boy to the doctor’s last night.” She also remarked that while it was ‘a joy to have their confidence’ she did not ‘feel equal or desirous of taking the doctor’s place.’²⁶²

Nursing in Birmingham, 1902:

Sister Erica Marley

‘We are well supplied in Birmingham with hospitals and dispensaries....but there are often many who ... find it more convenient to come to me.If they go to the hospital it means waiting three or four hours each visit, and consequent loss of

²⁶². HH (1900) p.236

much work and wage.....Or, children get burnt, scalded or cut....both parents go to work, and can ill afford to lose the time...the little ones come to me...During the last year over 200 were helped in this way....’

Source: Flying Leaves (June 1902) p.106

By the very nature of their work those Deaconesses who had qualifications or a special interest in nursing often had to deal with infectious illnesses to which some succumbed. For example, Lucy Hawken, working in Maidstone, Kent, during a typhoid epidemic in 1898, fell victim to the fever herself. She gave an account of conditions in the town at the height of the outbreak in *Highways and Hedges*:

‘The intense sadness and overwhelming sense of sorrow that appeared to brood over the town, was depressing....the little one could do for those who were its victims was gratefully accepted,....My own work lay almost entirely among our own people, and I soon found that night duty would in many cases relieve tired relatives, and prove the most acceptable help I could render. On turning to my diary I find that I stayed twenty-three nights, paid seventy-three visits, and did various other fragments of work as I was able, during the time I was at work in Maidstone from October 22 to November 28.’²⁶³

Two other deaconesses contracted scarlet fever and diphtheria. The Deaconess-Nurses had to be equal to dealing with all sorts of situations as one deaconess commented, showing that serious illness impacted on all the family and that she needed to be able to provide much needed support.

‘I returned from my holiday about a month ago, and since then I have been very busy. One case especially has taken up much time and thought. The poor woman is dying with cancer, the father in the asylum, and there was no one to care for the four children. The “Home” has taken three and the eldest has gone to an aunt’s. The whole of the nursing, home and children has been on my shoulders for a month. The mother I took to the Infirmary last Wednesday. How thankful I am that I have been able to help this poor sister. But, above all, I believe she has found her

²⁶³. *HH* (1899) p.68

Saviour and is now trusting in Him.’²⁶⁴

A probationer deaconess, working in a large hospital, found, when she went on night duty that there were six empty beds as patients had been discharged during the day. However, it turned out to be anything but a quiet night as admission after admission filled up the beds and at the end of her shift she commented, ‘Never was I so thankful I was of a calm nature. Had I been excitable, I think I should have lost all self-control....I retired to my room, and I can tell no one how I felt. The best illustration of my feeling was, when a firework has been fizzing, then goes bang! and all is silent and over. I felt really *flat*.....The next night, as the Sister came round....she said, “Your beds are all occupied, so you need not fear another night like the last;” and added, “I think you are capable, after last night, of anything.”’²⁶⁵

Deaconess-Teacher

Teaching would be part and parcel of the deaconesses’ life as they took Sunday School, Society and Bible Classes and ran all the various Women’s and Girls’ meetings and probably gave ordinary school lessons at times. For example, Sister Edith Passmore in Sheffield found that some people would not come to her class because they could not read, so she decided to start a ‘*reading class*’ for adults every Wednesday night an hour before the Society Class. Many of the deaconesses found themselves in special mission situations, where not only did they face the same problems as their colleagues in the circuits, but had a wider role in trying to bring people into the church by visiting and organising special services and visitations. Much work done, through personal contact and helping families in time of sickness, bereavement or difficulty, persuaded a member to attend a service and then to bring

²⁶⁴. *FL* (Jan.1902) p.10

²⁶⁵.*FL* (March 1904) pp.40-1

others of the family along too. Missions were held in a variety of places, for example, - 'we meet in a large-mess room, lentby the proprietor of some large iron works.....the room seats about 400 and is generally three parts full.....this mission was a new departure in a very needy neighbourhood....we began a small Sunday school, gathering the children in from the streets. We now have more than sixty scholars.....we began a weeknight servicea weekly prayer meeting.' But the work was not restricted to towns as the outlying villages, farms and cottages were visited and society classes formed.²⁶⁶

One of the deaconesses, appointed to the Mantle Memorial Schools in Leicester, described it as a comparatively new Mission situated in one of the most densely populated areas with people mainly of the artisan class, but there had been a great response. As well as helping with all the usual mission activities she had managed to develop close contact with the girls who attended her class.

Mission Work in Leicester

'During the summer months I have taken the members of my class for rambles in the country; this has been a source of great enjoyment. One gets to know and understand them better, for it gives the opportunity of a chat about their homes and factory life. Most of them work in either the boot or hosiery factories. These girls need to be very soundly converted to be able to stand all the scoffs and jeers to which they are exposed every day. It is often most pathetic to hear them in our Class pray for grace and strength to keep true.'

Source: Highways and Hedges (March 1899) p.70

Slum, Prison and Rescue Work

Deaconesses were appointed to circuits to assist the minister with work, particularly among the women and children. In many cases they were virtually social

²⁶⁶. *HH* (July 1894) pp.138-9; *FL* (Feb.1902) pp.24,26-7

workers, but were also able to do nursing and evangelistic work. Often, although as noted before, many of their appointments were in the larger missions or town circuits, they also worked in rural situations where the minister could only visit occasionally. One aspect of city circuit and mission work, especially in large industrial cities, was visiting and helping in slum areas. Sister Mildred Homer told the 1901 Convocation of her morning in the Old Town Mission in Hull where early in the morning, having walked about two miles to the Mission Room, she fed a breakfast of bread, jam, cocoa and soup to starving and clamouring children. Later she returned to the Hall to give soup to the poor women for their dinner. She continued until about 9.30 at night helping to alleviate the unpleasantness of living in the slums.²⁶⁷

There is an interesting account of the problems in ‘a manufacturing village’, probably Hinckley in Leicestershire. Having pointed out that country is ‘delightful’ in summer, but in winter the country worker has to come home from work by walking or cycling along dark, muddy slushy roads the writer continues:

‘Life in the country is very different. Here we have the surrounding of the country with the work, and none of the conveniences of the town. The people work in large factories in the winter from eight o’clock in the morning to seven o’clock or half past at night with intervals for meals, and in the summer from six-thirty in the morning until half past five in the evening. The women also go to work so visiting in the homes is a difficulty, especially as the housework has to be done in the evening... There are the same temptations to materialism, immorality and drink ... as in the town. The great temptation is to make as much money as possible, and, as life is so monotonous spend it on dress and pleasure. Accordingly on the Saturday afternoon holiday, there is a general rush to the nearest town. ...the work and conditions (here are) different, but the work needs to be done, and it is better to save people from ever entering the slum, than to rescue them from the slum.

²⁶⁷. *HH* (June 1901) p.139

She pointed out the need for Girls' Parlours and also the difficulties - water to be fetched from a pump in a bucket, kettle boiled on a stove and washing up done in the bucket or a tin bowl, to say nothing of bad weather! Then, although one might have thought country life would be healthier, it was not so with consumption, scarlet fever and typhoid common, probably due to long working hours, inadequate clean water supply and poor sanitation. She concluded that the work was not exciting, but there was a wide sphere of usefulness and people in the village needed spiritual help and uplifting just as much as those in the town.²⁶⁸

Much of what the 1902-3 Report called 'rescue' work had to do with intemperance, poverty, unemployment, poor housing, too many children and ill-health. The deaconesses were often the only source of help and the sight of their distinctive dress brought a measure of hope, thus bearing out Stephenson's belief that a uniform served a vital purpose. Another deaconess in Leigh visited an injured drunkard in the workhouse. He was horrified to see her, especially when she suggested going onto his ward to talk to the other men, saying 'we are all past redemption', but, as she was leaving, he asked her for her New Testament. A few weeks later, he came up to her in the Market Place and told her that the other fifty men in the ward had asked him to read it to them and had stopped all their cursing and swearing.²⁶⁹

In April 1907 Huddersfield Mission opened a Women's Home which proved to be a very necessary refuge for many women and girls. Much of the work was confidential, but stories tell of helping orphaned young girls, drunken women, the homeless, young unmarried mothers, deserted wives and prostitutes. Sister

²⁶⁸. *FL* (April 1912) pp.54-5

²⁶⁹. *FL* (Feb.1902) p.25; (Nov.1912) p.161

Emmeline Downing gave two examples of work done by the Women's Home:

'I. The Workhouse Ward! A girl sent there by the police. Such a weak, frightened ignorant lassie. Next week she is to be charged with manslaughter. But listen now as she shudders and wails "Oh! I didn't kill my baby! I never killed my little baby! I was so frightened. Do somebody help me."

II. One of the bedrooms in the Home! By the side of one of the beds is a little white crib, and the mother of the baby bending over it.

"Not asleep, dear?"

"No. I'm just praying to be made good, I must be good now Sister, for baby's sake, and because you have helped me."²⁷⁰

At Carver Street, Sheffield, Sister Clara Nicholls, noticing women and girls standing in the streets during their lunch hour in all weathers, realised their plight, and the church agreed to set aside a room so that they could eat their food in a safe place. They were supplied with milk, hot water, teapots, cups and saucers for the price of one penny per week so that they could make themselves tea or cocoa. Magazines, papers and table games were provided to encourage the girls to stay rather than wander the streets till it was time to go back to work. About thirty girls used these facilities and when any were sick they were visited.²⁷¹

One deaconess visited Holloway prison and spent several hours in the police courts supporting a drunken woman who was eventually committed to 'an inebriates home' for three years where the deaconess visited her and wrote to her weekly. While 'M.G.' (probably Maude Gent) frequently visited a woman who was regularly put in a prison in Hull for drunkenness.

Mabel Fielder described Saturday nights in the Attercliffe Road area of Sheffield when the deaconesses visited the local public houses 'offering friendship and leaving invitations'. At 'turning out time' they attempted to help those in need.

²⁷⁰. *FL* (Nov. 1909) p161, (Dec.1910) pp.176-79

²⁷¹. *FL* (April 1913) p.54

To people who queried whether this work was worthwhile, they replied ‘We believe that the time has come when we must take our message to the people and not wait for them to come to us. As the people are to be found in their hundreds in the public houses, we go to them to offer them Christ and friendship in His Name.’²⁷²

In 1910, Emily Bird, (Bournemouth), took charge of a small Rescue Home. She found, on visiting the public gardens in an evening, that many of the girls congregated there, were in danger of becoming prostitutes. They were taken into the Home and trained to do domestic work to enable them to obtain good situations. The Rescue Work did not stop there because many girls when they left kept in touch with the Home. Florence Archer (Birmingham) was also doing Rescue Work in a Home where some girls were taken off the streets and others sent there by the Police courts. She kept in touch with them when they left and counted it a special ‘joy and privilege to stand by one of our girls a few days ago at her Baptismal service.’²⁷³

As the years passed the work of the Order tended to polarize and the deaconesses became more involved with welfare and prison work, especially when they were allowed to be seconded to ‘outside’ work, but still retain their membership of and status in the Order.

Foreign Missionary Deaconesses

The first Wesley Deaconess to answer the call to serve overseas was Sister Evelyn Oats who sailed to Durban, Natal on 17th March 1895. Over the years deaconesses went to various parts of Africa, and Asia, plus New Zealand, the West Indies, Canada, South America and Europe. The account of their work is to be found in *Saved to Serve*. However, here it is worth noting the 1922 listing of deaconess ‘on

²⁷² . *The Agenda* (Dec. 1928) pp.6-7

²⁷³ .*FL* (May 1914) pp.69-70,73

the Foreign Field’:

- (a) The deaconesses support two of their number at Puttar, Ceylon, as a special deaconess contribution to Foreign Missions.
- (b) Deaconesses work under the direction of the W.M.M.S.²⁷⁴ on the staff of the Girls’ School in West Africa, at Freetown, Cape Coast Castle, Accra and Lagos; in Hospital work in China, at Hankow and Anlu; also in Institutional and Social work in South Africa at Johannesburg.
- (c) Deaconesses are employed as nurses or educational workers under the Women’s Auxiliary, in Ceylon, at Trincomalie and Welimadi; in India at Haidarabad (sic), Akbarpur, and Mysore; in China at Anlu.

In other Evangelical Churches and in some exceptional appointments under special arrangements.²⁷⁵

The following extract gives some idea of the rapid growth and scope of the Order for in November 1901 – just over a decade since the start of the work - Stephenson wrote;

Of the seventy-one Deaconesses and Probationers now in active service two are in charge of Training Houses, two are Deaconess-Evangelists, ... two in a Convalescent Home for poor women and children. Three are Deaconess Nurses... Five Deaconesses (are overseas) one ... establishing an affiliated Order in New Zealand; two in the Transvaal, and two... in Ceylon. Fourteen Deaconesses are working in connection with Home Mission Enterprises in England, Scotland and Ireland; and forty-three are connected with Circuits...²⁷⁶

There were also 15 Student-Probationers in training.

In 1929 Maltby, the Order’s Warden, pin-pointed an important dilemma which faced all who served, not just the Wesley Deaconesses, when he wrote:

‘I find myself wondering more and yet more at the courage and patience with which our Sisters are facing difficulties and

²⁷⁴. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society was formally constituted at connexional level in 1818, though there had been local initiatives since 1813

²⁷⁵ *The Agenda* (November 1922) p.5

²⁷⁶ . *FL* (November 1901) p.5

discouragements, and at the bewildering variety of the things they are expected to do. They must take services, preach sermons, address women's meetings, superintend Sunday Schools, teach scholars, lead classes, captain guides, visit the sick, sit up with the dying, make beds, smooth pillows, companion the lonely, haunt the prison gates, take drunk people home, raise money, run Jumble Sales, oil the ecclesiastical machine, and know everybody, as well as, read, think, pray and keep their peace of mind. All needing to be done? Yes, and it is weakness to grouse about it. Yet I am in a strait betwixt two. I believe we must not decline the tasks of service in all their variety, and we must do what we can to fill empty lives with rational and healthy interests of many kinds. But often those who are busy with these activities are half dismayed with the fear that the real message is not being conveyed, but only *drowned* in all this serving.'²⁷⁷

Conclusion

In September 1893 Sister Dora (Stephenson) read a paper at 'The Congress on Women's Work, held in connection with the World's Fair, at Chicago' on 'Deaconess-Work in England' in which she gave details of the establishment, training and work of the Wesley Deaconesses. At one point she quoted a remark made by a deaconess which seemed to sum up the nature and variety of their work 'a Deaconess must be equal to any emergency from "making a poultice to preaching a sermon,..."²⁷⁸

'Variety of names' given to a deaconess, 1907

I am rather amused at the variety of names they give me here. "Singing Nurse," "Praying Nurse," "Preaching Nurse," "Wesleyan Nurse." Sympathy has twice been misplaced, as I have been taken for a "young widow." Our own people, many of them farmers, pay a very undeserving compliment, and say, "The Sister is a 'Tommy Owt' in the Church." I must explain that a "Tommy Owt" is a man employed on a farm, a man good at anything, and to whom nothing comes amiss.'

²⁷⁷ . *The Agenda* (June 1929) pp.3-4

²⁷⁸ . *HH* (1893) pp. 187-191

Source: *Flying Leaves* (October 1909) p.138-9

Many ministers, some of whom had been rather sceptical of women workers, gave witness to the usefulness of the deaconesses.

‘It has been my joy to have several of your Deaconesses in our Circuit. I am a convert to the Institute. I have seen so much splendid, cheerful service rendered by the Sisters.’

‘I have had working with me four Deaconesses or Probationers. If these may be taken as fair specimens of the Order, I think you have done a splendid work in training and sending out such workers. ‘So may the bright succession run.’’,²⁷⁹

The 1910 issue of *Flying Leaves* printed a selection of reports from ministers about the deaconesses who were ‘fully received’ into the Order during that year’s Convocation at Bristol. All were very favourable, paying tribute to their work.

Comment on Deaconess Work, 1910

“She lives in a chronic state of over work (sic) and does not take sufficient care of herself. The idea of having a Deaconess here was criticised at first by many of our own people. One hears nothing of that sort now, and she has so commended herself and her work to our people that £70 was raised for the Deaconess Fund last week, and the local Mayor sent us a contribution as the ‘town’s recognition of Sister’s work.’ He said she was worth six policemen.”

Source: *Flying Leaves* (June 1910) p.91

In 1974 the last Ministerial Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order, the Rev. Brian J. N. Galliers, wrote ‘Just what a deaconess *is*, and what she *does*, is not easy to answer these days.’ So, in order to try to answer these questions, a number of deaconesses were asked to write about their own ministry and their attitude to it in A

²⁷⁹ . *HH* (1901) p.164

Way of Serving (Autumn 1974). These articles give a picture of their work in the latter half of the twentieth century and show how, although much had changed since 1891, the basic principles and ideas were still the same and the need for such a caring ministry still just as vital. Mr. Galliers rightly commented

‘The result is a picture of care for people, and of dedication to Christ. It is a story of women reacting to the places and situations in which they find themselves. They dare believe that those places and situations have been offered to them by God, and that in them they must proclaim by deed and word the working of the Holy Spirit and the challenges of the Kingdom.’²⁸⁰

The areas in which the deaconesses have been involved changed up to Methodist Union in 1932 and there have been even more developments since. At the beginning the emphasis was more on the rescue type of work due, to a larger extent, to poverty and intemperance and along with that went the importance of pressing home the Gospel message. Social change and conditions forced re-direction of deaconess work in fields which were newly opened to women, so the Sisters were to be found in the forces and caravans. Then, latterly they were allowed to remain in the Order, but work in the sector ministry as social and psychiatric workers, teachers, and industrial chaplains. The scope is endless.

The Primitive Methodist ‘Sisters of the People’.

The Primitive Methodist Church did not have a connexionally settled Deaconess Order, but there were Sisters of the People, some of whom studied at Bowron House, the United Methodist Deaconess Training Home. This is borne out by the 1932 Deaconess Institute Report in the *United Methodist Minutes of Conference* which states that:

²⁸⁰ . *A Way of Serving* (Autumn 1974) p.1

'For many years the Primitive Methodist Students have attended our classes, and there are the happiest relations, together with close fellowship, between the Wesleyan Order and our own.'²⁸¹

However, it is fairly certain that on the whole the Sisters 'learnt on the job' in practical situations. Much of their work was in Missions and consisted of District Visiting, although if qualified, they were allowed to take services in any Church which asked for their help.

A Final Comment!

It is interesting to note that within the same decade all three branches of the Methodist Church should have realised the important part women could play in ministry and therefore set up organizations to achieve this. In particular they saw the urgent necessity for work to be done with women and children to counteract intemperance and the ensuing poverty which affected all the family.

Chapter 14:-Overseas Work

When male missionaries first went overseas in many cases they were supported by their wives, while other women who were skilled, perhaps medically or as teachers, went to serve in those capacities. All these endeavours were backed up by the women at home who worked to provide financial and practical support for their colleagues abroad. Here is given just a very brief note about the role played of women working overseas as accounts of their work has been covered by the writings of Miss Pauline M. Webb, the Revs Cyril Davey, John Pritchard, Albert Mosley and

²⁸¹ *UMMins of Conf.* (1932) p.176

others. Some account of the work of the early deaconess overseas is given in my own researches.²⁸²

Women's Work

Women's Work originated as 'The Ladies' Committee for the Amelioration of the Condition of Women in Heathen Countries, Female Education etc.'. It was formed in 1858. Under the guidance of Mrs Caroline Meta Wiseman, the wife of one of the missionary secretaries, around 1876 the group's name was changed to 'The Ladies Auxiliary for Female Education' and became an auxiliary movement within the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. Its role was to train, equip and finance the sending of women missionaries overseas. Women who responded to the call for volunteers were given 6 months training at Westminster Normal College before being sent overseas.²⁸³

By the end of the 1900s some women had gone overseas as missionaries in their own right. In many cases they were supported by the Women's Auxiliary. In 1859 the Ladies' Committee sent out its first woman missionary to Belize. Many of the early women missionaries engaged in education or medical enterprises, for example, the deaconess work in Sierra Leone, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and China.

The oldest of the non-Wesleyan women's missionary organizations was the Bible Christian one, founded in 1892, and known as the "Women's Missionary League". 'Its objects were to assist in every possible way the work of the China

²⁸² Webb, Pauline. M. *Women of our Company* (1958), *Women of our Time* (1963); Davey, Cyril and Thomas, Hugh, *Together Travel on: A History of Women's Work* (1984); Davey, C *Changing Places (Methodist Missions Then and Now)*; Pritchard, John, *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1900-1996* (2014); Graham E. D. op. cit.; cf. Mosley Albert's Database of Methodist Missionaries

²⁸³ *Mission 200:1786-1986* (compiled by... Mission 200 Committee – Leeds District – edited by Kellett, Arnold, 1986) pp.27-31)

Mission, to hold missionary prayer-meetings, to diffuse missionary information. To correspond with women missionaries and missionaries' wives and to be responsible for the distribution of gift parcels on the various stations.'²⁸⁴

Founded in 1897, the Ladies' Missionary Auxiliary of the United Methodist Free Methodist Church was, also called "Women's Missionary League with the first branch being in the Leeds and Bradford district. Its objects were very similar to those of the Bible Christians. A Central Council which consisted of elected representatives from every organized District was set up in 1905 and met annually.

A missionary's wife, Mrs Innocent, encouraged the setting up in 1899 of the Methodist New Connexion's organization. Again the objects were similar to those of the other two churches.

When in 1907 The United Methodist Church, came into being The Women's Missionary Auxiliary was formed by amalgamating the missionary organisations which already existed in the three churches. The first United Methodist Women's Missionary Auxiliary met in November 1909 attended by representatives of all three organizations. Officers were appointed and local groups in the Districts brought together.²⁸⁵ Also in 1909 a Women's Missionary Federation came into being to support women overseas. At Methodist Union in 1932 all these organizations came together as 'Women's Work'. In due course missionary enterprises were combined under the umbrella of the Methodist Missionary Society, then in 1970 it became the Methodist Committee for Overseas Development and in 1987 Women's Work joined with Women's Fellowship to form Network.

²⁸⁴ *The Story of the United Methodist Church* (ed. Smith, Swallow and Treffry, 1932) op. cit. pp 137ff

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship was started in 1942 when Mrs J. O. Hornabrook (wife of Home Missions General Secretary) and the Rev Dr. Colin Roberts (Home Missions Secretary) gathered together a group of women. The aims were to consider the training of women for leadership, how the women's meetings from all around the country could be brought together and to offer pastoral care and provide support for women whose lives had been affected by WW2. The 1944 Conference received the report and approved that the name of the organization should be Women's Fellowship and become part of the Home Missions Department. The first Chairman was Mrs H. B. Rattenbury. Two Mother and Baby Homes for unmarried women and a hostel for young women who were working in London were started. As part of its remit had been to train women for leadership it was natural that the Women's Fellowship should become closely involved in working with the connexional girls' schools, through District committees and by arranging family holiday conferences. In the 1960s it grew out of all recognition and became a powerful force among Methodist women. Young Wives Groups were started and they had a great impact on the younger generation. However, in due course, single women began to feel marginalized and so after lengthy discussions, in 1987, the Women's Fellowship and Women's Work amalgamated to form the Women's Network of the Methodist Church.²⁸⁶ Network 'encouraged a collaborative style of working and aimed to encourage, enable and equip women to participate fully in church and society.' In this way it provided training in specific skills; organized conferences and events on topical issues and

²⁸⁶ For more details see *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (ed. Vickers J.A., book 2000; online via Wesley Historical Society website www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk)

themes; encouraged different styles of worship by suggesting ideas for worship and led campaigns on subjects such as domestic violence, social justice and human trafficking. After 20 years Network joined forces with the British Unit of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women on 7th July 2011 to become part of Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB).²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ See website www.mwib.org.uk A number of biographies about the work of women overseas will be listed in the Bibliography/Appendix.

Chapter 15 Women in the Church/Ministry.²⁸⁸

As noted earlier the Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian denominations accepted women into their ministries on more-or less equal terms with the men. The phrase ‘more or less’ means that there is no evidence that any women actually reached high offices in the connexions, though in the everyday life and work of the church they did as much and, in many cases, more than their male colleagues. From the few Primitive Methodist circuit plans, which contain the names of female itinerants, I have been able to study in detail it would not be realistic to dogmatise about the celebration of the sacraments. At first glance it would seem as if only the men were authorized to conduct Holy Communion services, but a closer examination shows that on occasions local preachers did so. Thus one is forced to the conclusion that there was no hard and fast rule about it. This is borne out by the Conference regulation which states in reply to the question:

‘To whom shall the Sacrament be administered?’

that it shall be given

‘To all our societies who request it.’

and that it shall be administered

‘By those persons whom the quarter board may judge proper.’²⁸⁹

This lack of emphasis on what was, in Wesleyan Methodism, the prerogative of the ordained ministry is no doubt an illustration of the anti-clerical stance of the Primitive Methodists. As the representation of lay to clerical members was a two to one ratio in Conference, District meetings and all committees, this apparent low-key view of Holy

²⁸⁸ Much of this chapter relies on information taken from my PhD thesis, my chapter 8 in *Workaday Preachers* and chapter 11 in *Saved to Serve*

²⁸⁹ *PMMins* (1819/20) p.11

Communion would seem to bear out that attitude. So the fewer number of Sacrament services found in Primitive Methodism also tends to point to the Connexion as being primarily lay-orientated. The celebration of the Holy Communion, as an institution, was obviously considered of no great importance, as the frequency with which it appears on the circuit plans is notable for its absence. I am of the opinion that the Lovefeast took the place of the Lord's Supper in the early years of the Connexion's history. If we consider that service it appears that its celebration was shared among the travelling preachers and the local preachers. So, for example, in the four quarters of 1828/9 in Grimsby of the 27 lovefeasts celebrated nine were taken by the female itinerant, 10 by her male colleagues and eight by the local preachers. In the same circuit for the same quarters in 1835/6 44 services were taken - eight by the woman travelling preacher, 13 by one or other of the two male itinerants and 19 by local preachers. The same pattern emerges in the North Walsham Circuit in 1836 where Elizabeth Bultitude had seven lovefeasts and her two male colleagues 13 between them, with local preachers taking five. However, in the Bolton circuit (1835) and the Shefford area (1835/6) no local preachers took these services. So, it could be that the practice differed from circuit to circuit or with the passage of time. It cannot be argued that local preachers were used because the itinerants were not available as the evidence does not bear out such a contention as lovefeasts could have easily been arranged for a particular church which desired such a service when an itinerant was planned there. It seems that Primitive Methodism was being true to its profession of the priesthood of all believers in using its lay folk in this way. However, one must admit that there may have been other factors, impossible for us now to determine, which affected the use of local preachers. To date I have only found one instance of a

female travelling preacher conducting a Sacrament and that is Jane Woolford, who was appointed to take the service at North Morton at 5.00 p.m. on October 4th 1835 in the Shefford Circuit. It seems likely that the celebration of the sacrament varied from area to area and from circuit to circuit and also that its frequency increased as time passed. It is impossible to compare areas and circuits with any degree of exactitude as the number of preaching places and services varied in each circuit and sometimes from quarterly plan to quarterly plan within a circuit. (see Table 4 - this could be scanned in as a box). Another factor which exacerbated the problem is that the number of travelling preachers sometimes varied too and also that, on occasion, local preachers were allowed to celebrate the sacrament. I have studied closely two areas of which I have been able to get several consecutive plans - Grimsby and Shefford - on which female itinerants feature. With regard to the Grimsby set there are two groupings consisting of seven in the late 1820s and six in the mid 1830s. From analysis it is apparent that the females involved in the first group worked equally with their male colleagues. The later group all cover the ministry of Mary Ball in the Grimsby Circuit where she was the second of three ministers. Again the same pattern of workload is revealed, but the overall number of lovefeasts had increased, many of which, as we have seen, were taken by local preachers. However, on the 1826 plan there were 23 preaching places; in 1829 there were 16 and in 1835/6 27, so it is not easy to make a categorical statement about the incidence of the lovefeast.

The set of plans for the Shefford Circuit also covers the Branch Circuits of Andover, Mitcheldever, Farringdon, Wallingford and the Romsey and Reading Missions. This obviously makes comparison with the Grimsby set more difficult. However, if we compare the same four quarters in the Grimsby and Andover Circuits

we can make a few observations (see Table 4 as above) Grimsby had, it seems, more lovefeasts than sacraments, whereas Andover had an equal number of lovefeasts and sacraments. Grimsby had considerably more lovefeasts than Andover and considerably less sacraments. The workloads between the male and female itinerants and between the circuits show little variation, but this is only to be expected as there is only a certain amount that can possibly be done in a day! Perhaps one significant point is that there are only two instances of lovefeasts being taken by local preachers in the Shefford set of plans compared with the many we noted in Grimsby. I wonder if this, combined with the rather more numerous celebration of the sacrament, indicates varying attitudes towards the ministry in different parts of the country.

The final point which can be assessed from the circuit plans and from the Journal extracts available is the distances covered on a Sunday preaching schedule. Thus we find that Ann Brownsword, on Sunday, December 18th 1819 preached at Norley at 10.00 a.m.; at Kingsley (lovefeast) at 1.00 p.m. and at Crowton at 6.30 p.m.²⁹⁰ These villages are each about two and a half miles apart. Ann Stanna, on 6th February, 1820, preached three times at villages which were three and three quarters and three miles apart respectively,²⁹¹ and a fortnight later the three villages at which she conducted services were three miles from each other.²⁹² Mary Bu(i)rks travelled the same distance between her three appointments in the Grimsby area on 2nd July 1826 and on the 9th the three services were each one and a half miles apart. Similar distances can be deduced from the circuit plans for Elizabeth Bultitude (North Walsham, 1836), Ann Haines (Shefford, 1835) and Fanny Hurle (Andover, 1835), for

²⁹⁰ *PMMag.* (1819/20) p.236

²⁹¹ *PMMag.* (1819/20) p.250

²⁹² *PMMag.* (1819/20) p.251

example. A Committee was set up in 1824 by the Annual Meeting to investigate the matter of 'Long Preaching' and it recommended that for preaching services:

‘the most suitable lengths to be one hour, one hour and quarter, and one hour and a half, as the case may be, with three exceptions wherein long preaching was not improper.’²⁹³

So, assuming a service of one and a half hours and perhaps half an hour for conversation afterwards, then a journey of between one and a half and three and a half miles, most probably on foot, it is obvious that Sunday would have been a very busy and tiring day with little time for rest or refreshment. In each case we are only reckoning the distances from the first appointment to the last one and are not taking into account the travelling to the first service or home after the last one, which could most probably increase the total mileage, depending on their base or hospitality.

One last thing about the sacraments - in this case that of baptism, about which there appear to be no conference regulations - I have looked at Primitive Methodist Baptismal Registers in a number of Record Offices, but, so far, I have found no record of any baptisms being performed by any of the female itinerants.

It is important to realise that in addition to the heavy workloads we have been considering that each travelling preacher was expected to visit 30 families per week,²⁹⁴ exhorting, praying and engaging in conversation.

From all the evidence then it seems that, although the women were expected to share equally in the ordinary Sunday services, including lovefeasts, and in the weekday meetings, plus camp and missionary meetings the sacraments were apparently the prerogative of the men. One wonders whether this was, in spite of the Primitive Methodists anti-clerical attitude an almost subconscious harking back to

²⁹³ *PMMins* (1825) p.5; (1828) pp.36-40

²⁹⁴ *PMMins* (1824, small minutes) p.6

Wesleyanism and the Church of England or whether even by the mid 1830s the Connexion was moving toward conformity with these denominations. It would be interesting to know whether the women were happy about it or whether they felt slighted. In the twentieth century this question of the celebration of the sacraments was one of the reasons for women wanting ordination.

It seems extremely likely that the experience of the Bible Christian female preachers was very similar to that of their Primitive Methodist counter-parts (would have to do work on this if required)

There were several reasons for the demise of the female itinerants in Primitive Methodism. Two are directly related to the women themselves, put briefly, they were, firstly, the strain of the itinerancy, which often led to illness and enforced retirement. In the early missionary, evangelistic days they were replaced, but later, when the denomination became more settled and conformist whereas the men were replaced the women were not. Secondly, marriage - the women had to retire on marriage, though a few returned when they were widowed. Many of those forced to retire did continue virtually as itinerants in their husbands' circuits, though not acknowledged as travelling preachers in their own right. (see pp. ??)

The Bible Christian Conference gave advice to male itinerants who were contemplating marriage.

Marriage: The Bible Christian Advice

to choose their partner from among our sisters, who have dedicated themselves to the service of God, by coming forward as travelling preachers; and we do agree that those preachers who so marry, shall be entitled to the first support from the connexion.

Source: Bible Christian Minutes of Conference (1820) p.??;
see also *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* Vol. 29,
Part 4 (Dec. 1953) pp.77-78

While there is no such directive in the Primitive Methodist Minutes it is highly likely that this would also have been encouraged in that connexion.

Other related factors were developments within Primitive Methodism itself and the changing attitude towards women in both church and society.

Early Primitive Methodism, and indeed the Bible Christian connexion, were essentially missionary movements with preachers breaking new ground in evangelistic missions. All available means were used to pull in the crowds including the novelty of women preachers. Consideration of the stations of both denominations indicate that the women were often placed in rural or missionary situations. This was still true later in the 1840s when there were fewer women itinerants, but women preachers continued to be used to make an impact in areas to be 'opened'.

I maintain the view that the explosion chapel building contributed greatly to the decline and demise of the female itinerants. The mere desire to have chapel buildings and the possession of a site and bricks and mortar meant that men played a much larger part as they were deemed more able to deal with professional and business men, such as architects, surveyors, builders and financial experts than women. So the male itinerant played an increasing role in these schemes, though it must be said, that often the women were used still at opening services and anniversaries to pull in the crowds (and increase the collections!).

A corollary to this explosion of chapel building was that now there was a

purpose built chapel it became the focus of the 'life' of the chapel community. So Sunday Schools, tract societies, Dorcas societies, mutual improvement societies, sick visiting and missionary collecting activities developed, which meant they catered not only for the chapel community. but also for the local neighbourhood. Hence life in the community tended to centre on the local chapel. Here was an outlet for the talents and energies of all, but particularly the women. So, perhaps inevitably, women continued to exercise their ministry, but rather than 'travelling abroad' they now worked in more localised situations - as local preachers, class leaders; Sunday School teachers, sick visitors and missionary collectors.²⁹⁵ Capable women workers there were, but their sphere of work had changed, with their efforts being channelled away from the itinerancy.

Even though women played a large part in the spread of the embryo connexions, taking full share in the work and the men made great use of their talents and novelty value yet they were not really accorded true equality. For example, they were not allowed to speak in meetings, unless specifically invited to do so; they were paid less salary; apparently did not celebrate the sacraments and there is no record of any becoming superintendent ministers.

As the nineteenth century progressed it is very obvious that the role of women changed from being acceptable itinerant preachers to being expected to work in more local situations. Their 'preaching' was now felt to be through being class leaders and Sunday School teachers, participating in women's meetings, in

²⁹⁵ For e.g. the *PMMag* (1862) has the biographies of 15 women, of these 11 were said to be local preachers; seven class leaders; three Sunday School teachers; three sick visitors and one a missionary collector. Eight of the women held one of these offices; four held two; and three held three. In addition there are 142 obituaries and 43 or 30% of the women engaged in all the preceding church activities, except that of local preaching.

tract distributing and by engaging in house to house visiting or 'conversation preaching' as Hugh Bourne called it. The Primitive Methodist and the Bible Christian denominations were striving to gain respectability and moving towards conformity with the other denominations - they were moving from sects to churches!

Social change played its part too as both church and society altered their attitudes to the role of women. Urbanisation militated against the use of women. Whereas both denominations had originally been chiefly rurally based when they spread into the towns the emphasis altered as did the general change in the social perception of the status of women. The Victorian ideal of womanhood was now making itself felt in the church - the woman's place was in the home, caring for her husband and family - ('behind every man is a good woman'?!). In other words, the denominations were now moving towards middle-class standards from their former rural, working class basis. So it was no longer considered respectable or suitable for women to be itinerant preachers, although they were still welcomed as local preachers or special preachers for anniversaries and missions. Could it also be that the men were jealous of the success of the women preachers?

Perhaps the final nail in the coffin for women itinerant came with the development of theological colleges and ministerial training - a subject in itself. Suffice it to say here, that in the early days both men and women had, to a large extent, learned 'on the job' and by self education and experience, whereas now, when congregations were more knowledgeable and sophisticated they demanded a better educated ministry and a more professional approach. These attitudes militated against the women as it was not yet considered the norm for women to be

educated equally with men and certainly not in the heady realms of higher education.

With regard to women preaching in Primitive Methodism I leave the last word with Hugh Bourne, one of its founders, who endorsed their ministry when asked why he allowed women to preach in his churches.

Women Preaching

Hugh Bourne

The men have monopolised the preaching for upwards of eighteen centuries, and you must admit that on the whole they have made very badly out; and suppose now you permit the women to try and see if they cannot do better than the men have done. At any rate, God owns them in the converting work, so we had better not interfere with them.

Source: H. B. Kendall in *The Primitive Methodist Leader* (Thursday, January 24th 1907) p.49

Wesleyan Methodism

Again, as we saw earlier, (see pp.??) attitudes were very different in the Wesleyan Methodist Church where women were, if only officially, denied entry into the itinerant ministry.

In the 'Notes of the Month' in *The Wesleyan Methodist Church Record 1894-1895* it was reported that at the Representative Session of the last Conference a lady, who had been elected as a Lay Representative by the Third London District Synod, took her place along with men. The presence of Miss Dawson raised the question as to whether a woman might, in harmony with constitutional law and usage sit as a Representative in Conference. After a long discussion the Conference resolved that it could not be tolerated, 'except as the result of careful consideration.' A committee was appointed and resolved that women should be permitted to sit in Conference, though an amendment against the admission was also tabled.

Women in Conference 1894/5

The Committee having considered in all its bearing the question of the election of Women Representatives to the Conference, reports that in its judgement it is not probable many women will be elected, but in view of the great services which women render to Methodism, of the increasing activity of women in all spheres of life, and of the fact that women are already eligible for every lay office of our Church, this Committee recommends that after due legislation the Conference should permit the election of a Woman Representative to the Conference when, in the judgement of any District Synod, such an election would secure the best interests of the work of God.

Source: The Wesleyan Methodist Church Record 1894-1895
p.54

The writer of the 'Notes' was obviously not in favour as he commented that it had not 'yet been seen very clearly what women can do in the Conference that cannot be done quite as well by men.' He added that practically arrangements would become more complicated if women were admitted and anyway few would want to be elected once the initial novelty had worn off. The Conference received the Report, but did not adopt its recommendations. To a certain extent the buck was passed (to coin a phrase) to the laity, by implying that the admission of women would have an adverse effect on laymen.

Women Representatives in Conference

It is mainly a question for the laymen to consider. It affects them very much more than it affects the ministers. For if it became the fashion, as it might become, to send a considerable number of women to the Conference the result would probably be a distinct lessening of the rights and powers of the Methodist laity. In many instances the minister's wife would be appointed and in this, and other ways, as the result of the New Woman, the Conference would become more intensely clerical than ever. But perhaps the laymen will say that "Clericalism" in the Methodist Conference is a mere bogie - the baseless fabric of a dream.

However, the 1909 Wesleyan Methodist Conference '*provisionally* resolved that duly qualified and elected women should be eligible as Lay Representatives.'²⁹⁶

As a result of these deliberations the admission of women into the higher courts and offices of Methodism was raised again when it was noted that as well as women having a lawful place in Quarterly Meetings and Local Preachers' Meetings there were accredited women local preachers in one or two circuits. As mentioned above Miss Catherine Dawson of Redhill, a circuit steward and who thus went 'by right which no one could gainsay to the District Synod', was elected to Conference for the Third London District. A scrapbook of cuttings about Miss Dawson is to be found in the Wesley Historical Library, Oxford. Two of these were written by an Edith M. Corderoy. The first, dated January 11 1894, congratulates Miss Dawson on her appointment 'to the Circuitstewardship of our Circuit' and then goes on to say that she feels that the appointment 'is most courageous on the part of our Quarterly Meeting and on your part too'. Her second letter of June 7, 1894 reads 'I expect you have been inundated with letters and calls, and have received endless marks of approval and congratulation and perhaps of remonstrance on your appearance at the District Synod and vote for Conference.' The writer further comments that 'it certainly ought not to be so difficult for a lady to sit in Conference with Christian ministers and other gentlemen and to talk of church work, as to sit on a Board of Guardians where one's fellow may be of all religions or none and where

²⁹⁶ *Minutes* (1894) p. 320, (1895) p. 319, (1909) p. 119; *The Wesleyan Methodist Church Record 1894 1895* p.54, 159

all sorts of social life have to be discussed.’ Approval was not confined to Methodist or even religious circles as another letter from Newtown Women’s Liberal Association, North Wales enclosed a resolution of congratulation.

Resolution passed by the Newtown Women’s Liberal Association

That this meeting heartily congratulated Miss Dawson on her being the first woman lay representative to the Wesleyan Conference and thanks her for the courage with which she has taken her stand amid so much opposition and trusts that another year there may be many more women to stand by her.

July 31st 1894

It is interesting to read that William Bradfield, the then Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order, commented that ‘although we well know that a great many good women have no sort of desire (to go)we think that the church will do well to remove an unnecessary and irritating restriction.’ – this, as noted before, indeed done at the 1909 Conference. Also that year the Conference referred, ‘the regulations with regard to women preaching (were) to the consideration of the Committee of Law’. Bradfield’s comment on this move was that the regulations certainly needed amending, but that there was no fear the evangelistic work of the Deaconesses would be stopped or that any moves would be made to impose the ministry of women on those who did not want it. The regulations were duly amended in 1910.

As we have already seen, during John Wesley’s lifetime he had allowed women to give exhortations and, eventually, permitted certain women to preach if they had an ‘extra-ordinary call’ and that, after his death, the 1803 Wesleyan Methodist Conference passed a resolution: ‘We are of the opinion that, in general they

(women) ought not.'²⁹⁷ This did not mean that women stopped preaching altogether in Wesleyan Methodism, but officially there were no women preachers.²⁹⁸ However, certain women, including deaconesses, who had a special aptitude did preach and, in certain circumstances, might take services. In 1910 the Wesleyan Methodist Conference deleted the 1803 phrase 'address only her sex', but inserted addendum which restricted their preaching to neighbourhoods where there was no special opposition. The General Committee of the Wesley Deaconess Order passed a resolution on September 20th 1910, which was of great significance:

'Resolution re Women preaching:

The committee having heard the new regulations of Conference with regard to women preaching, gives its sanction to the preaching of the following Deaconesses, who have already either been engaged as Deaconess-Evangelists, or have been accustomed from time to time to take services, where required to do so:- (15 are listed).....

With regard to all further applications, the Committee resolves that in the case of any Deaconess who feels called to preach, and asks for authorisation, the matter shall be brought before the Committee by the Warden, provided he is satisfied that she has the necessary gifts, that she has read Mr. Wesley's Sermons, and that she believes and preaches our doctrine. All authorisations to preach shall be for the ensuing year, and subject to the annual review of the Committee. No authorisation shall be renewed unless the Warden is satisfied that the Deaconess applying for it, is doing some theological reading, and keeping up a living acquaintance with New Testament studies.

N.B. It is distinctly understood that the authorisation of the Committee only entitles a Deaconess to preach, where she is desired to do so by the Superintendent of the Circuit in which the service is to be held.'²⁹⁹

This Resolution shows that a very strict eye was kept on the suitability and competence of any Deaconess wishing to preach and she was required to do a considerable amount of extra studying. Thereafter, until women were accorded equal

²⁹⁷ . *WMMins. of Conf.*(1803) (1862 ed.) p.187

²⁹⁸ . see John Lenton's paper at the 1996 WHS/WMHS conference.

²⁹⁹ . *WDIMins I* pp.366-7; cf. *FL* (Sept.1910) pp.124-5, (Oct.1910) p.141

rights as local preachers with men and those deaconesses who had been preaching were accredited, deaconess preachers, as approved by the Warden, were named in the Order's Minutes. In December 1915 Bradfield, in reporting that he had given authorisation to Sister Maud Gent, stated that she 'was taking the place of a minister who had gone to the War - the first case that had occurred'. In 1915 Sister Maud was stationed in the Glasgow (North-West Mission) Circuit where the minister the Rev. J. Forster Holdsworth was a Chaplain 'responsible for the pastoral oversight of Wesleyan Soldiers in the Army and Seamen and Marines in the Royal Navy'.³⁰⁰

Debates in the 1920s

During the 1920s there was much debate in Methodism about Women and the Ministry and Women's Work in the Church. This had apparently been brought to a head in 1922 when a woman candidate for the Ministry had been nominated by a Superintendent Minister and unanimously endorsed by the Quarterly Meeting, but because it was deemed to be contrary to Wesleyan Methodist regulations she was not allowed to proceed. By 1922 Methodism had become aware, without doubt largely through the work of the Wesley Deaconess Institute and the Women's Auxiliary, of the increasing scope and growing importance of women's work. So Conference appointed a Committee 'to consider the whole question of the admission of women to the Ordained Ministry, to the work of a Deaconess and kindred forms of service,.....'³⁰¹

The fact that the Rev Dr W. Russell Maltby, the Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order, was made convenor of this Committee, was surely a tacit

³⁰⁰ . *WMMins. of Conf.* (1915) p.503, (1916) p.547; cf. p.9

³⁰¹ . *WMMins. of Conf.* (1922) p.272; cf. *The Agenda* (June 1928) pp.9-14

acknowledgment the valuable work of the organization and his own personal commitment to women's involvement in all aspects of church life. In addition William Bradfield, the former Warden, was one of the Committee of 18 ministers. The 1923 Conference received the Committee's interim report and re-appointed it 'with power, if it think well, to meet along with the corresponding Committee appointed by the Representative Session' which had realised 'the importance to the Laity of our Church of the relation of women to the Ministry'.³⁰² Maltby was also the Convenor of that Committee which included eight laymen and seven women, one of whom was a deaconess, Sister Esther Taylor.

At the end of December 1922 Maltby reported to the General Committee of the Deaconess Order that in January there was to be an informal gathering in London of people concerned with Women's Work in Methodism to consider:

- '1. A new appeal for the service of Christian women in many forms.
2. The possible provision on a new scale for training in the Christian Service, whether as voluntary workers in the church, or set apart for some special vocation.'³⁰³

A year later more meetings, formal and informal, were held on both subjects with representatives, including three deaconesses, of the Wesley Deaconess Order in attendance. The Committee's Report, presented to the 1924 Conference, stated that due to the great changes 'in the work and status of women' and now that there were many more openings for women it was necessary for the Church to have a reassessment of women's role in Methodism. The Committee could see no real reason for women to be disqualified from 'any function of the Ordained Ministry....merely on the ground of her sex.' This was true in principle, but there

³⁰² . *WMMins. of Conf.* (1923) p.87

³⁰³ . *WDIMins.* II p.190

were practical difficulties. The Committee also felt that many women were reacting so strongly against not being allowed to enter the ministry that their talents were being diverted elsewhere and the church was losing a great resource. It was observed that there was much work which lay women could do in Methodism and that trained and educated women had a vital part to play. The Committee rebuked the Church for making not the best use of its women and believed that there should be a 'Ministry of Women parallel to the Ministry of Men,....equally recognised by the Church, held in the same honour, trusted with adequate authority, and united by the same bond of fellowship.' Perhaps, rather daringly, it recommended that 'in certain cases of outstanding service on the part of women whom the Church has called, they should be formally ordained to such a Ministry.' Going on to say that women missionaries and deaconesses 'should have the full recognition as colleagues with the ordained Ministers....' Finally, the Committee recommended a Standing Committee on Women's Work be appointed:

- '1. To advise women desiring to fit themselves for better Christian service;
2. To watch for possible opportunities of women's service in the Church;
3. To open up opportunities of training for such workers;
4. To report to Conference generally on such questions as are dealt with in this Report.'³⁰⁴

So a Standing Committee consisting of 12 ministers, 10 women, including Sister Esther Taylor and two laymen, with Maltby and Miss M. V. Hunter as Convenors was duly appointed. The Representative Session of the 1924 Conference adopted the Report, but the Pastoral Session, while giving general approval 'in view of the many difficult questions involved' remitted the Report for further consideration to 'a

³⁰⁴ . WDIMins II p.200; *WMMins. of Conf.* (1924) pp.94-7,301; cf. *The Agenda* (July 1923) pp.5-8, (Jan.1924) pp.6-7, (Sept. 1924) pp.2-6

Committee consisting of the Ministerial Members of the “Standing Committee on Women’s Work”, appointed by the Representative Session, plus six more ministers. The Committee reported its findings to the next Conference, namely, that subject to certain provisos, women should be admitted.

Report to 1925 Conference

‘...’a report approving the admission to the ministry substantially on the same terms as men and by the same procedure subject to certain conditions which concerned finance, training and marriage.’

Source: The Agenda No. 37 (July 1928) p.11

Although the 1925 Conference received the Report on ‘Women and the Ministry’ and re-iterated its belief that there was a growing role for trained women in the church; that the changing social perception of that role necessitated a serious re-think about admitting women to equal colleagueship with men and that there was no fundamental reason why they should not be admitted to the ordained ministry, it felt that ‘Both our organisation and traditions, however, interpose serious practical obstacles to the admission of women to an itinerant Ministry such as ours, which do not immediately admit of any complete solution.’ So, once again, the Report was sent back to the Committee with an additional instruction ‘to prepare a Statement showing the Biblical grounds on which the new departure is based.’³⁰⁵ Apparently, the Committee returned in 1926 with proposals in much the same terms, including a set of procedures to be followed if a woman believed she had a call to enter the ministry, training and reception into full connexion. It also made suggestions for overcoming the practical difficulties, especially those of marriage and maintenance. The Representative

³⁰⁵ . *WMMins. of Conf.* (1925) pp.276-7

Session adopted these proposals with a confirming resolution, but the Pastoral Session did not and issued a conflicting one. Therefore, neither was confirmed by the Legal Hundred, but were reported to both sessions of the 1927 Conference which resolved that in the circumstances the whole matter needed further serious consideration and remitted it to the Standing Committee on Women's Work. The poor unfortunate President placed in this dilemma was none other than the Rev. Dr. W. Russell Maltby, the Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order and the Convenor of both Committees.

'Women's Work and Women and the Ministry

Resolutions upon "Women and the Ministry" were adopted by the Representative and Pastoral Sessions respectively which, in the judgement of the President, were in conflict with each other and were therefore not confirmed by the Legal Conference. The Resolutions will be reported accordingly to the respective Sessions of the next Conference.'

Source: Wesleyan Methodist Minutes of Conference (1926) pp.144,472 cf. (1927) pp.80,295

The 1927 Conference received the Report of the Standing Committee on 'Women's Work' and then directed it 'to explore the possibility of suggesting such arrangements as shall secure larger opportunities for the exercise of the gifts of consecrated women in the service of Christ, and the further development of the existing Diaconate of women in the Ministry of the Church.'

³⁰⁶

The Committee was re-appointed, plus an extra six ministers and six lay members, to continue the discussion and 'to report to Conference on questions relating to the work of women in the Church'. It was further instructed to issue a pamphlet on "How Women can Serve the Church". In 1929 Conference, having received the Report, invited the 'other Methodist Conferences to join with it next year

³⁰⁶. *WMMins. of Conf.* (1927) pp.80-1; *The Agenda* (July 1928) p.113

in appointing a joint Committee, to consider the question and to report to the three Conferences.³⁰⁷ The final report of the Standing Committee on Women's Work was delivered to the 1930 Conference and the three Conferences appointed their representatives to the Women and the Ministry Committee.

The Committees concerned with the discussions on women's role in the Church, held meetings in which Dr Maltby, was very involved thus making sure that Wesley Deaconess Order was kept fully informed of developments. Maltby was obviously a passionate advocate for women having a rightful and proper place in the Church, saying that 'the traditional subordination of women is fast passing away, and a new collegueship between men and women workers, on equal terms, is emerging.'

Women's rightful place in the church

The Warden

'....the Church ought to concern itself about the recognition it gives. It belongs to the health of the Church to offer due scope and due honour to its workers, especially those who take the hardest part. So if I could, I would shout in every drowsy ear and fret every easy conscience until Methodism turned and reflected on the place we expect women to occupy in the great service. The Church ought to entrust responsibility freely to competent women without waiting to be badgered about it or shamed into it.....Churches and Missions are now often asking for Deaconesses with "initiative", but they would be surprised to learn in how many instances in the not distant past "initiative" was regarded as a disturbing inconvenience.'

Source: The Agenda (September 1924) pp.2-6

Naturally the Wesley Deaconess Order was very concerned about the matter and much debate on 'the future of women's work & especially the relation of the Wesley Deaconess Order to a "wider ministry of women" ensued in the 1923 and 1924 Convocations. The following Resolution was passed in 1924:

³⁰⁷. *WMMins. of Conf.* (1929) pp.71-2. [N.B. the three conferences were the Wesleyan, the Primitive and the United Methodist]

‘ “Convocation recognises that a new situation has arisen. It welcomes the possibility of wider opportunities and more adequate recognition of the place & service of Women Workers in the Church.

The members of Convocation realise that in the Wesley Deaconess Order there is already a nucleus for a large & more varied body of Christian workers. They believe that the line of future development is indicated in the existing organisation, fellowship and status of the Wesley Deaconess Order. They would be glad to co-operate with others in framing whatever new policy might be required for the future.’³⁰⁸

Maltby continued to keep the Order informed about the Women and the Ministry Committee and other meetings which discussed ‘the possibilities of closer fellowship between the branches of Women’s Work’. He commented in the 1928 magazine that ‘All these discussions relate to the admission of women to “the ministry,” and, it might be argued, are not our immediate concern. But the Deaconess Order is already a ministry, and such proposals as are now under discussion do affect our Order and our work.’³⁰⁹*****

Two, rather radical, Notices of Motion, which were particularly relevant to the question of the place of deaconesses within the ministry and life of the church, were raised at the 1927 Convocation. One read: ‘that every Wesley Deaconess should be an ex-officio member of the Representative Session of the Synod in the District in which she is appointed.’³¹⁰ This was not put forward as a resolution to the Women and the Ministry Committee either then or again in 1929, but those deaconesses who were ‘elected to attend the Representative Session of Synod in the usual way were urged to accept.’ The second Notice of Motion was even more radical, namely, ‘that in exceptional cases, such as village chapels, small missions, etc.

³⁰⁸ . RConv. (May 29th 1924) cf. quoted in *The Agenda* (Feb.1928) p.4

³⁰⁹ . *The Agenda* (June 1928) p.13

³¹⁰ . RConv. (May 23rd 1927)

where ministers are rarely appointed to preach, the Deaconess should be permitted to administer the Sacraments.’³¹¹ In 1930 the administration of the Lord’s Supper in special cases was raised again, but the Warden felt ‘that such an empowerment would be a breach of Methodist Law, and to approach Conference now would be highly inadvisable.’ So the matter was dropped.

By 1928 the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, especially the Pastoral Session, had rather grudgingly accepted that ‘1. Women who believe they are called of God to a wider and fuller Ministry of the Church than now obtains among us, may secure the sanction of the Conference under the following regulation, i.e. A woman who believes herself called of God to the Christian Ministry in our Church may offer under the same regulations as apply to men....’

While the rest of the Report of the Women and the Ministry Committee was approved in general, the Committee was asked to look again at such points as marriage, training, probation and finance before provisional legislation could be considered. When it came to 1929 Methodist Union was appearing on the horizon and so, to a certain extent, Conference was able to shelve a thorny subject by resolving that both Reports should be received and that the other Methodist Conferences be invited to join with it the following year to appoint a joint committee to consider the question and report to the three Conferences. This committee was to consist of 20 Wesleyan, 10 Primitive Methodist and 10 United Methodist members. In 1930 the members, comprising 10 ministers, five women, five men with Maltby as Convenor, were listed and. No deaconess was included. Did Conference feel that Mrs Bradfield, ex-Lady Superintendent, and Maltby provided adequate representation?

³¹¹ . RConv. (May 23rd 1927); (discussed and rejected again in 2001)

In 1930 the Report of the Standing Committee on “Women Work” was received and the Committee discharged. The Committee on “Women and the Ministry” was re-appointed in 1931, with the Rev. G. E. Hickman Johnson joining Maltby as Convenor, but the Conference specifically requested ‘....the Deaconess Committee, in conjunction with the Committee concerning Women and the Ministry to consider the whole question of the status of the Deaconesses and their position under the constitution of the united Church.’³¹²

The Wesleyan Conference meeting for the last time received the Report of the Committee, which had also convened for the last time under Maltby’s guidance, and referred it to the Uniting Conference, which simply also received it and asked the Committee to report to the next Conference. The 1933 Conference stated:

- ‘2. having considered the reports from the Synods on Women and the Ministry, is of the opinion that there is not sufficient support for the scheme to justify procedure into the main project at present; it notes, however, with satisfaction the desire of many Synods to develop the existing ministerial work of women.
3. The Conference thanks the Committee on Women and the Ministry for its services and discharges it.’

The Ministerial Session agreed with the Representative Sessions resolutions, but wishing to appear positive in view of the ‘widespread changes in whole position of women.....is deeply concerned that the Methodist Church should respond worthily....and when the question is again before the Conference, make all such adjustments in our organisation as will give to women called of God full scope for the exercise of their ministry.’³¹³ So Methodism in its own inimitable way accepted the work of women, but declined to give them the official status that their work deserved

³¹². *WMMins. of Conf.* (1929) pp.71-2,260, (1930) pp.87,73 (19),83-4,261

³¹³. *Minutes of the Methodist Conference* (hereafter *Mins. of Conf.*) (1934) pp.102,249

and the position so remained for many more years.

Twentieth century developments

As the twentieth century approached further debate about women preaching arose in Wesleyan Methodism. As noted earlier J.W. Walker's article entitled, 'The place and power of woman in Methodism' commented that 'The fact remains that women have been and are being put on our plans, and that with the happiest results.' although not in great numbers. He went on to impress on women that as local preachers they had a seat on the circuit quarterly meeting, which gave them the right to vote on all important matters, a heavy responsibility which must be accepted. Walker concluded by saying that

'woman is beginning to share more equally in both the work and the rewards of the future, and this in the church as well as in the world.....it is one of the many evidences of the adaptability of Methodism to modern times that it has,...made such large opportunity for women to consecrate their talents to the highest service.'³¹⁴

Significant recognition of women local preachers after the 1910 resolution, referred to earlier, came in 1918 when the *Wesleyan Methodist Minutes of Conference* stated 'that women are eligible to become fully accredited Local Preachers on the same conditions and shall hereafter enjoy the same rights and privileges as men who are Local Preachers.'³¹⁵ In 1919 the Conference formally regularized the situation with regard to the Wesley Deaconess Order:

'Wesley Deaconesses and Women Preachers: - The Conference authorises Local Preachers' Meetings, in the case of Wesley Deaconesses and other women who have already been preaching under the sanction of the Regulations of Conference of 1910, to receive them upon full plan without further examination.'³¹⁶

³¹⁴ .WMMag. (1897) pp.174-6

³¹⁵ .WMMins.Conf. (1918) p.85

³¹⁶ WMMins.Conf. (1919) p.271

Brief overview of the Post Union debates on Women's Ministry

Much of the discussion about women and the ministry naturally focused on the Wesley Deaconess Order – its own ministry, work and status. This area is largely covered in *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1979*³¹⁷ so only reference to important features are recorded here.

So, as seen above, in 1918 women had been granted equal recognition as local preachers with men and the following year they, including Wesley Deaconesses, who had 'already been preaching' were received 'upon full plan without further examination.'³¹⁸ Not all deaconesses were recognised local preachers, but permission 'to preach' was given annually by the Warden. In 1937, Dr. Maltby felt that the situation ought to be clarified so he had discussions with the Rev. F. A. Farley, the Local Preachers' Connexional Secretary, and explained that

1. Most of our Students have had no opportunity of coming on the Local Preachers' Plan in their own Circuits.
2. The Students while at College are constantly called upon for preaching appointments in the neighbourhood. The average number of appointments supplied from the College is about 50 each quarter.
3. Many of our Deaconesses are required to take preaching appointments in the Circuits where they are stationed. Further the work they are doing in many instances is indistinguishable in principle from preaching. If they are fit for the one they are fit for the other.
4. The position therefore should be regularised. But the procedure devised and suitable for young and untrained people is unsuitable and improper for those who have been Connexionally recognised and set apart for the work of Deaconesses.
5. The Committee therefore suggest the following rule to be presented to Conference:-
A Deaconess who has received the full course of training at

³¹⁷ E. Dorothy Graham, in *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1979*, especially pp. 390-412

³¹⁸ . *WMMins. of Conf.* (1918) p.85; (1919) p.271

Ilkley, and is certified by the Deaconess Committee as an acceptable preacher may be accepted by a Local Preachers' Meeting on full plan without further examination.'³¹⁹

It seems likely that the continuing discussion about the status of the Wesley Deaconess Order and the changing role of women in the world led once again to the re-opening the debate on Women and the Ministry. *The Agenda* of July 1944 contained a small, but significant '**Note.** - Sisters and other friends will be interested to know that, for the first time in the history of the Order, Deaconesses ordained this year will be received by Conference into Full Membership of the Order. They will be received in Conference early on Tuesday afternoon, July 18.' In December the Warden reported that the Conference Committee on Women and the Ministry was preparing its report and would welcome their opinion. A special meeting of the Executive Committee was held on March 16th 1945 and passed: the following resolution:

'Althoughthe scheme may have some unfavourable repercussions on the Wesley Deaconess Order, we nevertheless resolve generally to approve ... because it embodies the principle for which we have long contended, namely women in the Ministry. We also wish to affirm our conviction that the whole Ministry shall be open to women.'³²⁰

The resolution stressed that the Order should be kept fully apprised of developments when the training of women candidates for the Ministry was under consideration. As, it was obvious that deaconesses would be very concerned about and become involved in the whole subject of women entering the presbyteral ministry the Conference Committee on Women and the Ministry sought the views of the 1947 Convocation on the resolutions to be presented to Conference. After much thoughtful discussion

³¹⁹ . WDOMins III pp.55-6 (Dec 17 1937)

³²⁰ .WDOMins III (Dec.12, 1944), (March 16, 1945) cf. Mins.Conv. (April 1945) pp.61,64; *The Agenda* (Sept.1946) p.4

Convocation approved the resolution that ‘women who believe themselves to be called of God ...and prove themselves to have the fitness and the gifts for this Ministry’ should be ordained to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. However, it preferred not to discuss allowances, and agreed that ‘The marriage of a woman minister shall involve her resignation from the Ministry, unless, in special circumstances and on application of the person concerned, the Conference shall determine otherwise.’ The Conference Committee had also put forward seven ‘suggestions’ to be considered. Four met with Convocation’s approval, namely, the recommendation of candidature, examination by Synod, ordination at Conference alongside men and eligibility to be members of the Ministerial Sessions of Synod and Conference under the same arrangements as men. However, Convocation felt that each candidate should be assessed on merit and while agreeing that women should be trained at one of the theological colleges it did not think it necessary for a special consultative committee to be set up. Unfortunately, all the years of discussion were to no avail as the 1948 Conference received the report but declined ‘to declare its willingness to receive for Ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, women who believe themselves to be called of God to this work.’³²¹ Nevertheless, the Warden’s Report to the General Committee on December 16th 1955, contains the significant comment ‘that in many new appointments deaconesses were being called upon to do the kind of work complementary to that of a minister.’³²² So it looks as if the status of deaconesses was now being recognised and this may also have had an influence on the future as regards training and appointments.

³²¹ .*The Methodist Church Conference Agenda* 1948 pp.141-3; *The Methodist Church Ministerial Agenda* 1948 p.9; *Mins of Conf.* (1948) pp.50,162

³²² .WDOMins IV Dec. 15, 1955

In the late 1950s there was much discussion in the British Council of Churches and the Methodist Faith and Order Committee about the place of women in the Church and the Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order, the Rev. T. Morrow, felt it was essential for the Order's thinking to be clarified. So, the 1958 Report to the Conference included mention of "the institution of probationer studies", and made "reference to the question of Ordination and status of the deaconesses within the Methodist Church".³²³ One wonders if this institution of probationer studies indicated that deaconess training was becoming more akin to that of ministers. Convocation emphasised that probationer studies were very important and that they would be taken into account when the question of ordination occurred. The ordination of deaconesses featured in the discussions of the Faith and Order Committee. The 1960 Convocation had a lengthy debate about 'women in the ministry and the status of the Wesley Deaconess Order'. Sister Dorothy Farrar remarked that the question of women in the ministry might be rejected altogether and that no women might feel called of God to enter the ministry. In her opinion she felt that the ministry in its present form 'was not meant for women, although the Order had been granted some of its privileges such as administering the Sacraments. Ours was a pastoral ministry, given to prayer and the inner life. If however, we believed that God calls women into the ministry, what must the Church do about it?' In the ensuing debate many questions were raised including what effect having women in the ministry might have on any conversations regarding uniting the Anglican Church. The whole matter of deaconess ordination and being allowed to administer the sacraments was addressed. At the next Convocation the debate was continued and

³²³ .Exec. Com. Feb.27, 1958

the following points emerged:

- ‘1. That the vast majority felt that the door should be open for women to enter the ministry.
2. That Convocation believed this, whatever its impact on the work of the Order might be.
3. That deaconesses must not think in terms of “status”, but in terms of ministering.’

Sister Margaret Statham gave a resume of the Report on Women in the Ministry at the 1962 Convocation and it was agreed that the following statements should be included in the Order’s Report to Conference:

‘ “The members of the Wesley Deaconess Order assembled in Convocation express their thankfulness that God had called this Order into being and their belief that in its membership many have in the past and will in the future find the full exercise of their calling. They would, however, affirm their conviction that the full ministry of the Word and Sacraments should be open to such women as are called thereto, and whose call the Church is able to confirm. The implications of these two beliefs can be left in God’s hands”.’³²⁴

In 1972 the Wesley Deaconess Order was very concerned about the effect the opening of the Presbyteral Ministry to women would have and asked the General Committee to present the following resolution to Conference

‘The Wesley Deaconess Order meeting in Convocation, aware that the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments may be open to women, requests the Methodist Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee to examine the meaning of both presbyteral and diaconal ministries.’³²⁵

In anticipation that a number of deaconesses would wish to candidate for the presbyteral ministry the General Committee was also asked to accept a resolution that ordained Deaconess who were accepted for the ministry and wished to retain links with Order be called, “Associates of the Order” and that the present Associates should

³²⁴ . Mins.Conv. (April/May 1962) p.7

³²⁵ . WDOMins. IV June 12, 1972

be renamed, “Friends” and could in future include both men and women.³²⁶ The Rev. Brian Galliers, the seventh Warden, had to deal with the changing thinking on the nature of the diaconate which had occurred with the opening of the presbyteral ministry to women and, in due course, the Division of Ministries produced a study paper on the Order and the diaconate.³²⁷

So after many years, much debate and argument, women were admitted into the presbyteral ministry. Although many Conference Committees and Conferences had admitted that, in principle, there was no reason against the ordination of women they had long hesitated to take the final step. The Anglican-Methodist Conversations forced the 1965 Conference to shelve the matter once again, as at that time, the Anglican Church was resolutely opposed to the ordination of women and it was seen as an insuperable barrier to any of hope of the two Churches coming together. However, when the Conversations failed the Conference finally accepted the admission of women in to the presbyteral ministry in 1973 with first ordinations in Britain taking place in 1974.

Final Conclusion/summing up!!

As was stated at the beginning this paper was never intended to be an original work. Its object was to bring together items of interest about the involvement of women in the Methodist Church in the hope that it might prove a useful starting point for future researchers. Starting with Susanna Wesley and her influence in so many ways during the early years it has been a fascinating journey trawling through various

³²⁶ . WDOMins. IV June 12, 1972; Finance May 15, 1972

³²⁷ . WDOMins. IV Jan. 12, 1973, Jan. 11, 1974

documents to look for and at the involvement of women in the various branches and areas of Methodism. In many cases, as we have seen, it was the strong faith and determination of the women themselves which pushed the barriers to achieve parity with men. It took time for this to become the norm as in a male dominated era the thought of women being permitted to have equality in the areas of gender, pay, and eventually status in the higher realms of the church's governance, was unthinkable, but in the end became inevitable. Much still needs to be explored, both in Methodism's past history and the Church of today to ensure that women are used and accepted equally throughout all aspects of church life.

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